

**Iris came to Skiathos in the Winter of 2017 and wanted to share her experience with others considering volunteering**

**What to expect from volunteering at the Skiathos Cats Welfare Association:**

Sharon and all the volunteers are really friendly and welcoming so you will be made to feel at home! However, the Association is based at Sharon's house so this needs to be taken into consideration. There's a bathroom you can use and a place to put your things and you're always allowed time to grab a drink etc. but you are very busy so expect the time to fly!

The kind of work you will be involved with tends to be helping to give out food, washing up after meals, filling up water and biscuit bowls, giving out medications, cleaning up, and sorting deliveries of food and litter. The vast majority of the time is spent cleaning! It can be quite physical but it is always fun as there are so many cats trying to get involved as you work!

The cats at Sharon's house are all very very well looked after – whilst some of them are poorly or have just been rescued and are therefore thin or vulnerable looking, the vast majority are very friendly and happy. It is not upsetting working with any of these cats! The more emotional part of the volunteering can be from feeding the stray cats around the island at the various feeding stations. Some of these cats are quite thin, very nervous and look quite worse for wear, so this can be upsetting to see.

The support you get from the other volunteers and Sharon means that you remain positive despite any of the distressing things you see and being so hands on with the work also helps you to realise that what you are doing is so worthwhile. It definitely gives you a new view on life and how lucky you are, and it helps you put things into perspective. It can therefore be quite an experience where you learn as much about animals as you do about yourself!

**What to expect from Skiathos:**

If you haven't been to the island before, you will find that it is fairly small but very busy during the summer months and very hot. In the winter the population decreases dramatically and it can feel very quiet. However you get the chance to witness the island in a way that many people won't. It is very peaceful but some of the tourist hot spot areas such as Troulos and Kolios can feel a bit like ghost towns! It can be quite wet in the winter so wellington boots and a waterproof coat can be really helpful! Many of the shops in town are closed so you may need to bring a lot more of the items that you require rather than relying on purchasing them there. The bars down by the port tend to be the ones that open during the winter months. Food and drinks from the supermarkets can be quite expensive although eating out isn't.

The Greek people are all very friendly and tend to speak English well, they just have quite a different attitude towards stray animals compared to the British!

**Flights and airports:**

In the summer, you can fly quite easily to Skiathos directly during the summer season May- Early October from the UK and other European airports. It takes around 3 and a half hours from London, Bristol or Birmingham. In the winter, you tend to have fly via Athens with a stop over there for a few hours before a connecting flight to Skiathos which takes about 45 minutes. Athens airport has quite a lot of shops there to buy things to eat or books to read etc. Skiathos airport is relatively small and in the winter there may not be anything open to get a drink etc!

Overall volunteering is not traumatic at all, which can be quite a concern before heading out there. You are able to do hands on work that you can see is helping and benefitting animals who really need it. It is a real learning curve and you can experience quite a rollercoaster of emotions if you aren't used to being away from friends and family for a while but it is most definitely worth it!