



BEACH MECCA

From twin-wire cats to foiling Lasers, **GEORGIE CORLETT-PITT** headed out to Wildwind for a week of adrenaline overload

Vassiliki, on the Greek island of Lefkas, is a world-renowned sailing destination thanks to the reliable localised cross-shore wind that kicks in most afternoons. For the last 30 years, Wildwind has been taking advantage from its prime beachfront location at the centre of this watersports mecca. Established in 1987 by Simon Morgan, today Wildwind boasts a 70-strong fleet of catamarans and dinghies. The set-up has come a long way since its first year, when a fleet of four Hobie cats attracted just a handful of guests who had to brave an off-road journey to get there. It's fair to say things are run a bit more professionally now, albeit still with a distinctly chilled out approach. Within two hours of landing at Preveza airport, I was afloat in a Laser, having already been welcomed and settled in to our comfortable hotel room, located just behind the beachfront. And what a treat. Not only was this an opportunity to actually sail on arrival day – making a very early start from Gatwick worthwhile – but it was also one of the best blasts I have had. Skipping

over the waves that were starting to form further out in the bay, the smell of olive groves and cypress trees swept down the hill towards me as the warm breeze piped up to around 20 knots. Bliss! What a way to start our holiday.

CATS AND MORE
Later that evening, whilst enjoying some traditional home-cooked Greek fare at the welcome meal, we had the chance to meet our fellow guests. As well as Brits, there were those who had travelled from Belgium, Holland and Germany, and even Australia. Several were Wildwind fans, back for a second, third, fourth time, or, in one instance, their 50th week. I was most surprised to discover a range of expectations. While Wildwind to me has always seemed synonymous with expert cat sailing, there is equally plenty to tempt the monohull sailor, and to attract those wishing to improve their level or even try sailing for the first time. Mornings in Vassiliki are ideal for

Above Wildwind has taken centre stage in Vassiliki for 30 years
Facing page First set up in 1987, the resort boasts 70 cats, Lasers – foiling and traditional – and more

those looking to try new skills or brush-up on existing ones, with a light onshore breeze prevailing until lunchtime. Lessons are run for beginners with the chance to obtain RYA qualifications, and for more experienced sailors, a series of clinics are run, split into monohull and multihull categories. There's no rigid structure and guests are able to drop in to the sessions as they please. What really ensures this approach works is that the beach team, from the outset, take the time to find out a little about each person's experience and aims for the week, tailoring the coaching

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programme to fit and re-assessing as the week goes on. I joined a number of talks ranging from boat set-up to startline tactics to trapeze technique, each of which was followed up by an on the water coaching session so we could translate theory into practise. In peak weeks the waterfront operation comprises 25 staff, all proficient sailors, many of whom have raced to a high



IMAGES: GEORGIE CORLETT-PITT



relationship. Accommodation is mostly on a hotel-only basis; although a number of newly refurbished self-catering studios are also available. We stayed on site in the family-run New Melas Hotel, where simple but comfortable rooms are set back from a delightful pool ringed by sun beds and an array of scented flowers. Wildwind's beach bar and adjacent lawn are perfect for lounging around over lunch or to enjoy an après beer.

level. There is always someone on hand to offer advice, help you rig and launch, or jump in the boat for a one-to-one.

They also spend a lot of time fielding queries about the breeze, and when it will fill in. This is the big question! Locally known as 'Eric' the afternoon cross-shore regularly pumps at between 20 and 30 knots – occasionally more (in which case, windsurf fanatics can head next door to Club Vass to grab a board). It's perfect for blasting across the bay in a boat of your choice, safe in the knowledge that the water is warm and there are safety boats on hand to assist if needs be. It's at this point in the day that the beach team will also offer high performance dinghy and cat joy rides so that nervous or less experienced sailors can still enjoy the thrill of sailing from the wire when it's blowing hard.

Often in the UK, there's a point on the beaufort scale when the race officer would start to look worried and boats would start to head home. Not so out at Wildwind. With the benefit of the right kit and experience, the team are very adept at managing windy weather and giving sailors at all levels the chance to push beyond their own boundaries.

PUSHING THE LIMITS

It was on one such afternoon that my husband and I decided to jump into an F18 Hobie Tiger. Both very experienced monohull sailors, we were far from being cat experts, and our stated aim for the week had been to get to grips with two hulls. Twin wiring was something of a novelty too. All I can say is it was very fun and very fast – once we realised we needed to stop sailing it like a dinghy!

The following day we opted for something more in our comfort zone; well, that is, at least we chose a monohull (a Laser) – just with the added challenge of having foils. With a lot of hard work pumping the 1:1 mainsheet and a few



spectacular crash downs, the boat's simple foil set-up soon saw us taking it in turns to fly across the bay.

The rest of the week saw us dabble alternately in various classes, from the RS100 to the Hobie FX and even the 49er. Another breeze-on afternoon saw us hit 17 knots downwind in an RS200 with the hull barely in the water - simply stunning sailing. The week was rounded off with a mini race series, with some close competition at the front of the fleet.

Back onshore, seeking to address the overload of adrenaline (though I wasn't complaining) I checked out some of the alternative activities on offer. Top of my list was the Healthy Options programme; yoga, pilates, meditation and fitness workshops are all offered with an excellent standard of instruction. There are also guided health walks. Mountain bikes and SUP boards are available too, while scuba diving and sea safaris can be arranged locally.

Although our 15-month-old daughter was a few years off being able to join in Wildwind's kids' programmes (ages 7-17), she was very well cared for in the crèche at neighbouring Club Vass; with which Wildwind shares a reciprocal

Top
Wildwind is known for its superlative cat joy rides

Above
Drop into a class to pick up boat set-up tips and race tactics

On three evenings there is the option to enjoy special activities on site. In addition to the welcome meal, there is the famous Wildwind BBQ – followed by live music performances from several of the instructors, definitely making the beach bar *the* place to be on that night – as well as a more low key poolside cocktail party later on in the week. Other evenings, we wandered into the village with its harbour-side seafood restaurants and a handful of local craft shops.

THE NEXT 30 YEARS

At the time of our visit, Wildwind was preparing to host a special 30th celebration week, along with a festival that will involve the village of Vassiliki. It was shaping up to be a pretty special event.

And what does Wildwind have lined up for the next 30 years? The answer: more of the same. There's not much to improve on, with a picture-perfect wind-sure location and a fantastic choice of kit. Perhaps the hardest to beat is the chilled out vibe that permeates every aspect of the holiday – driven by an experienced, friendly team who you can genuinely feel can't do enough to make sure guests get the most from their holiday, both on the water and off. ■