

# Glorious Greece Happy holidays



## ONE FAMILY TAKES A RELAXING BREAK AT A FAMILY-OWNED, FIVE-STAR HALKIDIKI HOTEL

**WHO WENT** Ruth Gardner, 39, partner Will, 45, plus children Bea, 6, and Rory, 3

**WHERE WE WENT** Eagles Palace Hotel & Spa, Ouranoupolis, Athos Peninsula, Greece

### › THE JOURNEY

We travelled in early May, booking EasyJet flights from Gatwick to Thessaloniki. It's a three-hour flight, and we arrived at the hotel in time for lunch. The transfer from airport to hotel was 90 minutes – not ideal with two excited small children, but the drive is spectacular, through lush mountains and olive groves, with regular glimpses of the sea, which helped keep them amused. You can pay for a private taxi (the hotel will organise car seats), or minibus via the hotel, or hire a car.

### › THE HOTEL

The family-owned Eagles Palace Hotel is nestled attractively into a gentle

sea-edge cliff on a bend in the road to the nearby small town of Ouranoupolis. The welcome could not have been more courteous and relaxed as we were ushered to a sunny terrace with complimentary drinks while we completed our check-in.

The hotel offers a variety of family rooms, from a standard double with travel cot (supplied), to adjoining rooms with sliding door, or junior suites. All 161 rooms have a balcony, free wifi, flatscreen TV and king-size bed, plus some have a sea view, too. The hotel has recently been refurbished and comfort and service are paramount. There are four restaurants, two pools (one children's), a playground, spa, private beach, library, shop, beach- and pool-side bars,

winery, private bungalows, free kids' club, and beauty salon.

### › WHAT WE ATE

Most guests opt for half-board, including us, so we took our breakfast and dinner either in the large dining room or on the outdoor terrace. The European buffet was generous and delicious. Each night is themed and during our stay we experienced the delights of Greek (naturally), Italian, Balkan and fish cuisines, and couldn't find fault. Child-friendly options include pancakes, sausages, bread, pastries, fruit, yoghurt and a variety of eggs-done-every-way for breakfast, plus plenty of pasta, chicken, kebabs, pizza, salads and vegetables for dinner, and the chef is more than happy to purée meals for babies. There isn't a

dedicated children's menu, but our two had no trouble finding something they liked. Besides, there was always the beach and pool bar snack



menus of toasted sandwiches, burgers or baguettes to top them up with if hunger struck.

### › FAMILY FRIENDLY?

The hotel can supply travel cots, highchairs, a baby-sitting or -listening service, and add children's beds to create a family room. There are supermarkets nearby for emergency nappies, and access to a doctor 24/7. There are lifts to take you and your buggy down to beach level, or up to the highest floor. Paths around the hotel, along the beach and through the grounds are flat and buggy-friendly, with only the steep steps from the beach, and down from the hotel terrace to the pool a bit arduous. There's a free children's club for 3 years+ that Bea and Rory loved, with bilingual, accredited staff and loads of activities to amuse them while you sunbathe, scuba-dive or pamper yourselves.

### › THINGS TO DO

In the unlikely event that your children will want to drag themselves away from the beach, splashing in the pool, or larking in

Gorgeous golden sand



the playground or the kids' club, there is a free shuttle bus into Ouranoupolis, or a boat trip around the peninsula to take in the views of Mount Athos and its monasteries (see more right). But that's about it. There's also a sailing club, plus tennis courts. The hotel can also organise excursions to local sights, hikes and cycle rides, but these are more adult-orientated.

### › WHAT WE LOVED

Unless you want a high volume, action-packed holiday (which this most definitely is not) there's really nothing to dislike about this idyllic hotel with its charming staff and beautiful location. The rooms are luxurious, the service outstanding – but all this doesn't come cheap. **TH**

### ESSENTIAL INFO

Seven nights bed and breakfast mid-season (May), for a family of four (two adults, two children under 5 sharing a family suite) costs from £1,484. Visit [eaglespalace.gr](http://eaglespalace.gr) for more details.



## Why choose Halkidiki?

✦ The area we chose is part of northern mainland Greece and is known locally as the 'Giant's Trident' because of the three peninsulas (Kassandra, Sithonia and Athos) which point down into the Aegean sea. It's also home to the delicious Halkidiki olives, local honey, and a ready supply of freshly-caught fish. In early May it was hot enough to sunbathe, although the pool was a little chilly!



✦ Of the three peninsulas, Athos is the quietest and prettiest (with 17 blue flag beaches), largely because half of it is home to one of the most holy places on Earth – Mount Athos – and the 20 ancient monasteries that line its slopes. Mount Athos is a self-governed monastic state, out of bounds by a 1,000-year decree. Only men and pilgrims can visit by appointment, and although you can take a four-hour boat tour round the mountain, women and children are forbidden from disembarking!







Fun activities at  
the kids' club