



★ Travel > Destinations > Europe > Greece > Articles

Halkidiki: Mum's the word in my Greek idyll



Sun, sea and the beach at Sani

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10 tips to making better connections

Networking strategist Andy Lopata shares his advice on how to improve your connecting skills

By Charlotte Hawkins

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Getting up at 2.40am each morning for Good Morning Britain means that, for me, holidays have traditionally been a time to catch up on sleep. Then I became a mother. I was excited to go on holiday with Ella Rose for the first time, but the prospect was also daunting: how tricky would the actual travel be? And how much upheaval and abandonment of a well-established routine could my seven-month-old handle?

Friends with little ones seemed to be split into two camps: some had opted for staycations, wanting to avoid hassle; others strapped on their baby slings and set off backpacking. As a compromise, my husband Mark and I decided to try to make our holiday as stress-free as possible, opting for a family-friendly resort. We also went for safety in numbers, and invited a cousin and her family; they have a baby the same age, plus a three-year-old, and have therefore seen it all before.

Our aim as new parents was to enjoy our time away with Ella Rose, but also try to fit in a bit of relaxation for ourselves. When choosing a destination, we did wonder: how relaxing can it really be, with a crawling baby on a beach? While there are lots of family-friendly beach resorts around Europe, we were drawn in particular to Sani, in Halkidiki, and its legendary beach “Babewatch” service, where you can leave your baby with a nanny while you have a dip in the sea. That sounded like a ticket to relaxation.



Sani Beach Hotel

Halkidiki, Greece

Telegraph expert rating **8/10**

A microcosm of Mediterranean luxury, Sani Resort comprises four hotels with child-friendly facilities, and a dizzying amount of restaurants. The six-storey Sani Beach Hotel is the only option offering a classic hotel set-up (the other properties at Sani are low-rise lodgings), several pools, and a social vibe.

[Read expert review](#)

The resort is completely geared up for families; it even provides car seats for the transfer if you decide to leave yours at home. The path from Britain to Sani is well-trodden; while we went armed with two cases full of the baby's things, with our clothes squeezed in the gaps (pushing us well over the luggage allowance), we should have relied on the resort; you can get anything you need for babies or children at the on-site mini-market.



Charlotte Hawkins and her daughter, Ella Rose

There are three hotels in the resort: Porto Sani Village, where we stayed, Sani Beach Hotel and Sani Beach Resort. Set within a bay on the rocky Kassandra peninsula, the resort is part of a 1,000-acre estate, surrounded by pine forests and wetlands. Due to its size, Sani feels rather self-contained – it has its own marina with a handful of high-end stores.

The complex also has 18 restaurants, many of which accept transfers of your half-board allowance, so you can eat somewhere different each night.

Of course, most are child-friendly, and can produce a couple of high-chairs from nowhere at a moment's notice. Also appealing for parents of young children are the elaborate baby purée menus with a choice of dishes for your little one that rival those on the main menu – such as chicken with potato and sea fennel, or fish with arborio rice. And for older children, the menus offer more than just chips – there are meat skewers, and elaborate pasta dishes.

"I can see why 70 per cent of people return to Sani"



Everything seems designed to please parents and children: for example, the Greek salad at lunchtime at the Lagoon restaurant

is not to be missed: the charming Miss Flora brings a trolley laden with ingredients right to your table, where she not only makes the salad for you, but also chats to the children as she gives them cucumber to munch on.

• Greece's 17 most beautiful beaches

There are adult-only areas in the complex, but guests without children are certainly in the minority. Indeed, all members of staff seem to have been picked for their ability to elicit a smile from even the grumpiest child. Tucked in the corner of the main restaurant a staff member sits with a group of children playing with building blocks, or drawing pictures. For our cousin's three-year-old it was perfect, as it meant she didn't get bored, and we could sit and enjoy a leisurely dinner.



"There are adult-only areas in the complex, but guests without children are certainly in the minority"

It took surprisingly little time for Ella Rose to settle into her new holiday routine. The Greek climate – and sunshine – seemed to help, and on her first day, after splashing around the pool, she fell straight to sleep on the sun lounger. Thanks to the two-hour time difference, we could stay up later and still enjoy what felt like a bit of a lie-in.

Sani's three immaculate beaches are certainly appealing, as are the pools, and the marina makes for a lovely distraction: you can walk along and look at all the boats as well as stop for a glass of wine at one of the bars. We always picked local wines.

There are paths and ramps all around, making navigating with buggies or prams easy – and useful for those times when only a brisk walk will put your baby to sleep. For older children you can borrow bikes and scooters, or hang out at the play park. There are football sessions, basketball and beach volleyball, two water sports stations, six clay tennis courts and a kids' disco, as well as shows at the outdoor theatre in the evening. We had a look at Mamma Mia in full swing which was packed out with all ages.

• Stoupa, Greece: Secret Seaside

There are walks laid on for the more adventurous – a cliff or forest walk, bird or bee watching. There is a running trail, too, but I only made it as far as the gym once. My excuse is that baby weightlifting is plenty of exercise with a wriggly seven-month-old, but there is everything in place for parents who want a sporty holiday.



Don't miss the Greek salads

If you want to make the most of easing out the tensions of everyday life, the Spa at Porto Sanl Village has numerous treatments. I went for the full-on Thai massage where the knots were pulled and pummelled; Kiki was amazing, and her promise that I would emerge feeling like a “new woman” was true. I then decided a bit of pampering was in order, and tried Sanl’s signature treatment “From Paris with Love” – a medley of massage, exfoliation and facial which was blissfully relaxing. While there were enough of us in our group to look after the little ones when someone took time out, if you do want some time to yourselves, there is a crèche that takes children from four months, and a mini-club where older kids do all sorts of activities.

• The best books about Greece

I thought that having a new baby would mean little chance of recharging my batteries on holiday, but I needn’t have worried. I managed to enjoy my time away with Ella Rose and Mark without the usual stresses and strains of daily life – and found that the Babewatch service delivered just as friends at promised.

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One staff member told me that 70 per cent of people return to Sani, and I can see why. The staff are also loyal; he said that many of his colleagues had worked there so long they have watched children grow up, and pointed at Ella Rose and said: "I look forward to seeing her when she's walking, and then when she's coming back hand in hand with her boyfriend."

Isn't that a thought?

Essentials

ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527; itcluxurytravel.co.uk) offers a seven-night stay at Porto Sani Village, including return economy flights with EasyJet from London Gatwick, and transfers, from £1,969 per family of three, based on two adults sharing a Upper Floor Garden View Suite on a half-board basis.