

Episode 15: Living in Greece

Summary

Greece is a wonderful holiday destination for many people, but what's it like to live there? Nick's Australian friend Phil talks about his experiences living in Greece, both positive and negative.

Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking to my friend Phil about a country that he knows really well, which is Greece. Umm, so why, uhh, or what's your relationship with Greece?

Phil: My relationship with Greece is I'm married to a Greek lady called Pagona. Umm, and we spend part of the year there every year to, umm, spend time with her family, to catch up with¹, umm, with friends and live ... follow the sun, basically.

Nick: Yeah, it's interesting that you ... because you're Australian and she's Greek and what you're trying to do is find this, sort of, balance where you spend some time in each country so everybody gets their, kind of, home country. But it's kind of difficult to figure that all out, isn't it?

Phil: It is difficult, very difficult, because, umm, because the distance is one factor. Umm, you also have other factors like visa eligibility and, umm, balancing that with, uhh, hopefully finding yourself with a solid home base somewhere. Umm, but at the moment we prefer to spend more time in Australia and treat, uhh, Greece as more of a holiday destination for various reasons.

Nick: That sounds like a good way to do it. But, yeah, I mean, you think, you know, if you sort of say, you get to live in Greece part of the year or part of the time, it sounds like that would be amazing. Is the reality of it ... it's not quite a Greek island holiday, you know, three months out of the year, is it?

Phil: Not quite. That's what we're aiming for but we haven't quite reached that stage yet. It's, umm, yeah, if you're tied up to, uhh, a place like Greece and its bureaucracy, uhh, things can be very, very difficult just to make general things happen, so we're trying to un-domicile ourselves from there and, umm, make Australia our solid base.

¹ to catch up with (phrasal verb with two prepositions): to see someone you might not have seen for a while and find out their latest news

Nick: So when you're there, do you have a ... do you have a right to stay for a certain time?

Phil: I do at the moment, I'm, uhh ... I have a, uhh, spouse² visa in Greece. Umm, that's a whole different story about ... that took about two or three years to actually get. Originally they gave me a humanitarian visa, umm, which was a mistake and which a couple of times I was hailed into³ security offices at Athens airport because I apparently didn't have the right visa.

Nick: And were they nice to you or was it a little bit of a struggle?

Phil: Umm, to start with they were a little bit, uhh, aggressive. At one stage I met a particularly unhelpful woman who told me I owed a 1200 euro fine to the state of Greece. Umm, but eventually when I explained things, umm, we all had a good laugh when they saw I had an Australian passport but I'd been given a humanitarian visa, it was slaps on the back⁴ and, uhh, 'Away you go'.

Nick: OK, good stuff. Umm, so let's start with the good then: what do you like about spending time in Greece or living in Greece?

Phil: Spending time ... I love spending time by the water in Greece in summertime. Umm, it can get extremely busy so the month of August is a month that you generally don't want to be in Greece. Umm, or if you are there, it's a good time to spend, uhh, time up in the mountains, which is generally ... kind of an unknown quantity about Greece. Not many ... everyone sort of thinks about the water and the islands and that's about it. But Greece has some fabulous mountains and some fabulous winter scenery as well. Umm, yeah, I mean the food is great, it's quite a relaxed lifestyle there, umm, and if you can go there as a tourist, just having fun, it's much better than if you're having to deal full-time if you're living there.

Nick: Yeah, no, definitely. I mean, when I was there, yeah, you just feel that, that vibe of everybody's very relaxed, very laid-back, umm, and you just feel kind of comfortable, you know, unstressed and all of that. But then on the other side like you said, you have the bureaucracy that you have to deal with if you're trying to live there. Umm, any other kind of, uhh, slightly negative points about Greece from your point of view?

² spouse: either member of a married couple (i.e. husband or wife), often used in documentation

³ hailed into (phrasal verb): brought somewhere (often a police station or a similar place) in a rough, physical way. Phil is probably exaggerating here.

⁴ slaps on the back: what you do to good friends when you're laughing, or as congratulations. Phil uses this expression to contrast his being hailed into the security office earlier.

Phil: Well, well, the bureaucracy is number one, probably. There has been a tendency for, uhh ... especially with the refugee crisis recently, there's been a tendency for some nastiness⁵ in Greek society. It's still very much a minority and some ... many Greeks, uhh, have barely anything to give but they're giving all of it and more to these refugees who are kind of stuck in transit⁶ in Greece at the moment. So it's bringing out good and bad in the population there and, you know, as usual with things in Greece, if you want something to get done, you're better off⁷ doing it yourself than relying on the government because it's so dysfunctional, you just can't rely on them to get anything done at all.

Nick: And that probably means that they don't have the means to support or to house all these refugees coming in...

Phil: The government itself?

Nick: Yeah.

Phil: No, no. And they don't have the resources and they don't really have the organisational skills either. There's too much in-built corruption and road blocks⁸ in the system for anything to really be functional.

Nick: Right, and so when you're there with Pagona, I mean, she's obviously Greek, but she's a very international Greek, she's lived in different countries and stuff ... do you, if you criticise Greece for example, does she kind of get defensive or does she ... can she see it slightly from your point of view or does she sort of still see it from the Greek point of view?

Phil: Umm, she ... yes and no. Most of the time, I think when we're in Greece, she tends to be a lot more defensive about it. When we're outside of Greece, she tends to see these negatives factors more for what they are. I mean, it's not ... it's never anything personal that you're having against someone when you make a negative comment about Greece or trying to get things done in Greece. It's ... but I think a lot of Greeks find it difficult not to take those sort of things personally.

Nick: And so when you've been living in Greece you found a place in the Peloponnese, is that right?

⁵ nastiness (noun, from the adjective nasty): meanness, opposite of politeness

⁶ stuck in transit: when you are trying to get somewhere but have been stopped in the middle.

⁷ you're better off (+ verb -ing): it's better for you

⁸ road blocks: things that stop you getting where you need to go or doing what you need to do

Phil: Yeah, we rent a place down in a little village called Kardamyli, which is about an hour south of Kalamata, four hours south of Athens, down on the middle finger of the Peloponnese. Yeah it's quite, uhh, quite a nice spot. Not my ideal spot in Greece, but we needed to get out of Athens. Athens is a big city that's, umm, just getting bigger and crazier by the day.

Nick: Yeah I imagine if ... because you sort of do freelance work and things like that, so it's not ... you don't need to be in that, that big city with all the traffic and all the other problems.

Phil: No. We're very lucky that if we have an Internet connection, our work ... we're able to continue with our work, so ... for a lot of people it's just not an option, so it's either staying in a big city or you have to, you know, make a huge lifestyle change and get out of the city into the country and start a ... start a new life, which I think a lot of people by necessity are going to have to do anyway. There's actually a big movement in Greece at the moment with people doing that, moving out of the cities into the country, taking up some land, growing their own food, building natural-style houses, becoming energy-independent. It's quite exciting times for them.

Nick: And I know that's something you're really interested in with permaculture⁹ and things like that, so is that your ... one of your dreams in Greece?

Phil: Yeah, certainly. We'd like to do it. We're talking with friends about trying to buy some land together to have something like that where we can all spend time and, uhh, you know, not necessarily live there full-time but have a place to go and spend time whenever we are there.

Nick: Alright, and then you get, sort of, the best of Greece and you, sort of, don't have to deal so much with some of the problems.

Phil: In and out, 'hit and run missions¹⁰'. Purely holidays.

Nick: Alright, well, good luck and thanks for talking to us.

Phil: Thanks mate.

⁹ permaculture: a natural form of agriculture that Phil is particularly interested in

¹⁰ hit and run missions: when you get in, do what you need to do, and get out quickly. It typically refers to war missions but Phil has adapted it in a funny way to mean that he wants to stay in Greece just long enough to enjoy it but not too long that he has problems.

Comprehension Questions

1. What does Phil say is a lesser-known natural attraction in Greece?
2. What does Phil say is the worst thing about living in Greece? Why?
3. According to Phil, what lifestyle changes are people starting to make in Greece?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. After he confessed to the murder, he was _____ prison to await trial.
2. There is a lot more _____ in politics than there used to be. No one is nice to each other anymore.
3. I'm trying to get a residence visa but there are a lot of _____ that are making it difficult.
4. Believe me, _____ without your ex-girlfriend. She made you miserable.
5. My family is coming to visit me but their plane was delayed and now they're _____.
6. He used to be in the U.S. Army. He did a lot of _____ in Afghanistan and Iraq.
7. Christmas is almost here. I can't wait _____ my family when I get home.
8. In _____, farmers work with nature rather than against it.
9. After she got the promotion, she received _____ from everyone in her department.
10. "Do you live with your _____?" "Not anymore, we're separated."

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you ever been to Greece? If so, what did you like about it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever lived in a place where the bureaucracy was an issue like Phil describes in Greece? What problems did this cause?
3. Would you like to work from home like Phil and Pagona? Why or why not?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Phil says the mountains are a lesser-known attraction in Greece, and that he likes to go to the mountains in August when most people are at the beach.
2. He says the worst thing about living in Greece is dealing with the bureaucracy, because there's a lot of corruption and lack of organisation.
3. He says some people are starting to move out of the cities into rural areas and are becoming self-sufficient by growing their own food, generating their own energy, etc.

Exercises

1. hauled into
2. nastiness
3. road blocks
4. you're better off
5. stuck in transit
6. hit and run missions
7. to catch up with
8. permaculture
9. slaps on the back
10. spouse