

How a beautiful Greek boy called Theo taught me to talk to my female side...

By Jennie Bond

WHATEVER will we do with ourselves? I asked my husband as the reality of our 'chill-out' holiday loomed ever closer. 'Ten days in a Greek resort, with no plans to do anything but eat, drink and sleep. Do you think we're going to get bored?' It had seemed such a good idea a few months earlier when – tired, cold and in the middle of making 40 cookery shows for the BBC – my thoughts had turned to summer holidays.

Now, as we packed our bags for the flight to Thessaloniki with our teenage daughter and her friend in tow, I wondered whether we really were cut out for almost a fortnight of indolence. Most of our holidays have had more purpose: cruises that have taken us to several countries in a week or safaris where you're on the go from dawn to dusk.

Forever in search of that undiscovered corner still unsullied by the tourist trade, we would normally run a mile from anything that smacks of a 'resort'. But the whole point of this trip was to unwind after Emma's GCSEs and, on paper, Sani Resort on the first finger of Halkidiki seemed to tick all the boxes.

We didn't want a long, arduous journey; Sani is less than an hour from the airport at Thessaloniki. My husband loves wildlife; it is set in a 1,000-acre ecological reserve. The girls live to lie



PARA-HOOT: Jennie Bond takes to the air with her daughter Emma for a spot of parasailing. Jenny, above, also relished the cuisine at Sani Resort, left

on the beach all day and party at night; the brochure promised white sandy strands and a range of bars and restaurants around the marina. As for me, I love to be pampered and Sani's new spa sounded seductive.

We arrived in searing sunshine – the hottest June, they said, for years. The resort is made up of four different hotels and, as we soaked up the 35C heat, I was a little disappointed that our accommodation was set back from the beach.

Our home in Devon looks out directly over the ocean, so I felt slightly miffed to discover that the low-rise villas of Porto Sani Village

are grouped around the swimming pool instead. Pay a little more and you can be in the posher Sani Asterias suites, right on the beach. Slightly less and you can choose between the Sani Beach Hotel and the Beach Club – where you can get the sea view but you're a bit more in the thick of it all.

It was the only disappointment. Our little villa was air-conditioned and very comfy. It had a pleasant lounge, bedroom, kitchenette and bathroom. Outside was a patio with a table and wicker chairs and our own patch of garden, complete with white sun-loungers.



Getting there



ITC Classics (01244 355527, www.itcclassics.co.uk) offers seven nights at Porto Sani Village from £626 per person. This includes accommodation in a Junior Suite with breakfast, transfers and return flights with British Airways.

masterchef called Nikolaos Katsanis – and turns out to be one of the 15 best restaurants in Greece.

We were treated to a gourmet banquet fit for royalty. In fact, I think Nikolaos, who lovingly presented us with six exquisite courses, washed down with the finest wine, would have given the chefs who cooked for the Queen's birthday a run for their money.

The days passed in splendid laziness; we didn't venture far outside Sani and didn't feel the need either. The girls discovered the nightclubs, the outdoor cinema, water sports and other activities such as beach soccer and volleyball. Most of that kind of action is at the Beach Hotel – a stroll along the sand – so, if you're at Sani Village, you can avoid it completely.

I preferred the sanctuary of the spa. Stepping into its cool marble hall, scented with candles and herbal tea, was an experience guaranteed to make you relax in an instant. The products by Anne Semonin are luxurious and the treatments indulgent.

'You have very tired legs,' said my masseur, a beautiful boy called Theo. 'How can you tell?' I asked.

'Trust me, I can tell a great deal about you. You must talk to your female side more. It will give you more energy.'

I've kept his advice in mind and tried to address my female side: 'Come on, the holiday's over, get on with life. What do you mean you've forgotten how to juggle a dozen balls in the air and keep smiling?' But I'm a bit baffled about what Theo saw or felt. Am I turning macho?

Well, I certainly felt brave – if not manly – when I tried something at Sani that I've always fancied but never dared: parasailing.

We stood on the beach and saw the parachutes float up into the clear blue sky, pulled by a speedboat.

'I could do that,' I said to my husband, who suffers from vertigo.

'Well, do it then,' he said. 'But don't ask me to come with you.'

So I did. And I didn't.

Jim watched from the shore as Emma, Alice and I ventured out in the boat. The ocean seemed vast as we were strapped into our harnesses. After a brief safety instruction we were told to sit tight... and prepare to fly.

I'm a bit of a screamer, so I was expecting to shriek as we soared into the air. In fact, it was one of the most peaceful experiences of my life. We rose, ever so gently, high above the sea, sitting comfortably in our harnesses and wafted along by a huge, vivid parachute. Up there the world was silent, serene and oh-so-beautiful.

Tanned and relaxed, we left Sani on a beautiful summer's day, like the day we arrived. It was the perfect family holiday, with just enough going on to keep the young people happy and little enough to give us 'oldies' the chill-out we needed.

The girls were next door in their own matching villa-ette – which turned out to be the best possible arrangement. As the parents of any teenager will know, life can be a rollercoaster and tempers can easily flare. This way, Emma and Alice could enjoy some independence, while we could have our privacy – and keep an eye on them from over the hedge.

I'd said from the outset that we should accept we were going to an international resort that would almost certainly have very little of Greece about it. Even Sani's owner – a dashing Adonis of a man, Andreas Andreadis – said it had never pretended to be anything other than a 21st Century resort.

BUT there are some authentic sights, sounds and tastes of Greece. The marina is full of gleaming yachts – and rich Greek boys, as our girls discovered. And overlooking the water are more than a dozen independent restaurants. We tried out almost all of them and were impressed.

You can indulge in Japanese or Italian cuisine but most offer stonkingly good Greek fare. Only the Greeks can cook calamari as it should be cooked – and Emma and I ate it almost every day in every way. You know the food is good when locals eat there, and these restaurants attract a lot of trade from towns and villages outside the resort.

I've learned a thing or two about Michelin-style cooking from presenting the BBC's Great British Menu, but I didn't expect to find world-class cuisine on this small peninsula.

However, a short drive took us to the pretty village of Afitos and an unpretentious restaurant called Sousourada. What a find. It's run by a