GREECE AND TURKEY: SIGHTSEEING

SANDRA EU
First-year business student
National Technological University

Trips sightseeing in Greece and Turkey

Duration: 27 days

Sandra Eu visited Los Angeles when she was eight, toured central Europe at 16 and visited the rest of the west coast USA. It’s no surprise that for her

next trip, she has chosen places that

are different from the US and Europe.

Next month, she will be traveling

outland Greece for 10 days and skip-

ping across to the Greek islands of

Mikonos, Santorini and Crete for

another nine days with her

60-year-old aunt, before traveling

into Turkey for another eight days.

The journey will cost about $7,000.

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cuppa on the balcony in my

hotel room, while admiring the

picturesque sea view.

Sandra Eu (left)

Travel agencies say that countries

in the Mediterranean are popular

destinations for good trips.

While in Greece, the 18-year-old

wants to visit historic attractions

such as the Temple of Zeus and

Aphaia.

There will be some non-sightsee-

ing activities, too. She says: “I

enjoy people-watching and would

like to sit at an alfresco café, taking

in the sights, sound and smell of the

place and how the people work,

interact and live.”

The trip will cost about $7,000.

The parents will be sponsoring 20 per

cent of it, while the rest is from her

personal savings, part-time work,

investment. Her father is a safely

affluent, her mother a secretary and

her brother, 20, is a final-year com-

puter science major at the National

University of Singapore.

She is paying most of the trip,

she claims, so she had to cut costs

but plans to stay in small hotels

overlooking the Hyming Aegean Sea. The hotels each cost

about $120 (S$150) to $150 for three

nights.

“I can’t wait to wake up every

morning to enjoy a cuppa on the bal-

cony in my hotel room, while admiring

the picturesque sea view,” she

said.
Backpacking is passe, graduates are signing up for volunteer trips and going to more exotic places

Huang Huifen

Undergraduate Sandra Eu, 23, decided she could not find anyone to accompany her on her graduate trip to Europe.

"She is not without friends. But her taste in holiday venues, Greece and Turkey, is too exotic for her peers, who prefer trendier and trendy places such as the United States and central Europe. "I've been to most parts of Asia, the US, and the UK, but still can't find anyone to accompany me on her graduate trip to Europe."

SIM Global Education, which launched an academic travel initiative in 2009, has sent more than 700 students to 14 destinations. About 400 went to the US last year. Travel agencies have noted a shift in the travel patterns among globe-trotting undergraduates.

"Ms Alicia Liu, CTC Travel's senior vice-president of marketing and public relations, says: "About two decades ago, students went on comprehensive tours organised by four agencies to Europe, America and China."

"But in the last decade, the trend has evolved and we are getting bookings to nearby destinations such as Koh Samui, Phuket and Bali, working trips to the US for about five months, and volunteer trips." CTC started offering such volunteerism and US packages last year, and expects revenue from these trips to grow by 1 per cent every year.

"Currently, the company offers its services only for the five-to-six-week travel portion of the Work and Travel USA programme. But there are plans to launch a full programme to China next year.

ST Travel, which specialises in youth travel, has also seen a 15 to 20 per cent spike in bookings for its volunteer trips among graduating students since it started offering them in 2006.

"Some of the newer trips include a tur

Grads see the world

Institute of Management.

"They do not want to spend their entire life in the hospitality sector. . . . Some are even in the hotel industry, some in the restaurant industry," says Mr Ng.

"Being a porter is very different from other forms of travel. You are doing the daily lives of the locals and know them better. It is better than going as a tourist, checking into bigger hotels and visiting the usual attractions. You see a lot more of the world that way," he says.  

Before you go...

What is the ideal duration for a trip?
STA Travel marketing manager Timothy Su says: "If you go to a place where you do not see yourself visiting within the next five years because of career and other commitments, aim for a month. Spend at least four days to a week in each city."

How should I plan the itinerary?
Decide on the places that interest you and if you are travelling with a group, decide on an itinerary that matches everyone's interest, says Mr Damien Goh, 26, an IT security consultant who went on a 13-day backpacking trip to Taiwan with seven friends. They met a few times weeks before the trip to finalise the itinerary.
If you are going to multiple cities, plan the itinerary in a circular pattern so that you do not backtrack, says production engineer Ng Yixiang, 25, who backpacked for four months to India and Pakistan.

How do I choose the right tour firm?
Engineer Koh Tian An, 26, who went on a 10-day Tibet trip with Adventure Quests last year, suggests shopping around and visiting trade fairs or university-organised travel fairs to find out what each tour operator offers.
"If you want a specialised tour to a specific region, choose a company that concentrates on such tours there, instead of a company that offers a wide spectrum of tours. That way, you are likely to get more experienced guides who know the ground well," he says.

How do I choose good accommodation?
Mr Nicholas Lim, director of sales and marketing (Asia) at Contiki Holidays, says it may be cheaper to stay in a city hotel in places such as Europe and be near the attractions than stay in a hostel and pay transportation to get there.
The Internet is the best tool for checking reviews for location, cleanliness and service. Go to websites such as Hostelworld.com or AsiaRooms.com.

What are some of the safety precautions to take when overseas?
Do not put all your money in your wallet. That way, you will not be penniless should you lose it. On adventure trips such as trekking the Himalayas, Ms Alice Giam, marketing director of Divine International Explore and Treks, advises travellers not to eat food they do not know well, avoid routes that are not familiar and always inform their guides when they feel ill.

What does packing light mean?
It means packing according to the needs of your trip. Mr Lim of Contiki Holidays says: "I've seen too many young travellers bringing fancy three-inch heels, only to end up buying comfortable shoes, especially when they are in Europe where there's a lot of exploring on foot."
Bring formal attire if you want to dine at a fine-dining restaurant. Those going on long grad trips such as the Work and Travel USA programme, property agent Alexis Phang, 24, suggests bringing an empty suitcase to store shopping items.

What should I do when there are disagreements and conflict within the group?
It boils down to choosing the right travel buddies. Social worker Lynnette Lee, 24, who went to Nepal and Bhutan last year for her grad trip, says: "You cannot have two people who want to play the tour guide. One must be the leader and the other the tourist."
If your group cannot agree on where to go, consider going separate ways and meeting for lunch later. That is, if the city is a safe place to move around alone in.
USA: WORKING AS A PORTER AND TRAVELLING

BRIAN NG, 25
Psychology major, National University of Singapore
Trip: Mission Point Resort on Mackinac Island in Michigan
Duration: Five months

Most of his peers on grad trips carry their own luggage. But Brian Ng will be carrying other people’s luggage for 130 hours a week on his five-month stay at a resort on Mackinac Island in Michigan. He will be leaving the country for the first time in five months to work.

This is the ideal time to go. Once I get back into the first semester, I won’t be able to get five months off to travel. And after I start working, perhaps I will not have the same adventure to try a low-level job. It will be good to experience the industry and the local culture,” he says.

He will be working on the programme, which was organized by Speedwagon Tourism Asia. Under the programme, Vietnamese students are employed in summer jobs in scenic spots like Yellowstone and Grand Canyon. At the end of their employment period, they will get to travel around the US for a period of three weeks.

The jobs range from housekeeping to waitressing and kitchen staff to householders. Students pay about $3,600 for the programme fee. They have to pay to stay at the staff quarters in their workplace. But in the US, students will have a subsidy from NUS and USSA on their rent. Remuneration would take place in December for the winter programme.

Mr Ng’s father is a senior-ranking businessman, his mother is a manager at a distribution firm and his older brother is a director of his father’s company in Vietnam. Mr Ng, who loves the outdoors and goes climbing in India, China, Hong Kong and Thailand, is looking forward to the activities at Mission Point, a 10-mile-long island on Lake Huron.

The island has laid-back charm and motor vehicles have been banned since 1895. People move about on foot, at by bike and horse-drawn carriages. The island has no cars, no traffic lights and no signals.

After his work stint, he plans to tour Toronto and Montreal in Canada, and the east coast of US, before flying to the west coast for a bus trip through San Francisco, Yosemite National Park and Los Angeles. He believes he will make his way on his earnings and tips from his own job.

He thinks the experience is one worth missing his July convolution for. “Convocation for a basic degree is not something so symbolic of academic achievement. I would rather be pursuing experimental wealth,” he says.

INDONESIA: TAKING CARE OF ANIMALS

GAN JIANYI, 12
Psychology major, National University of Singapore
Trip: Taman Safari Indonesia
Duration: Three weeks

Going to the Singapore zoo leaves her blunted and disabled as she cannot reach to touch the animals. But next month, she will get to feed the animals at Taman Safari Indonesia, near Jakarta, as she will be doing the same thing. Duties such as cleaning the animal enclosures and preparing food for the animals.

“Hence, I wanted a grad trip where I could do something meaningful and something I love. Going to Europe is expensive and all my parents do is work,” she says.

During the three-week long volunteer trip, she will be taking care of animals rescued from the illegal wildlife trade in Bandung.

“I wanted a grad trip where I could do something meaningful and something I love,” she says.

The trip, named ‘Help Animals to a Youth Conservation Project’ is an international programme administered by the National Youth Council here.

Ms Gan, together with five other members from Singapore aged 15 to 29, will stay in a dormitory in Taman Safari and carry out the programme.

The rescue centre, set up by Dutch conservationist Willem Stolte, houses animals such as orang utans, gibbons and monkeys.

Studious working at the centre, Ms Gan will try to feed the rescued animals, a task which she has always wanted to do. “I cannot forget the time my grandfather could not find the time due to his school work,” she says, adding that she plans to volunteer at SPCA or A Casa after her trip.

Convocation for a basic degree is not something so symbolic of academic achievement. I would rather be pursuing experimental wealth,” he says.