

# ONE HELI OF A TIME

In need of a dinghy sailing fix, **SUE PELLING** headed to the bustling harbour town of Porto Heli, Greece, to find out if Ocean Elements' Nautica Bay Beach Club holiday lived up to expectation

Ocean Elements is a relative newcomer to the beach club sailing holiday market but has already cemented a strong reputation amongst keen dinghy sailors. With its sister company Alpine Elements running successful ski holidays for almost 20 years, Ocean Elements has certainly made its mark on the competitive sailing holiday beach club sector, with three now well-established bases at Vassiliki, Pelion and Porto Heli. My sister in law, Jane, and I set off to see if the Nautica Bay Beach Club at Porto Heli was going to live up to its reputation.

Our week on the southern tip of the picturesque Argolic Peninsula in early summer couldn't have come at a better time for us girls to take a break from our hectic lives back home. Neither of us had found time to race much over the last couple of years so we thought it was a good opportunity to gently ease our way back in.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Although the early morning 5.40am easyJet flight from Gatwick to Kalamata was a struggle (in terms of lack of sleep) and, for those travelling to Gatwick from further afield it meant the extra cost of a night in a hotel, the process ran smoothly and before we knew it we'd arrived in Greece. A four-hour interesting coach journey from Kalamata through the pretty, rugged Greek countryside included a highway pit-stop for refreshments. We were rewarded for our early start by a

respectable mid-afternoon arrival in Porto Heli, which allowed us to settle in, and enjoy our first dip of the week in the ultra-inviting hotel pool. Because first impressions are often the lasting ones, it was good to discover a high standard of professionalism immediately evident among the staff at the resort. It was also clear that safety and hotel cleanliness were among the priorities and, pleasingly, levels of excellence remained consistent for the duration of our stay.

With around 60 guests including up to 15 children a week during peak season, Ocean Elements' Porto Heli Beach Club is well equipped with its functional fleet of dinghies to suit all abilities including the Laser Pico, Standard, Radial, Bahia, RS100, RS200, RS500, RS800, RS Feva, RS Venture, RS Quba, RS Cat 16, Sunfish, Topper Xenon, Topaz 16 Cat, Hobie Cat and Dart 16. We were there in early June – off peak – with just 35 guests, so for us, kit availability was never an issue. It was also a real bonus to discover the use of all boards, boats and equipment, and basic instruction is included in the price of the holiday, which worked out at less than £70 a day all-in for a week on a half board basis.

The Laser Picos and RS Aeros were hugely popular during our holiday, as were the RS200s. For relative newcomers to multihulls we found the RS Cat 16 lots of fun, and really enjoyed blasting around the bay.

The conditions were generally ideal with a light onshore breeze in the morning building to a good Force

**Facing page**  
Sue and Jane took advantage of the wide variety of activities available with Ocean Elements

3 from the prevailing southwesterly direction after lunch. This was perfect for sharpening up skills in preparation for the end of week regatta.

The other part of our holiday plan was to learn a new skill in stand-up paddle boarding. I was also keen to progress my windsurfing skills and try out new kit, while Jane enjoyed many a late afternoon's relaxing cruise around the bay in a kayak. The paddle boarding was a big hit for both of us and we found the progression from beginners to intermediate boards fairly swift thanks to the high level of instruction and the forgiving early morning flat calm conditions.

Although we gave the daily early morning fast-paced group bike rides a miss, we did enjoy the occasional afternoon adventure on one of the upgraded, brand-new specialised bikes, which cater to the growing demand amongst guests for mountain biking.

## HOTEL AND MEALS

We were impressed with the well kept, sparkling clean, 70-room beachfront hotel. As well as being quiet and tranquil, our family room (probably the furthest from the waterfront) provided stunning views across the picturesque bay. One of our greatest treats of the day after a tough session on the water was sitting on the balcony watching the sun set before dinner, enjoying a glass of the finest local wine.

With the price of the holiday including breakfast and dinner, I have to confess I was feeling rather sceptical about what to expect in terms of cuisine. As well as →



ALL PHOTOS: SUE PELLING/OCEAN ELEMENTS



attitude of the staff at the Porto Heli base, headed by Doug Reid, the Activities Manager, was exceptional. There was always full safety cover afloat with a vigilant yet discreet look-out teams watching from the shore and from the safety RIBs.

All this made it very difficult when it was time leave the Nautica Bay Beach Club and head home at the end of a superb week.

More info at [oceanelements.com](http://oceanelements.com). □



**Above**  
A wide range of boats are available, including singlehanders like the RS100

**Left**  
Many guests come as couples or groups; children are well catered for too

**Below**  
There are plenty of opportunity to try new activities ashore and afloat

## How to find your dream beach club holiday...

From the Med to the Caribbean, there are a number of beach club operators to choose from. Each offers a different take on the perfect watersports-hotel combo that will appeal differently depending on your sailing level and the sort of holiday you are looking for. Use our handy checklist below to get you started...

- What does the cost of the holiday include? Extras can include flight, transfers, catering, use of equipment, and tuition
- Is the centre RYA recognised, and does it cater for relevant experience levels?
- What wind/sea conditions can you expect? Novice sailors should avoid resorts known for their strong prevailing winds
- Are you insured? Check you have adequate insurance to cover watersports activities

the vast spread and variety of food with its strong Greek influence, the service was first class, and the view from the roof terrace restaurant was exceptional.

### FEELING INSPIRED

It bodes well that many of the other guests we encountered are return customers. Charles Milne, a member of South Cerney SC, described the Ocean Elements offering as one of the few aimed at the “serious sailor”, commenting: “This is our seventh time here at Porto Heli; even though we are in our 60s we are very active people. It is a safe bay and the standard of tuition is great.”

Paul Sutherland was leading a group of 14 sailors from Maidenhead SC. He said: “We’ve been doing these holidays for the last 24 years but we find this base a great sailing location and amazing value for money. Getting a group together from the club is not difficult but you need just one or two to decide where you are going, then announce the package... We always have a great time on and off the water, and our club pre-dinner drinks are becoming quite well known!”

But it wasn’t only couples and groups we encountered at Porto Heli. Chantel Everil had travelled solo from County Durham and said that the experience had really boosted her confidence.

“Even though actually coming here alone was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done, I have loved every minute of it!”

Chantel wasn’t the only one leaving feeling uplifted. Neil Archibald was heading home to London feeling similarly inspired: “Although I am an Ocean Elements regular this is the first time at this venue and I think it great for beginners and improvers like myself. I not only feel more confident but I feel I have also improved a lot sailing the RS Aero this time. The plan now is to make an effort to join a club back home and sail more.”

Like many of our fellow holidaymakers Jane and I found this was the ideal low-pressure, amazing value for money, short break in a safe environment for all levels. Even non-sailing partners found the beach (and bar!) a great place to relax, and were keen to explore the local places of interest including the pretty, cosmopolitan island of Spetses just a short ferry trip away.

This holiday is a particularly great option for beginners and improvers including those who want to embark on RYA level courses. And if like us you are up for some real relaxation, then the treat of being able to select a boat and have it rigged ready-to-sail, is a real plus point!

The level of safety and the professional

