

Russian websites urge travelers to choose destinations in Greece



Numerous Russian websites are urging Russian travelers, who are preparing to embark on their summer holidays, to choose from among the limitless beauties of Greece as their destination.

One of the oldest such sites, www.Greek.ru, which according to its creator Roman Simkin is the most popular Russian-language site on Greece, tallies some 5,000 visitors daily (according to Google Analytics).

"We are the most independent net portal on Greece — without state support and sponsors," Simkin said in an interview. Simkin decided, after a visit to Greece nine years ago, to create a "little Greece" on the internet, in the Russian lan-

guage.

"When we started up the site 9 years ago, Russian tourism to Greece was still in its first stages. In Greece at the time, they didn't believe that the Russian tourist would be the most faithful and good-paying visitor. Today, I believe adamantly that Greek.ru has contributed to Russians seriously considering Greece for their holidays".

The website, apart from rich historical material from Ancient to Modern Greece, Greek news in Russian and a plethora of other informational elements, also contains a number of travel texts by Russian bloggers on their visits to Greece.

"These texts, on our blog, are the best advertisement of your country,

because they are always real, truthful and also describe the sentimental relationship of the traveler with Greece — his/her love affair with Greece. This is so because, usually, the travel texts are written by inspired people," Simkin added.

He also said that, together with the Greek-related news from the Russian media, the site also uploads exclusive news from Greek.ru's correspondents in many parts of Greece.

Among the most popular webpages of the portal is the "Learn Greek" section.

Two smaller but equally popular portals on Greece are www.lovegreece.ru and www.russiangureece.gr.

(source: *ana-mpa*)

Losing our best and brightest

YIANNIS Yiakoumis lives and works at Stanford University and only heads home to his native Thessaloniki once a year - or at least whenever he can. It's not that he prefers the California sun but rather that he believes that the climate for researchers is better in the United States.

Embarking on his studies at Patra University, he decided to continue in the US, where he's now working on a PhD in electrical engineering and beginning to plant permanent roots.

"Compared to the situation in Greece, the big difference here is the exposure that you get at a university like Stanford," Yiakoumis tells in a telephone interview from California. "You can show your work to everyone in the world."

Yiakoumis is not alone. The 28-year-old who works on computer networks is just one of the many educated Greeks fleeing the country, according to new research conducted by Lois Lambrianidis, an economic geographer at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki.

Ultra-mobile

Lambrianidis interviewed 2,850 Greeks abroad. The findings of the web-based survey conducted between May 2009 and February 2010 suggest Greece is facing a severe brain drain as young scientists and budding academics are becoming more mobile and are finding jobs in countries where research is better funded.

And while the problem is not new, it is expected only to worsen in the current economic climate.

"These are people who have very impressive CVs," Lambrianidis tells. "The majority [73 percent] have a master's degree, while about 51 percent have a PhD. And 41 percent of them have earned these degrees at some of the world's top schools."

According to Lambrianidis, more than 80 percent of the Greeks surveyed said they started their university education in Greece before pursuing graduate studies or seeking employment abroad.

"What's most interesting is that 14.5 percent of those working abroad said they completed their studies at Greek universities," he says. "So just imagine someone who has studied in Greece, earned a PhD in Greece, and then left straight away to go find work abroad. This is remarkable, especially if you consider that 61 percent of them never even bothered to look for work in Greece before seeking employment



abroad.

"I believe this is an indication that graduates believe the job market in Greece is very bad and there's nothing here for them," Lambrianidis adds.

Rising joblessness

A large part of the problem, according to the findings, lies in Greece's labour market and rising rate of unemployment. The national statistics agency noted that the jobless rate in February was 12.1 percent. The majority are recent university graduates between the ages of 25 and 34.

Meanwhile, the Greek taxpayer should also be concerned about the brain drain problem, according to Lambrianidis. It is taxpayers who are funding education at public universities only to see graduates leave after they complete their studies.

The United Kingdom and the United States draw the most attention from Greeks leaving their country.

Why are the country's university graduates leaving Greece to take jobs in other parts of Europe or across the Atlantic? The answer is probably a combination of higher salaries and more opportunity. According to Lambrianidis, it's not because there is an overly competitive and saturated labour market or that Greece has too many people earning university degrees.

According to official EU data, 27.7 percent of Greeks between the ages of 25 and 64 hold a university degree. While there is no shortage of graduates, other EU countries have a higher percentage of degree holders. It's 31.4 percent in France and 38 per-

cent in Finland.

"I think the biggest factor is that Greek companies are more geared to providing products and services by exploiting cheap labour and not investing in high technology and skills," Lambrianidis says.

"And that's why they don't need degree holders. So, it's not a problem of supply, but demand - there's no big demand for degrees. In fact, the more educated someone is in Greece the greater the risk of unemployment."

Shrinking planet

The internet, web-based head hunters and cheap air travel have all contributed to the ease with which Greek graduates are deciding to build a future abroad.

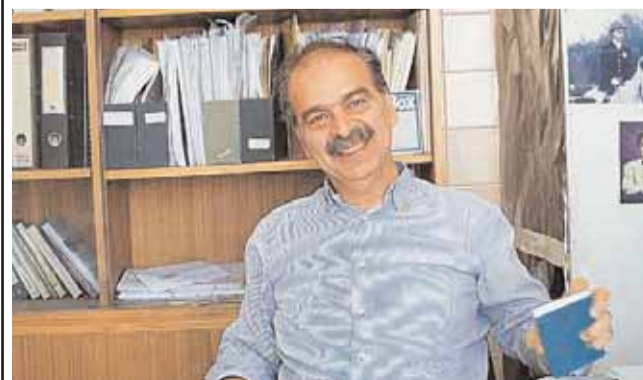
Much has changed since Greeks paid lots of money for a one-way ticket on an ocean liner to the United States. "Things have gotten easier," Lambrianidis says. "They can look for work online and use the internet to send their CVs to millions of employers around the world."

But probably the biggest reason Greece's best and brightest scientific minds are taking flight is to escape the nepotism. "Getting a job because you're someone's nephew is what most of these people want to avoid, especially if they have lived abroad and have experienced how things are in other countries."

Back in Stanford, Yiakoumis says he thinks he'll stay put for a while because he just doesn't see much of a future in his line of work in Greece, at least not in the near term.

"I'd like to gain some experience in the industry in Silicon Valley."

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Lois Lambrianidis