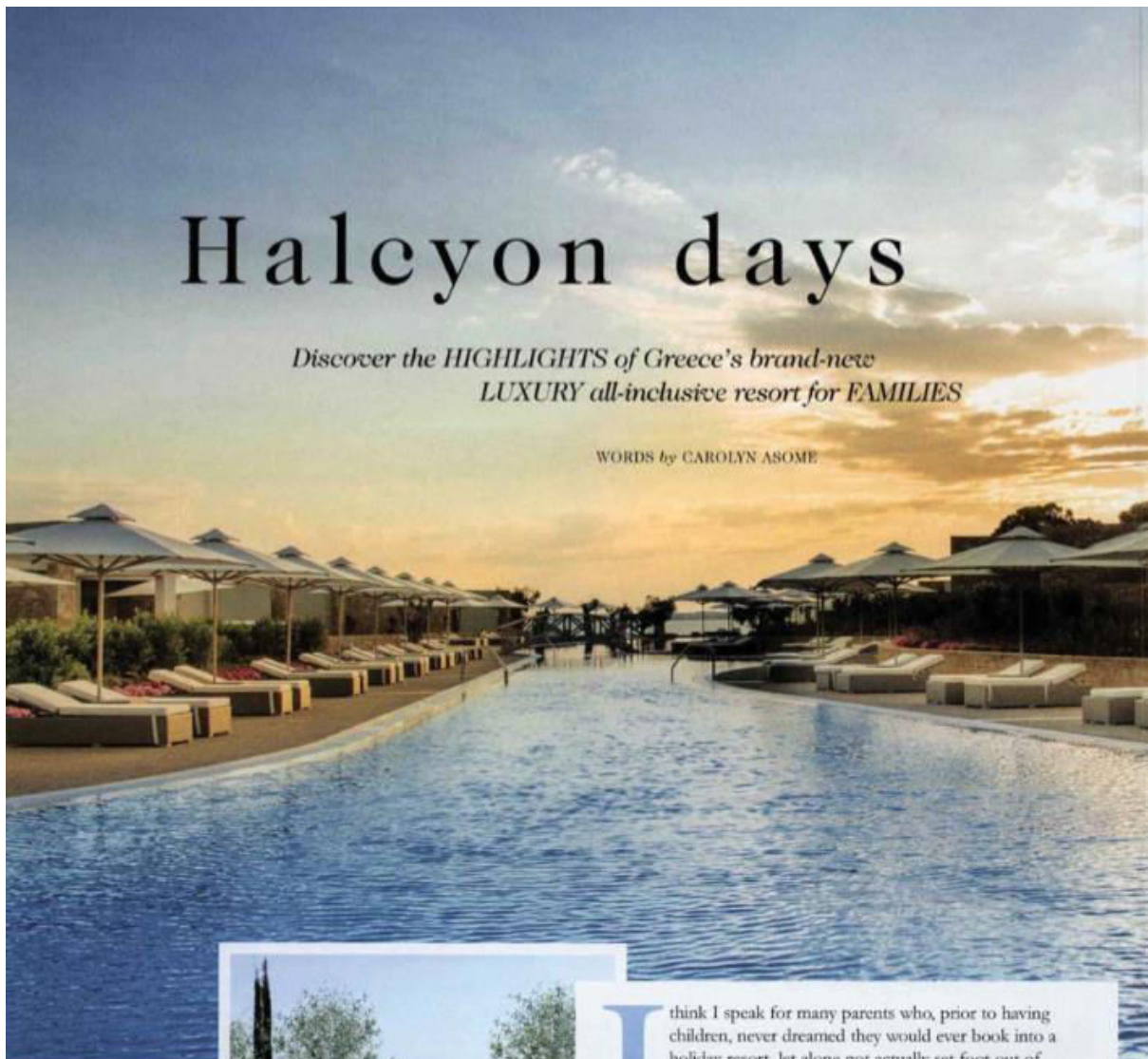


Halcyon days

Discover the *HIGHLIGHTS* of Greece's brand-new
LUXURY all-inclusive resort for *FAMILIES*

WORDS by CAROLYN ASOME



ABOVE: Enjoy a dip in the pool
RIGHT: Dine at
Lusco restaurant
BELOW: Take in
the views
in Athens



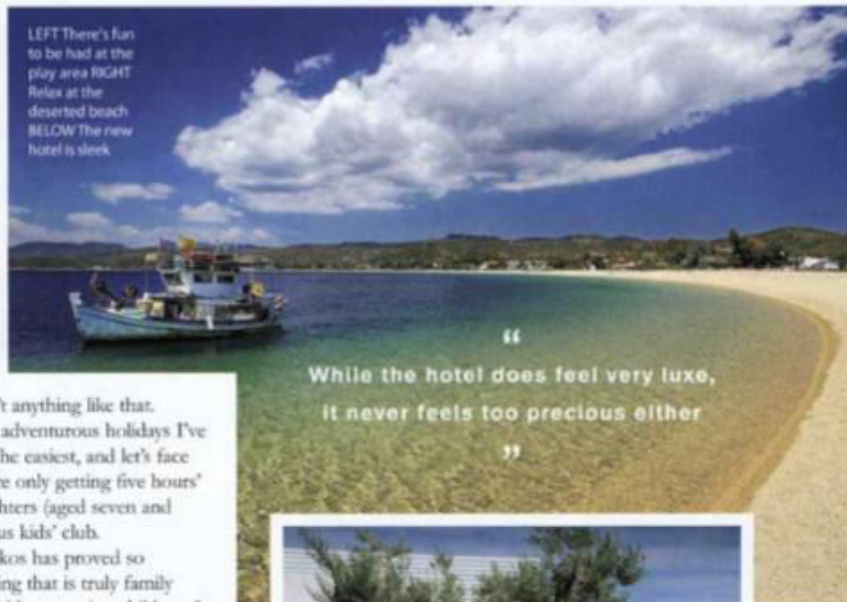
I think I speak for many parents who, prior to having children, never dreamed they would ever book into a holiday resort, let alone not actually set foot out of said holiday resort for an entire week. Where once holidays meant heli-skiing in the Rockies, horse riding in Kazakhstan (OK, so that's my husband) or (me) gently exploring the Aeolian islands, bonkbuster in hand, most will agree that holidays with babies or young children mean catching up on the hotel HBO channel in the dark at 7pm, while slugging a bottle of wine and trying not to wake up the kids asleep on the other side of a flimsy screen that divides the family sleeping quarters.

A low point – and very possibly TMI – was once having to relieve myself into an empty Evian bottle so as not to wake up the seven-month-old jet-lagged baby who we'd put to sleep in a cot in the en-suite hotel bathroom in San Francisco. But I digress...

Because obviously, at Ikos Olivia – the luxury, all-inclusive resort a few miles east of Nea Moudania (very near Halkidiki airport), which opened in May 2015 and follows the same model as it



LEFT There's fun to be had at the play area RIGHT Relax at the deserted beach BELOW The new hotel is sleek



“ While the hotel does feel very luxe, it never feels too precious either ”

its sister hotel, the Ikos Oceania – it wasn't anything like that.

True, it may have been one of the least adventurous holidays I've ever been on, but it was certainly one of the easiest, and let's face it, adventure is a bit over-rated when you're only getting five hours' sleep a night. Nine months later, my daughters (aged seven and three years) still bleat on about the fabulous kids' club.

And it's not hard to work out why the Ikos has proved so popular: few holiday resorts offer something that is truly family friendly while ensuring it is not over-run with screaming children. It might exude the décor of a cruise ship (albeit a very modern, sleek and contemporary one), and while the accommodation and dining or pool areas do feel very luxe, they never feel too precious either.

The rooms vary from doubles at the main hotel to a series of bungalows – the most expensive of which come with private pools or are right on the beach and sleep six. Ours was a one-bed apartment that included a master bedroom and a living/kitchen area, which doubled up as the kids' sleeping area. It was separate enough though that we didn't feel as if we had to tip-toe around after they'd gone to bed.

For fussy kids and discerning adults, there are five restaurants and six bars on site, all of which are included in the cost of your stay. The choice is vast but the standard is good. Ikos have asked Michelin-star chefs to design menus in the Greek, French, Asian and Italian restaurants. A word of warning, though: do book ahead before you arrive as the restaurants get full quickly. A highlight was the sunset family dinner on tables that were carried to the beach.

Unusually, there is also a 'Dine Out' option, which encourages guests to sample local cuisine by visiting one of the nearby restaurants carefully selected by the hotel at no additional cost.

We were invited to use the deluxe pool, which is much more spacious than the other pools on site. Thanks to its very long, kidney shape, it means you can sunbathe and read right by your children splashing in the water. The sunloungers are also very spread out, so unlike other hotel pools, you don't feel as if you're packed in like sardines. All pool snacks (roasted sandwiches, as well as bowls of watermelon and pineapple) and drinks are included and



brought to your sunbed, while the immaculate 450-metre beach is another spot you can spend all day and was deserted for the end of July. There's even a 'babewatch' service, where staff will look after your children while parents enjoy some sanity.

The aforementioned Heros kids' club (with an outdoor playground that could be used after-hours) was a hit. A high point was the arrival of giant Minions puppets one evening and the disco where they learnt how to do the *Macarena*.

Other facilities, such as football, tennis, basketball, water sports, a fitness centre and Anne Semonin spa treatments were also on offer.

The water sport station is located on the beach and offers complimentary non-motorised water sports, such as pedalos, kayaks, paddleboards and wind-surfing for non-beginners. Motorised water sports are available too. There is also a range of fitness activities and classes, including volleyball, water-polo, Zumba and aerobics.

Would I go back? I've always been a bit sceptical about resorts as I'm used to more active holidays where we self-cater in a villa. However, our trip to Ikos made me realise that I hadn't had a proper sun tan in about four years (possibly no bad thing), and yes, I definitely switched off and even managed to finish two books. I think that means yes, and certainly if my children get their way.



LEFT Our bungalow at the Ikos Oliva has a private pool – with strong sunbathing & views of the sea

Rates at Ikos Oliva in July/August 2017 start from £890.50 per room per night for a One-Bedroom Bungalow Garden View for two adults and two children on an all-inclusive basis. The price includes free transfers for stays of five nights or more when booking at ikosresorts.com

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