

Vassiliki blast

The appeal of the Greek resort of Vassiliki is well-known among windsurfers; the ultra-reliable local wind, Eric, is chiefly responsible for a reputation that sees the resort rank regularly among the very top windsurf spots in the world.

Eric makes his appearance most days at about 2pm, rolling down the near-vertical mountainside flanking the west side of Vassiliki Bay, before hitting the deep blue water with pretty serious intent. The result is a constant breeze that kicks in at about 20 knots, and typically builds and lasts until the sun drops behind the hills. For experienced windsurfers, it's quite simply paradise.

You might well wonder, then, what two dinghy sailors – with, at best, intermediate windsurf ability – were doing in this resort? The answer, in short, is that we had come to sample the best of both worlds, with a holiday that combined guaranteed wind for dinghy blasting with the opportunity to develop our windsurfing skills.

A complete package

We were staying for a week with Ocean Elements, which exclusively occupies the Surf Hotel, a very pleasant beachfront hotel offering traditional-style accommodation with inclusive breakfast. This particular Ocean Elements base – one of three resorts in the company's beach club portfolio – is located approximately halfway along the sandy stretch that comprises Vassiliki beach, on which a cluster of watersports holiday operators have established themselves over the years. Each operator offers a slightly different variation on the beach club package, from windsurfing, cat sailing, racing

Georgie Corlett-Pitt checks out the best of both worlds with an action-packed week in Vassiliki

weeks, sailing tuition, through to plain old relaxing. Vass is truly a watersports Mecca, with plenty of options.

Sealing the deal for us in our final choice of holiday was the RYA tuition that is included as standard as part of an Ocean Element's package. That means that guests can choose whether to master sailing or windsurfing skills, whether you're at novice or improver level. Daily sessions follow the RYA syllabus, with certificates up for grabs.

Ocean Elements also ensures use of top-of-the-range kit, with new models bought each season – and plenty of it to go round. On our induction tour of the site, we were amazed by the extent of the boats, boards, sails, SUPs and kayaks available to us.

The choice of boats included cats, RS200s, RS500s, RS Fevas, Laser Vago, Laser Bahia, a number of Lasers and Radials and a highly popular RS100. For the learn-to-sail groups, early morning zephyrs that gradually built up to a Force two provided perfect conditions for gaining confidence, while the steadier breeze that appeared around lunchtime gave more experienced dinghy sailors a decent chance to go for a blast – much to our delight. With good line of sight from the centre directly out towards the periphery of Vassiliki Bay, the sailing area feels almost limitless, and we relished the opportunity as experienced sailors to get out on the water and simply enjoy playing about with the different boats on offer. With

a raft of instructors and safety boats out on the water at any given time, there was plenty of friendly help on hand if needed. On return to shore, the Ocean Elements staff were only too happy to wade in and catch us, then take equipment off our hands so we could head ashore and relax.

We quickly settled into a relaxed routine, spending our mornings either enjoying the dinghy sailing on offer, or exploring the local area on the centre's top of the range mountain bikes. After replenishing our energy levels with lunch at the hotel's poolside beach bar, it was time to learn something new and challenge ourselves to take our windsurf skills to the next level. With aspirations to crack planing and carve gybes by the end of the week, we were welcomed into the intermediate group.

Learning curve

First up was a demo from our ever-patient instructors, who took the time to answer even our silliest questions and to explain the theory in as much detail as we needed, before we left the shade of the palm trees and headed afloat. As we practised our 'super sevens' and tried to remain in control, I remembered that windsurfing is definitely a lot trickier than it looks! But with input, reassurance and numerous demonstrations from our instructors, we found ourselves progressing throughout the week, and the opportunity to test out new kit that gradually pushed us that little bit further every day ensured a consistent learning curve as the week wore on.

After zigzagging our way about the bay, translating theory into practise with varying degrees of success – and maybe just once or twice having to ▶

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hitch a lift upwind from the safety boat – our group united for a debrief to absorb more wise words from our instructors over a happy hour beer. By the time the week was up, our group was even able to perfect a follow-the-leader exercise, involving standing on one leg and the big test – helitacking.

Among our fellow students were several past Ocean Elements guests, who were returning to Vass for their second or third time that year – seeking not only another fix of Vassiliki's conditions but also the coveted expertise of the staff.

Sundowners

We found the perfect vantage point for sundowners to be our apartment's balcony, from where we took in the vista of the bay and marvelled at the pros still out making the most of Eric at the end of every day.

Local tavernas provided easy pickings for dinner nearby. Alternatively, a ten-minute walk into Vassiliki town was rewarded with a choice of fish restaurants and a couple of bars which, in true Greek style, by day provide the setting for locals to drink coffee and by night provide

low key venues for enjoying a cocktail or two. Vass's tiny harbour provided a pretty backdrop against which to explore the few streets that lead back from it to make up Vassiliki town.

There were also options to stay on site; on a couple of evenings each week, Ocean Elements provides a relaxed but fun dine-in night at the hotel, with entertainment courtesy of the multi-talented waterfront staff.

So it was, on the final night, we found ourselves at a prizegiving dinner, re-living our various achievements and 'must try harder' moments with our fellow guests over a fine Greek meze. After-dinner presentations were accompanied by hilarious re-enactments of each group's escapades afloat, with plenty of jovial input from our instructors.

As we woke the next morning for our short transfer back to Preveza airport, we were naturally pretty reluctant to leave after what had all in all been a fantastic week – although the storm that had materialised overnight definitely helped with coaxing us on to the coach! The consensus was that Ocean Elements does well to provide a watersports holiday that ticks a lot of boxes for those looking to expand their skills and enjoy a break in the Med, at what is ultimately an affordable price.

While we visited towards the end of the season, during school holidays the centre is popular with families; a big draw is that teens can join in with courses alongside their parents, or pay for race-specific coaching courses with dedicated junior race groups, and there are free kids' clubs too.

For those that want to add in another element, Stay and Sail holidays are being introduced to this resort for 2015, whereby you can spend a week enjoying sailing and windsurfing at the Surf Hotel, before taking off on a charter holiday from Vassiliki – definitely the best of *all* worlds! ■

