

# Go with the BLOW

Whether you want a terrifically windy sailing adventure or a chance to pamper yourself in the sunshine, Wildwind is the place. **Emma Knights** and **Oli Franzen** visit this unique retreat on the Greek island of Lefkas.

**THE PHRASE 'A SAILOR'S PARADISE' IS BANDED AROUND** a little too freely these days but in Wildwind's case it might just be true.

Rumour has it that after falling in love with sailing on a school trip to Norfolk's very own Hickling Broad, Wildwind founding owner Simon Morgan bought a VW campervan, hitched his boat behind it, and roamed across Europe in search of a sailing utopia.

He found his nirvana at the beautiful Vassiliki bay.

The wind here, known locally as 'Eric,' guarantees extreme sailing by blowing seriously hard off the mountains every afternoon, while giving a lighter breeze in the morning where sailors can hone new skills.

Simon founded Wildwind with just a few dinghies, but over two decades has developed it into a sailing mecca.

But while the choice of boats, coupled with quality tuition is now enormous, Wildwind's trademark bohemian atmosphere remains.

And Simon's wife, Varvara, has added a different dimension to the Wildwind experience, by creating a new Healthy Options element where guests can enjoy a relaxed well-being programme of yoga, pilates, massages and more.

## OLI – THE SEASONED SAILOR'S EXPERIENCE

The Wildwind staff warmly welcomed Emma and I when we arrived, having remembered us from the previous year's holiday. As I stood on the beach drooling at Wildwind's fleet of boats it was tough to decide what to sail first.

The resort specialises in catamarans and while most sailors stick to a strong fleet of Hobie 15 training boats and the classic Hobie 16 beach cats, Wildwind's Formula 18 Hobie Tigers and Formula 20 Hobie Foxes deliver astonishing performance.

For monohull sailors there are plenty of single-handed Laser Ones and beginners Picos to enjoy, while people wishing to sail with a friend can try a wide range of dinghies from the beginners' Laser 2000 to the more

advanced Laser 3000, 4000 and Vago.

The super-high performance 49er and Laser 5000 also deliver a rare chance to experience some serious double trapeze action.

In the 2008 season Wildwind also gave guests the chance to try sailing a keel boat with the three-man Laser SBR 3 for the first time.

On the first morning guests are split into ability groups, paired up with instructors, and asked how they would like to develop their skills.

Most of my experience was with monohulls so I decided to do something different and learn how to sail a catamaran in the light morning breeze before putting a single-handed Laser monohull through its paces when the wind blew hard in the afternoon.

Before the holiday I had always believed a myth perpetrated by monohull sailors that catamarans were a little like American cars – fast in a straight line but slow to turn, or tack as it is known in the trade.

I was also more than a little nervous about sailing a catamaran. The last time I had sailed one it 'pitchpoled', flipping head over heels and throwing me into the sea!

But thanks to some excellent one-to-one tuition each morning from my instructors, Pete and Nat, I soon got into the mindset of a catamaran sailor; learning that cats can be handled with ease but need a completely different technique to a monohull.

Tacking a catamaran is all about backing the jib, sheeting in the mainsail to power up and then spilling the wind just at the right time to avoid a stall.

You cannot sail downwind on a run in the same way as a monohull either, and in strong winds moving your weight towards the back of the boat and spending a lot of time on the trapeze is critical to avoid the dreaded pitchpole.

In the afternoons I had an absolute scream stretching my skill in storming winds onboard the single-handed Laser monohulls. It was certainly some of the most exciting



sailing of my life with the boat humming in a wall of spray as it planed across the swell.

Wildwind holds a regatta for guests on the penultimate day of the holiday, and while this was suitably relaxed it was a great chance to put the skills I had developed on the holiday to the test.

In the morning I raced a Hobie 15 catamaran and was pleased with a respectable seventh place out of a field of 30 – not bad for a catamaran beginner I maintain.

The afternoon was the windiest day of the week but, undeterred, I raced a Laser in white-knuckle conditions around an enormous course with a dead beat out to sea and a 'death roll' run followed with a gibing mark.

Despite capsizing at the gybing mark I still finished third – pretty good considering I would never have been confident racing in these conditions at the beginning of the week.

## EMMA – THE SAILING AND HEALTHY OPTIONS EXPERIENCE

While my boat-mad boyfriend surrendered himself to the water, sailing all day everyday, I opted to combine learning to sail with daily yoga sessions and other treats from the Healthy Options element.

It did not matter that we both had to go off on our own sometimes, because the relaxed atmosphere and friendly staff and guests meant that there was always someone to enjoy your day with.

The Wildwind motto is to make sure everyone is always having a lovely time', and the happy and enthusiastic staff do everything they can to ensure this happens.

They have created a very special community in the Vassiliki sunshine, and each and every guest is warmly welcomed into the Wildwind family from the very



## need to know

- ▶ The 2009 Wildwind season starts on May 3 and finishes on October 4.
- ▶ We flew with Monarch Airlines from Gatwick to Preveza Airport which is about an hour's drive from Wildwind.
- ▶ Prices per person per week for the sailing programme start from £589. This includes flights, accommodation, transfers to and from Preveza Airport and sailing tuition. There are discounts for children and a special kids club.
- ▶ Special events throughout year include the Watersweets Festival at the end of June, the Ionian Regatta on September 17 and three week-long training sessions with visiting sailing experts in May.



### The Wildwind base on Lefkas.

- ▶ Prices per person per week for the Healthy Options programme start from £479. This includes flights, accommodation and transfers, daily yoga and pilates sessions, an aqua safari, sailing taster, cycling, walking and fitness activities, and a massage.
- ▶ For more information about Wildwind sailing holidays telephone 0844 4992898 or visit the website at [www.wildwind.co.uk](http://www.wildwind.co.uk)



**Sun, sea and sailing: Above, Oli Franzen learning to sail a catamaran at Wildwind on the Greek island of Lefkas. Left to right, Oli and Emma Knights sailing; a beach near Vassiliki; practising yoga on the Healthy Options programme; and exciting sailing in a Laser for Oli.**



beginning, with many guests so enchanted by their first stay that they come back time and time again.

It was our second visit, and as we set foot in the resort it felt like we were being greeted by old friends.

First up was the delicious welcome meal, where guests and staff swapped stories, caught up and got to know each other while tucking into traditional Greek mezes, ahead of a hard day's sailing or pampering the following day.

There can surely be no better classroom-come-playground for sailing than Vassiliki's beautiful bay, where Mother Nature offers inspiring views of Lefkas and nearby Cephalonia as well as perfect weather conditions for all levels of sailors.

Having learned the basics of sailing on my last Wildwind trip, this time I chose to improve my catamaran sailing techniques on

a Hobie 16 in the mornings with my great instructor, Rory, who taught me everything from how to rig the boat to what to do in a capsize.

And when the stronger wind kicked in during the afternoons I took full advantage of the exhilarating joyrides – where the instructors show you what the boats can really do when worked to their limits in truly wild wind.

My most breathtaking experience was on a Hobie Tiger catamaran which raced along the water at high speed almost vertical in the air, giving me the most unforgettable feeling of immense freedom as I hung off the boat on a trapeze flying through the wind and the sea spray.

Another highlight of the sailing week was the sailaway on the final day.

Sailing on a Hobie 16, Oli and I joined a flotilla of other catamarans and a safety boat

as we put our newly-crafted skills to the test, venturing into the water beyond the usual Wildwind territory.

It was an awesome experience, made all the more magical by spotting some dolphins playing in the distance, before we reached a tiny and secluded Robinson Crusoe-esque beach for a picnic on the deserted shore with the crystal clear water lapping at our feet.

And while light winds meant it took several enjoyable hours to reach the bay, we returned to Vassiliki in less than 30 minutes thanks to a tremendous return sail in strong cross shore winds.

Everyday in the early evenings I swapped the water for the yoga tent where Karen, our enthusiastic teacher taught yoga novices like me the basics of the Hatha tradition while also catering for those who were more advanced.

It was a great introduction into yoga with each session leaving you relaxed, rejuvenated,

and wonderfully refreshed.

For those wanting to really kick-start a healthy new lifestyle the full Healthy Options programme allows you to combine yoga classes with a series of pilates sessions and aqua aerobics, as well as power walks and bikes rides in the beautiful Greek countryside.

And one of the best things about the programme is that you are free to do as much or as little as you like.

As I was combining the programme with sailing I could not fit everything in but as well as the yoga I also enjoyed a heavenly back massage and a great aqua safari.

Armed with our snorkels and masks we spent an afternoon delving into the underwater world, following the fish and marvelling at the intriguing rock formations at three different sites.

While sunshine, sailing and well-being are what Wildwind is most famous for, when darkness falls it is party-time with a great line-up of events.

There are also some more low-key nights giving you the chance to go off on your own and savour the good food and great hospitality of the friendly fishing village of Vassiliki, where, within days, the warmth of the people you meet leaves you feeling like an honorary local.

The highlight of the week, however, is the Wildwind beach barbecue which is renowned in Vassiliki and attracts people from far and wide.

Here the sailing instructors organise a tasty feast followed by an impressive line-up of entertainment including top-quality bands for you to dance to until the early hours.

During the week there is also a more chilled-out cocktails and curry night by the poolside, and the fun-filled last night prize-giving at the instructors' favourite haunt in Vassiliki, the Zeus Bar, where the Wildwind team make sure you end your stay with a send-off you will never forget. ■