

Blissfully lost in Salerno



A summertime adventure in the endless streets and paths of a city that was built to confuse even the most wicked pirates. *By Ioanna-Rantina Koutsafti*

"Sì, cinque euro (Yes, five euros)", the bronze-skinned bus driver told me, as I was subtly smiling at his persistence to keep answering in Italian, even though he definitely understood my question. Looking outside the drop-stained window, trying to keep the pictures of the Mediterranean houses vivid in my mind, I could almost hear my heart skip a beat from excitement, on this vehicle heading to Salerno. Although there was air-conditioning, it was not helping much, our group's three pairs of cheeks became flushed. Again. With a sudden hit of brakes, the grizzle-haired man, shouted that we arrived at *Piazza San Francesco D'Assisi*, only five minutes away from the summer university's organisers, as I had memorised like a present-day Columbus. Unfortunately for him, Columbus did not use Google Maps. But, he claimed he saw mermaids. So, did I.

Down the road from the bus stop, I finally saw a bright orange door, with a sign reading "Aegee-Salerno", I opened it and came across a flight of stairs, which earned three sighs, just as we simultaneously realised we had overpacked. Reaching the top of the stairs was challenging, but all the fatigue wore off as soon as I heard Luigi's accented, chirpy voice saying "Welcome, my grechelle (*little Greek girls*)", gesturing us to step further inside the indoors sports arena, while he continued to handle some paperwork from his desk. A lot of new faces to take in, people I had only seen on tiny Facebook photos became lifelike, all looking curiously towards our side to see who provoked the smiling, tall man's reaction. After

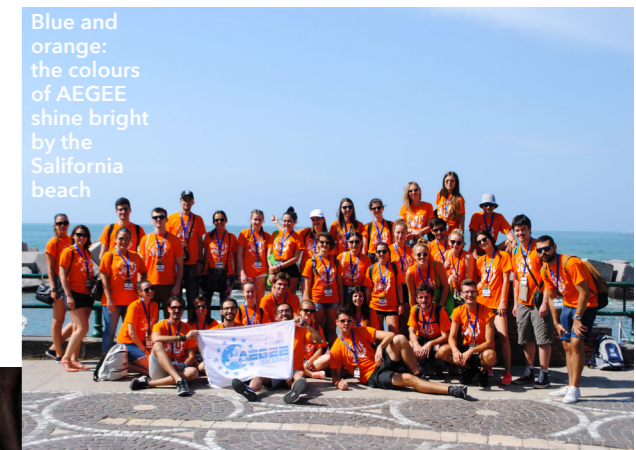
the forms were filled with blue chunky letters, I received a green tote bag, filled with goodies and the grey double-sized air mattress I would share with my friend, for the next 14 nights. I placed it almost at the centre of the volleyball court, next to the net and near the power plugs, a move that was later proved to be efficient, considering the constant lack of battery my phone was suffering from. The sheet was too big on my newly acquired bed,

Awkwardly enough, shouting "The floor is lava" in the middle of the street did not urge almost anybody, to protect their feet from the volcanic matter that the ground was allegedly turning into.

but as its smell reminded me of my home, it made me forget the arena's sultry atmosphere caused by the hot Italian sun, shining outside. And conspiracists still do not believe the greenhouse effect

is real.

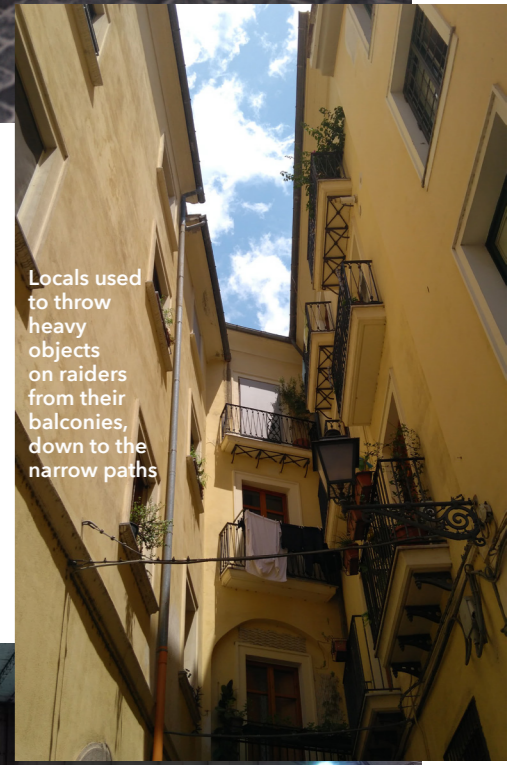
"Dinner is ready guys", someone cried out loud near the exit and I was awakened to a very pleasant surprise. Pasta. With tomato sauce. Everyone jumped out of their beds in milliseconds and headed towards the mouth-watering smell, grabbing a plastic dish and some cutlery on the way. Plenty of other Italian delicacies were served along the pasta; including pizza; that enabled my gluttony and



Blue and orange: the colours of AEGEE shine bright by the Salifornia beach



The Salernopoly dice did not stop rolling all night, challenging yet another participant



Locals used to throw heavy objects on raiders from their balconies, down to the narrow paths



The first participants had just arrived, unpacking in the oven-like arena



Neatly parked boats, ready to be rented out to adventurous tourists

made me stand up from my seat multiple times. From the schedule we were handed at our arrival, everyone knew that the first night out included a walk through the city and a pub crawl, as some of the local bars generously gave our group some free drink coupons. But the thing that everyone was not aware of was the ingenious game of Salernopoly - combining Salerno and Monopoly- we were bound to play. At first, I was intrigued by the huge dice that was accompanying us throughout the stroll, but I forgot about it in the process of absorbing the town life surrounding us. Quickly after, I was reminded of its presence when I was called to roll it and either fail or succeed at the challenge I would be presented with. Awkwardly enough, shouting "The floor is lava" in the middle of the street did not urge almost anybody, to protect their feet from the volcanic matter that the ground

was allegedly turning into. At least, I won the challenge. And a free shot. The rest of the night should be spent learning Italian phrases in order to request food, such as one particular kind of endive-filled pizza that was served at the homemade buffet earlier. "Io voglio una pizza con le scarole (*I want an endive-filled pizza*)" was repeated multiple times at that witching hour, and I started feeling a sense of pride that I had taken my first steps into learning, of what I thought as the basics of the Latin-like language.

Sitting on the refreshingly cold steps, right across the last bar we had nestled in, a wave of tiredness hit me, causing my eyes to sit slightly drooped. I was staring into nothingness, mentally participating in people's debates, when I saw a kind face approaching me and slightly shaking my shoulder. "Come with me", Raffaele told me, and I started following him, walking

away from the soft tunes coming out of the widely open doors of the pub. Soon, all I heard was our friends' indistinctive chatter, as my Italian pal guided me through some allies and narrow passages, below the full of magenta flowers balconies of the colourful, mouldy Italian residencies. As soon as we walked through a dark tunnel that was in between some houses, I realised I was looking at two sea-themed murals; one of what appeared to be Aeolus; and the other, a mermaid behind a window, looking nostalgically at the sea. Immersed as I was, intro admiring these works of arts, I had not realised that the sound of our presence had disturbed the slumber of a local, messy-haired woman. From her frowning face, I understood she wanted us gone and she expressed her request repeatedly. Politely. I wish.



Nocturnal love: a poem by Alfonso Gatto about his encounter with a mysterious woman in southern Italy