



Experience a Mediterranean Diet



Immerse Yourself in the Culture



Visit New Landscapes



Make New Friends

HOW TO LIVE TO 100: UF/IFAS CALS IN IKARIA, GREECE

By: Libby Putnam

Dr. Karla Shelnutt, a passionate member of the UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Extension Engagement who is dedicated to the missions of the University of Florida, specifically in the areas of nutrition education, family nutrition, and food security. Shelnutt also facilitates a study abroad trip to Ikaria, Greece, which provides students with an experiential learning opportunity to better understand the lifestyle and community dynamics of one of the world's five blue zones.

What are Blue Zones?

“Blue zones” are geographic areas with lower rates of chronic disease and longer life expectancies for community members.

“If we could incorporate at least some of the factors that have been shown to be associated with longevity, then you know, even if it doesn’t help you live to be over 100 years old, it’s one smaller step to being healthier, right?” – Shelnutt.

These regions are more than places where people live longer than normal, they are meaningful examples for the rest of the world of the importance of community and belonging. The students who chose to participate and follow Shelnutt to the small island community of Ikaria got a peak into what makes one of the globe's five blue zones special.

Through the study abroad trip activities and curriculum, students explored Ikaria using the lens of firsthand experiences with locals, new diets and dishes, and community events. Shelnutt’s study abroad trip helps students connect how the study of blue zones globally may hold the key to discovering a way to healthier and longer lives.

Inspiring Students

Shelnutt works to serve communities across the globe using creative nutrition programming to make an impact in her profession. Shelnutt aims to inspire students to take more of an interest in the intersection between health and happiness through hands-on experiences. Her study abroad trip to Ikaria, Greece, is just one example of

how she’s taking her students out of the classroom to get to the root of our connection with food and community. Studying blue zones like Ikaria, Greece, helps us to unlock key habits to longevity, health, and happiness from the communities that succeeded in the journey of longevity over several generations.



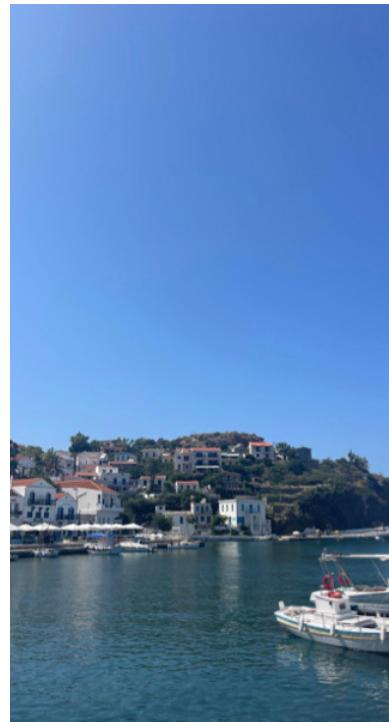
All students should push themselves to travel abroad to explore new cultures, landscapes, cuisines, and identities!

THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

Highlights of the study abroad trip recorded by former students include visiting an apiary, hiking to a flour mill, exploring gardens, and participating in a ceramics class. Former students note the positive memories they have of spending the day at the beach, learning how to cook alongside Thea, one of the trip hosts, and traveling to the local monastery. The most recent cohort was able to partake in a panigiri, a festival and centuries-old Greek tradition. During this festival, the main saint of the community is celebrated, and students on the study abroad trip were able to witness the beauty of the Ikarian community coming together as generations young and old celebrated with food, wine, and dance.

“For these kids who are 18 to 21 years old, they learn to be more independent, they’ve got to navigate international travel and any issues that come with that. I think it’s a good way to help them become more independent and grow up a little bit.”
- Shelnutt

Participating in the study of these communities through study abroad trips like Shelnutt's is a great example of how colleges and universities in the United States can assist in research practices to better understand how we can improve our own lifestyles and community practices.



Enrolling in study abroad programs such as “UF/CALS in Ikaria, Greece” allows students an opportunity to experience new places and cultures while gaining a global perspective and earning credits toward their degree.

If you are interested in studying the wonder of blue zones in Ikaria, contact Dr. Shelnutt or Dr. Anne Matthews for more information. Scholarship opportunities are available through the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the UF International Center (UFIC). For those who want to explore all the trip offerings organized by UFIC, visit their [website](#) to become a Global Gator!

