

# GREECE IS THE WORD

If you're looking for a family friendly holiday in stunning surroundings, it's hard to beat the Greek peninsula of Halkidiki, says Denise Marshall

Strolling along the cobbled streets of Athitos, a clifftop village in Halkidiki, it felt like we'd stepped back into a bygone era. Admiring the stone architecture and the village square's tiny dome-roofed church, we turned a corner to be greeted by a blaze of sunlit turquoise sea across Toroneos Bay.

Perched high above calm, shallow waters, Athitos has inspired ancient writers such as Aristotle. The village sits on the picturesque coastline of Kassandra, one of three peninsulas that make up the region of Halkidiki, alongside Sithonia and the undeveloped Athos, a private home for devout monks.

Robert De Niro holidayed in Halkidiki last summer, as did Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's large family. Both parties were reported to have moored their yachts in the Kassandra region before dining at a local taverna.

And you are spoiled for choice with pretty, shaded eateries throughout Athitos, where locals love catching up over meze.

Our taxi driver spoke of his hard-working fellow villagers with pride, explaining how they tend to the fertile plains through the winter, farming olive groves, wheat and honey.

Then in the summer, he revealed, while much of Europe struggles, Halkidiki's tourist trade is kept buoyant thanks to an influx of Russian families. With fine food and safe seas it's not hard to see why Halkidiki is a sought-after holiday haven.

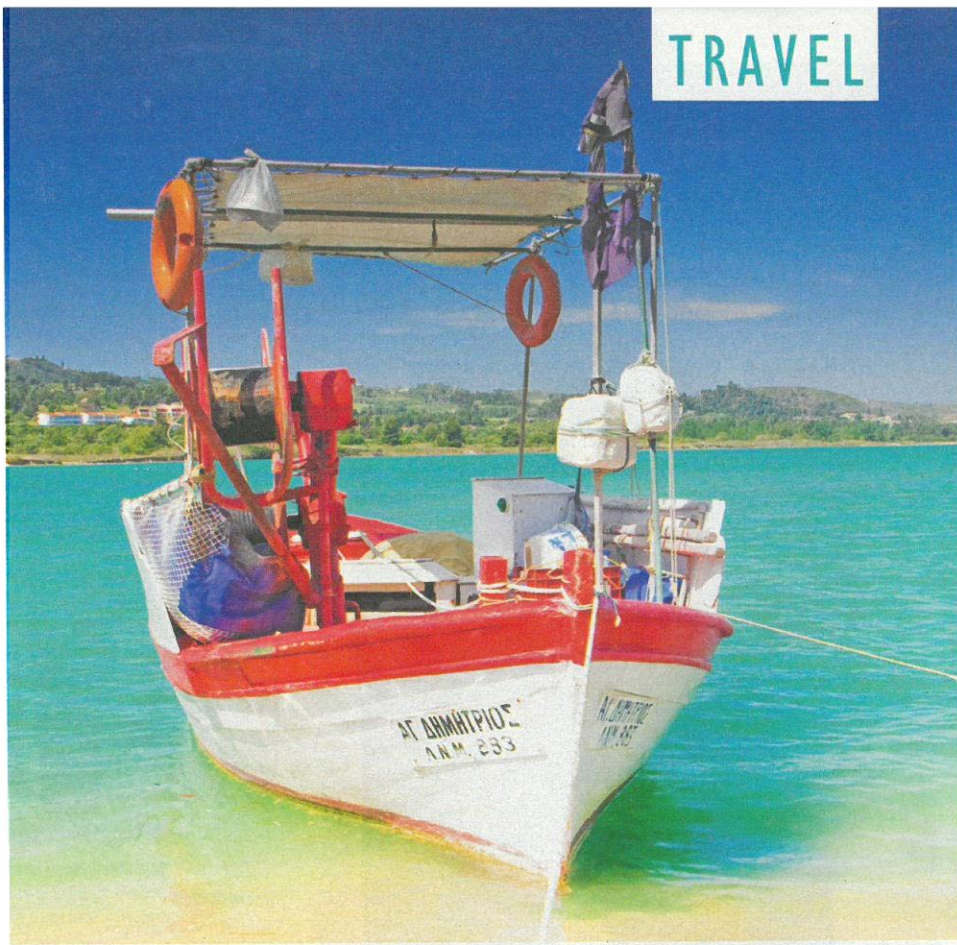
We based ourselves at Sani resort, 10 miles from Athitos, staying in the five-star Porto Sani Village adjacent to the marina and a stone's throw from two fine sandy beaches. The resort is just half an hour's drive from Thessaloniki airport and has earned its family focused reputation by welcoming children, even noisy ones, in the majority of restaurants.

If eating well is a priority when you go

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”

Main picture:  
a fishing boat  
moored in  
Halkidiki's  
azure waters

Below: a hot  
stone massage



on holiday, you will find plenty to whet your appetite at Sani, which is home to a deliciously diverse range of restaurants.

At the harbourside Psaroyannos Ouzerie we tucked into octopus, calamari and fried haloumi accompanied by freshly baked bread that my toddler son loved. For a more intimate experience overlooking the sea, the beach club Ouzerie, an open air taverna a five-minute minibus ride away, was our favourite for sampling snapper and sea bass. Or you may choose to people watch over fresh pasta at Tomata, which overlooks the Sani marina, where dozens of glamorous yachts are moored. The eatery has been voted one of the best 25 restaurants in Europe, and is also reassuringly child friendly.

If you need a break from beach and poolside life, you can enjoy a guided tour of the on-site bird sanctuary, a breeding ground for 214 species, from housemartins

and migrating swans to hawks. The surrounding forest is home to rabbits, lizards, butterflies and turtles and the Bousoulas

beach bar provides the perfect pit stop for fruit punch and a beachside back massage.

Billed as a wellbeing hotel, Porto Sani boasts a luxury spa suite, where parents can escape for a hot stone treatment. While I enjoyed one, my husband and son were at the lagoon pool bar, where even toddlers can choose from a tempting menu of homemade pizza or pasta dishes.

To completely unwind we headed for cocktails at the chic Ammos bar, which has a beachfront restaurant boasting stunning views across Sani Bay. To appreciate the surrounding area we also took a two-hour traditional sail boat trip. As the vessel moored up we took a bracing plunge in the clear Aegean waters followed by a picnic lunch.

Afterwards, with restless children pacified by a box of toys on the deck, we reclined in peaceful bliss and reflected on a wonderful holiday. Halkidiki had welcomed us with open arms.

## WAY TO GO

**A seven-night, half-board stay in Porto Sani Village ([www.sani-resort.com](http://www.sani-resort.com)) is from £845 per adult and £255 per child, based on two adults and one child sharing a ground floor Garden View Suite, including flights from London and private transfers. Call Western & Oriental on 020 7666 1234 ([www.westernoriental.com](http://www.westernoriental.com)).**

