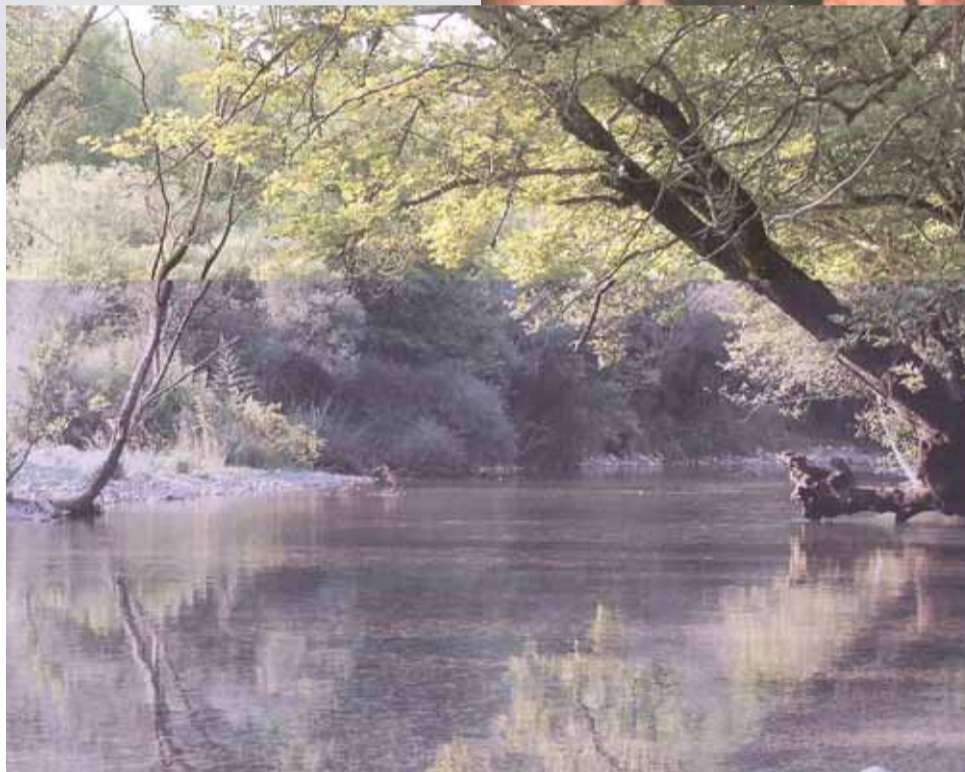


# My trip to Ioannina

In 2004, for my 16th birthday, my parents gave me a ticket to Greece, where I would spend most of my time in Ioannina, my father's home town. My trip lasted 10 weeks from late November to early February and it is a trip that changed my life.



**M**y first impressions of the small city of Ioannina were its uniqueness and beauty. Also, the hustle and bustle of the cars, trucks, motorbikes, the cramped footpaths and the ridiculous parking. Nonetheless this added to the life of the city. The city was decorated beautifully over Christmas, the streets, trees and buildings covered in lights and decorations and carols playing in the agora over the megaphones. The πλατεία and δημαρχείο were truly a sight to see, and people would gather there taking photographs and singing carols. Although very cold, quite a change from Australia, Christmas in Ioannina was indescribable and the warmth and joy of the people was overwhelming.

During my trip I tried to see as much of Ioannina and Epirus as I could. The kastro and the nisi of Lake Pamvotida were full of a rich history and I was horrified to hear the story of Ali Pasha, the drowning of Kyra Frosini and the death of the city's patron Aghios Georgios who was martyred in 1838. Something I still ponder about today, which really amazed me is the conspiracy of a tunnel being built under the lake from the house of Ali Pasha to the Kastro. The view from the Tzami as its Kale was magnificent and across in the distance I could see our village Kranoula on Mt Mitsikeli. I also visited Perama the silver town, the Cave and some beautiful monasteries that had stood hidden in the mountains for centuries such as Stoupena. My visits to these places I will never forget and soon enough I learnt that I came from a place filled with a unique history and culture, one that is very different from other parts of Greece.

When I wasn't visiting tourist attractions, I was enjoying the everyday culture of the city, visiting cafes up at Amphitheia or the Lingiades where one could see the whole view of the city, of simply enjoy the chill of the air walking along the molo with a warm bougatsa «στο χέρι» as they say and listening to the buskers play

their clarinet. Unfortunately as a true Ioanniotisa I became hooked on Δωδώνη fetta cheese and upon my return from my trip have never been satisfied with anything but Δωδώνη. After all, we must support local product! Drives through the surrounding villages were something I would never forget and I became amazed at the small villages hidden up and away in the mountains and I grew attached to the land there, waking up every morning in my village to the sounds of the bells of the sheep and their shepherd and the glorious view of the sun shining through the clouds onto the valley.

I had visited other places in Epirus which were just as beautiful as Ioannina such as the small town of Metsovo where we played in the snow fields there and had a warm Greek meal in the traditional tavernas there. I had also visited Papingko and its turquoise waters were something I have never seen before. It was not only the Aegean which had a crystal blue waters but the waters in Epirus too. I also visited Kalpaki and further on the Albanian border, and I found it rather bizarre to see «OXI» marked on the mountain, finally seeing the place which had been talked about so many times in Greek School Classrooms and the countless celebrations of the 28th of

October. Hgoumenitsa was a scenic town with a striking little beach, but it was very quiet due to the winter season and I would like to revisit it in the summer.

In late January, a week before I left, it snowed and the city and all its surrounding villages were covered with snow. I thought it was absolutely magnificent and I'll never forget the moment when I saw from the window the first snow flakes fall. My cousins and I were absolutely delighted to see the snow. Unfortunately we were the only ones happy to see it and I soon realized that for the adults it meant hard work and danger with slippery iced roads, snowed in streets, and the lake freezing up. I will never forget the freezing temperatures and the trees and grass around the lake covered in huge icicles from the water spray. It was amazing! Of course, being the little Australian that I was, not being use to such cold weather I quickly caught a bad cold and my delights in the s-

now were cut short, and I lay on the couch, watching it all from the window.

The 8 weeks I spent in Ioannina were unforgettable and I was very sad to leave. When I was leaving for Athens from Ioannina airport I was glad to hear that the plane would be delayed due to the bad winter weather, and I was delighted thinking I would stay for a few extra days, but minutes later it was announced the delay would last one hour. What a disappointment. On that trip I created a bond with my cousins and relatives that would last for a lifetime and it was a trip that I still to this day, wish had never ended. As a young girl I had decided that this was the place I belonged and soon I found myself begging my family to migrate back, but of course it was impossible. At 21 I have now matured, accepting that my home is in Sydney but I have kept a love for Greece and Epirus that had inspired me to continue to study Modern I Studies at a University level and next year I hope to begin my post graduate studies in Modern I. My trip also inspired me to become a school teacher and share my passion for Greece, its history, its culture and its language with others, in which I now teach at 3 schools. Since then, I have been back to Epirus twice, both times being in winter but each time getting better and better, and upon return always planning my next trip back. Epirus is a magical place, filled with a distinctively rich history, culture and people incomparable to any other place in Greece. Around every corner there is something, somewhere or someone interesting to explore.

*Karly Pantoulis  
Καλλιόπη Παντούλη*

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