

Chronicle Telegraph




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**Lei
CHAN**

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UNTIL my arrival on the Greek island of Lefkas, my experience of sailing was non-existent.

Previous sun soaked holidays had involved exerting as little energy as possible on a beach with two feet firmly on dry land except for the occasional dip in the sea.

This time my boyfriend Neil and I decided to turn our action levels up a notch by taking on the Greek waves. Our destination was the Wildwind sailing retreat in the glorious Vassiliki Bay, with spectacular views of the nearby island of Cephalonia.

The bay is characterised by gentle breezes in the morning, making it ideal for first-time sailors, while in the afternoon the cross-shore winds provides excellent conditions for the more experienced looking for some fast paced action.

Guests are split into beginners, intermediate, improvers and the advanced. There is also a children's club.

Neil and I, along with a teacher from Ireland called Martina (who had limited experience) were put together with Steve, our instructor for the week, a 22-year-old former national sailing champion – an indication of the calibre of staff.

Over the next three days our crew were given instructions on rigging up, launching, tacking (sailing into the wind) and gybing (sailing away from the wind) on a Hobie 15 catamaran and given opportunities to practice these basic manoeuvres in tame waves.

After a gentle nudge from Steve, Neil and I finally managed to go it alone in the bay and we survived unscathed.

We silently wished for 'L' plates on our sails so other seafarers could avoid us in case we couldn't avoid them. By the end of the week and some sort of miracle, we had single-handedly sailed our vessel out of the bay in gentle winds to a nearby beach in a 'Sail Away' event, an informal regatta.

Wildwind's carefully planned weekly programme also includes



race day training and the racing itself with technique lessons to inject some fun into sailing.

To get a real taste of the fast thrills, the instructors held 'joy rides' on catamarans for sailors wishing trapeze in strong winds. This meant wearing a harness and standing on the side of the boat while the craft tipped onto its side. It certainly sent my adrenalin levels rocketing into orbit when Steve took me for a ride on my last day.

The fact that Wildwind's feet consists of more than 40 dinghies

and catamarans from the high-performance range such as the Hobie Fox and 49er (equivalent to Formula One cars in the sailing world) to the less demanding shows it caters for every level.

It is also a Royal Yachting Association recognised teaching school and offers courses from beginners to racing.

However, not everyone at Wildwind is there for the sailing. It provides an offshore retreat through its newly formed Healthy Options

package for women or partners more interested in relaxation.

The package includes a programme of yoga and pilates classes, massages, guided bike rides through olive groves, watching out for dolphins during sailing tastings, and herbal walks.

In the evening most guests take a five-minute walk along the unspoilt pebble beach to Vassiliki village, which has several bars and tavernas. There are also ferry trips available to other islands.

Wildwind was set up 20 years ago when its founder Simon Morgan arrived with a VW Campervan and a catamaran in tow. As a small independent company it has since developed a big reputation for providing the right ingredients for a perfect sailing holiday for beginners and pro's alike in an informal and relaxed setting.

On the last day it was game over.

When we arrived we weren't sure what to expect but we left with a hint of sadness watching the bay disappear behind us.

fact file

- Prices start from £399 for a week's stay at Wildwind under the sailing option and health options packages. They are based on two people sharing and include airport flights and charges and transfers.
- Lei and Neil flew from Gatwick to Preveza airport, on the island of Lefkas, via Monarch with a 90-minute journey to the resort.
- The sailing option allows free use of catamarans and dinghies, as well as tuition and equipment.

- The season runs from May to September. But due to exceptional demand Wildwind is now staying open until October 14 – last one-week holidays start on October 7 – prices same as September 30.
- For further information log onto www.wildwind.co.uk, alternatively call 0844 499 2898 for details or email simon@wildwind.co.uk.

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5th Nov	South Downs - Holiday Village	5 Days	£229
12th Nov	Lytham St Annes - Lindum Hotel	5 Days	£239
12th Nov	Shanklin - Shanklin Beach Hotel	5 Days	£209
19th Nov	Weston Super Mare - New Ocean	5 Days	£229
20th Nov	Bridlington - Balmoral Hotel	5 Days	£229
26th Nov	Eastbourne - Queens Hotel	5 Days	£209
26th Nov	Paignton - Queens Hotel	5 Days	£239
3rd Dec	Llandudno - Grand Hotel	5 Days	£209
3rd Dec	Weymouth - Crown Hotel	5 Days	£249
23rd Dec	Eastbourne - Glastonbury Hotel	5 Days	£399
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