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# Wild thing

**Mark Jardine** and Cassie Richardson travelled to the beautiful island of Lefkas, Greece to sample the Wildwind experience at Vassiliki.

**W**e came to Wildwind having never been on an organised sailing holiday and really didn't know what to expect. As regular racers we were unsure what we would get out of our holiday and the type of people we would meet. So, we arrived with completely open minds to go with the flow of the Wildwind experience. We were not disappointed...

The travel arrangements organised by Wildwind cannot be faulted, with a three hour flight, destination Prevaia, mainland Greece. This is a small military airport so don't try and take any photographs, but collecting your bags and finding the Wildwind representative is easy. The transfer to the centre takes an hour and a half along the beautiful Greek coastline by coach. This is the ideal introduction to the holiday, especially if you're not familiar with Greece or the Island of Lefkas. The Wildwind rep gave an informative account of the island as the coach wound its way through the towns and villages. The transfer is always in the late morning allowing you to settle in before the welcome briefing organised during the late afternoon. Introductory drinks are planned for the first evening, which provides the ideal environment for meeting the other guests.

The two Wildwind hotels are situated next to each other and both have their own bar, which serve hot and cold food all day. They are run by

PHOTO MARK JARDINE/YSY\*



**Above Wildwind operates a partnership with the next door Club Vass centre for use of windsurfing equipment. This can be used as well if you go for Wildwind's 'Free as the wind' package.**

the local Melas and Kavadaos families who have worked with Wildwind since it was founded. The rooms are basic but are cleaned on a daily basis, have great views of the bay or the mountains and are equipped with everything that you need. There is a nice pool, sunbathing area and volleyball court which everyone at the club has access to.

### Sailing

While it was possible to go out for a sail on the day you arrive, most visitors chose to settle in, relax and have a beer by the pool on the first afternoon. The introduction to the sailing facilities and safety briefing takes place on the following morning but the staff are more than happy to get you straight out on the water.

Wildwind have a good range of well-maintained

boats; for monohull sailors you can go all the way from the RS Fevas to a 49er and the cat fanatics can try nearly the entire Hobie range from a Dragoon all the way up to the awesome Fox and FX1. While the atmosphere at the centre is very relaxed, a closer look shows that safety is the first priority. The morning briefing gave us an introduction to the boats and how the safety routine worked, and then we were divided up into groups so that we could sail boats that would be most suitable for our experience. Don't be afraid that you'll be tied to sailing this boat for the rest of the holiday – you can pick and choose to your heart's content! Being mostly monohull sailors we decided to go into the intermediate catamaran group. After a quick introduction from our instructor 'Bish' we were out in a Hobie 16 in the morning breeze. After a short while Bish was on our tail in a RIB giving us instructions on how to get the most out of the boat. Within seconds we were twin trapezing at twice our previous speed!

While out on the water guests must register their 'sailing card' at the watchtower so staff are aware of where everyone is. When I went up the tower with an instructor to take photos it became obvious just how seriously safety is taken with constant checks on numbers afloat and who was where. Constant liaison between the rescue boats, shore team and tower lookout, with VHF's, saw that everyone was checked in and accounted for all of the time.

Vassiliki is a natural bay with high hills on either side. There is usually a light breeze in the morning with a storming wind coming off the hills to the west in the afternoon. Now we were used to the Hobie 16 we went blasting in the afternoon. A couple of hours later we were back ashore enjoying a beer talking of burying the leeward hull, pitchpoles and high speed bear aways. On a windy day it's well worth going on a 'joy ride' with one of the Wildwind instructors for a high speed spin.

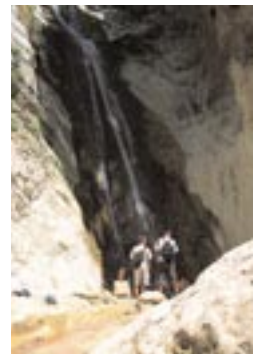
Guests came back with smiles that didn't go away all evening after a blast in the Hobie Fox with 'little Joe', the centre's head instructor; on a good reach he will even leave the windsurfers behind. Wildwind seems to attract a very high calibre of instructor and even the most experienced sailors will learn something from the team.

One of the best things about Wildwind is that you can delay choosing which type of boat you want to sail until you're right at the water front. There is rarely a time when what you want isn't available. We happily went out on a combination of 49er, Laser and Hobie 16 all in one afternoon. The 49er uses innovative 'bamboo tiller extensions' which are brilliant for absorbing the odd trip in a gybe! Wildwind operates a partnership with the next door Club Vass centre for use of windsurfing equipment. This can be used as well if you go for Wildwind's 'Free as the wind' package or organised on a daily basis through reception.

### Vassiliki

The small village of Vassiliki is the second largest holiday resort on the island of Lefkas and situated on the eastern side of Vassiliki Bay. The village is fairly quiet at the start and end of the season, but really comes to life in the summer months of July and August, where it is recognised as one of the

‘ The bay is noted for its afternoon wind – known as ‘Eric’ – which kicks in around noon everyday ’



PHOTOS MARK JARDINE/VEVA

windsurfing capitals of Europe. The bay is wide and sheltered, and noted for its afternoon wind – known as ‘Eric’ – which kicks in around noon.

The village itself is not large but the centre is based around the harbour, which is always full of yachts and visiting flotillas. The main precinct is host to a large number of restaurants, cafes, and knick-knack shops. There is no bank but there is an ATM and money can easily be exchanged at the travel agencies. The atmosphere along the main front gets going as dusk creeps in. There is one particular favourite late night bar, known as ‘Zeus’ where you can socialise with the locals, Wildwind staff and other holidaymakers alike, though do not book an early sail for the next morning!

Eating out in the village is definitely an experience. Our holiday was during the second week of May, by which time the town had not quite woken up from its winter slumber. Knowing this, we were amazed at the amount of energy displayed by the restaurateurs, each trying to win your custom – the food doesn’t vary all that much between restaurants, but they do all pride themselves in traditional Greek cuisine. Other options are found on most menus for the less adventurous. Two recommendations are Alexander Restaurant to take in the harbour views and the atmospheric Evi’s Pirate Place set back in the town.

Back at the centre the Wildwind party is a night that simply cannot be missed. Usually on Tuesday evenings a great selection of meats and salads is provided at the barbecue but the true highlight is still to come. The staff reveal their secondary skills as members of the band ‘Ouzo 9mm’ who play an interesting variety of music in their own unique style. Their performance of the Punjabi MC’s ‘Mundian to Bach Ke’ is legendary and gets everybody in the mood for a good night. Staff from the other Vassiliki clubs regularly come along for the evening and it is easy to see why.

### Further afield

The island of Lefkada lies off the south-western tip of mainland Greece and is separated from it by the Lefkada Channel. Lefkada is the fourth largest of the Ionian Islands, and has an indisputable reputation of being the most beautiful island in the Ionian Sea. It seems to have so much variety of scenery within one relatively small island. The centre of the island is host to a large mountain range with peaks of up to 1,182m. Elsewhere the island is green due to its natural springs, has spectacular coastlines, superb beaches, traditional Greek nightlife, ghostly deserted mountain villages, and lovely, warm people.

There is not a lot in the way of clubs and discos except for a few in Nidri. Most young people who

**Above left Vassiliki is a natural bay with high hills on either side. There is usually a light breeze in the morning with a storming wind coming off the hills to the west in the afternoon.**