



# EXPRESS

Home of  
the Daily and  
Sunday Express

## The 10 best things to do in Halkidiki

OUR REPORTER and her family discover a relaxing haven and first-class service at the Ikos Olivia resort on Greece's Halkidiki peninsula.



Our reporter and her family discover a relaxing haven

I counted just 20 short steps from the garden of our beautiful beachfront bungalow to the warm, crystal clear sea. An elegant yacht was lazily sailing by and everything was calm, quiet and blissful across the sun-kissed Gulf of Toroneos.

We had been hoping for a luxury family getaway, the first with our eight-month-old grandchild, and here on Greece's serene Halkidiki coast we found the perfect haven. Of course, when we set off with the baby, we had no idea if the adventure would turn into a delight or a disaster, but we were encouraged by the name of the resort, Ikos Olivia, when we discovered that Ikos is taken from the Greek word *oikos*, which means home.

Halkidiki, a peninsula in northern Greece that sticks out into the Aegean Sea, is a magnet to holidaymakers thanks to its golden sand, azure waters and its lush forests that tumble down to the edge of the beach. Halkidiki's rich tradition and cultural heritage means that there are endless historic areas and archaeological sites to explore, and a vibrant gastronomic scene ensures that there's no shortage of taste sensations to try. Meanwhile, the sea itself provides endless opportunities for water sports.

The peninsula is home to top-class resorts, and Ikos Olivia provided the home from home we were looking for. We latched onto its advice to "sit back, relax and be at one with your natural surroundings" faster than you can say *taramasalata*.

And it wasn't difficult to settle in. Our bungalow, with two elegant bedrooms and en-suite bathrooms, had a spacious lounge with a bed settee that ensured six could sleep in absolute comfort. It was spacious enough to ensure there was plenty of room for the baby, too. Outside was a sun terrace and garden leading to the quiet stretch of beach, giving us a magical and relaxing space in which to unwind.

With 24-hour room service available, it would have been tempting to not leave our peaceful haven, but the resort offers amazing choices of eating opportunities with remarkable menus created by Michelin-starred chefs. And because the holiday deal is all-inclusive, it was a no-brainer to take advantage of the culinary treats on offer.

Without doubt, the place to go for breakfast was Flavors, a buffet restaurant with stunning views over the beach. I have never seen such high quality, mouth-watering food. Cereals, pancakes, fruit and a magnificent English breakfast are all on offer. Lunch was just as appetising, and free wine was included with dinners at Flavors.



See more of the peninsula by [hiring a car to explore villages and churches](#) or by [booking a cruise](#)

But the delights of four other restaurants tempted us away: Ouzo serves up traditional Greek cuisine with a modern twist; Fusco is where Michelin-starred chef Andrea Fusco has created exceptional Italian dishes; Anaya provided the finest flavours from China, Thailand and India; and Provencal is an elegant French à la carte restaurant.

Every evening, there was live music ranging from jazz to traditional Greek, plus musicals and children's shows, and even the latest films on show. But there are also great bars, and the Olivia's beach parties have a reputation as being second to none.

Of course, after a good night out it was tempting the next day just to lie on a lounge and read a book, but Olivia offers practically every activity under the sun to lure us away from having a purely sedentary holiday – each day we chose between football, yoga, Pilates, walking, hiking, sailing, wind-surfing, water-skiing and tennis.

And to wind down and totally relax, the onsite Ikos Spa by Anne Semonin, which specialises in natural ingredients and the finest oils, was an absolute must, boasting seven private treatment rooms and a couples' suite. My husband and I tried the 90-minute spa for two and found it so relaxing we wanted to do it again – so we did!

The spa also has an indoor-outdoor heated pool with a jacuzzi, a hammam and sauna, fitness studio and hairdressing and nail salons. There are special deals offering clients free treatments – no wonder they came away smiling and very relaxed.

The Ikos brand is now proving so popular that two more resorts are already being created to join the Olivia and Ikos Oceania, both in Halkidiki. The brand has just purchased properties on the Greek islands of Corfu and Kos to add to its rapidly expanding portfolio of resorts offering sophisticated luxury in premiere beachfront locations.

On Corfu, the new Ikos Dassia, located in a beautiful region only 10 minutes from Corfu town, will feature 410 newly renovated rooms and suites, and will open in May 2018. Ikos Kefalos, on Kos, will open in 2019 after a €90 million (£79m) renovation of the Club Med to turn it into a new five-star resort.

It's hardly surprising that Ikos is growing so rapidly, because apart from the superb food, excellent accommodation and fun and efficient staff, they're so easy to get to. Within five hours of our flight taking off from Gatwick for Thessaloniki, we were checked in to the Olivia and given a welcoming glass of champagne, and were soon swimming in the sea and watching the yachts go by.

We had such a relaxing time that even with the demands of our delightful eight month old, the holiday was plain sailing.

### **Way to go**

***Rates at Ikos Olivia in April 2017 start from €367.20 per room per night for a two-bedroom Bungalow Suite Beachfront on an all-inclusive basis, including free transfers for stays of 5 nights or more when booking at [ikosresorts.com](http://ikosresorts.com). The rate includes an early booking discount which ends on February 28, 2017.***