



Clubbing together

Former Sunsail instructor **Lee Whitehead** thought he knew what to expect on a beachclub holiday, but Sunsail's latest 'flagship' resort, Club Phokaia in Turkey, still held a few surprises...

There's no doubt about it, Club Phokaia's location is stunning. We'd had a long day travelling but, as the bus crested the brow of a hill approaching the local town of Foca, to a view of the superb sailing area gilded by the setting sun, the weary mood on board perked up immediately.

My first holiday afloat was spent in the Greek islands with my parents aboard a 30ft yacht, but since then I have spent more time on the flip

side – as a Sunsail staff member in a variety of roles around the world. The company is renowned for their sailing flotillas and bareboat charters, as well as the watersports facilities at their beach clubs. But in recent years, these clubs have been adding extra attractions, such as health spas and gyms, to make the holidays more appealing to a broader market and thus open up Sunsail holidays to the non-sailor. It is these features that we truly intended to test out, as neither my partner Claire nor son Jordan are sailors (yet!).

Warm welcome

On arrival Club Phokaia was just as impressive as its Turkish location, exuding a feeling of style and comfort that instantly makes you want to explore. The staff gave us a friendly welcome and directed us to our rooms – free of all troublesome luggage as this was delivered to our doors.

I was glad to see that the custom of Sunsail



Left and above The kids' club proved a huge success, and a great way of getting youngsters started sailing while having fun.

Above The club's day yachts mean guests can take a short cruise.

Right A chance to try trapezing.

welcome drinks lives on and still offers a great opportunity for guests to get together, meet staff and generally relax with a few glasses of (free!) alcohol. But much more important than giving Claire and I the chance to mingle with our fellow guests, it gave Jordan the chance to meet some other kids of his age, run around and generally get excited about Kids' Club the following day – something that both he and Claire were a little nervous about.

Next comes the first inclusive meal of the week (you receive one per day, either lunch or dinner). The Sunsail chefs laid on a huge and appetizing spread with a great selection. In addition to a vast array of cold meats, vegetables, salads, local mezes and the baskets of bread, you have a choice of a number of hot dishes cooked freshly in front of you. And to top it off, if you can't find something for your young Sea Urchin to eat, ask nicely and the chefs will probably provide. One word of warning : beware the desert aisle! And yes I did say aisle, the puddings are endless – as are the cakes supplied with afternoon tea each day.

Besides the main watersports, Sunsail also offer new optional activities organised by trained staff. Beach and Activity programmes were handed out on our first evening prior with a full explanation of what is on offer: ranging from pilates and aquarobics, tennis workshops and



Above and right All ages and abilities can benefit from the watersports instruction sessions, plus there's relaxed races and games for the kids.



mountain bike trails, through to the 'Phokaia Triathlon'. Meanwhile, on the beach front there are daily sailing clinics in a variety of boats run by qualified instructors to give guests of all standards more confidence as they go afloat.

Little urchins

One of the biggest selling points of a Sunsail holiday are the childcare facilities. There are five Kids Clubs available depending on age: Jordan being five, he became a Sea Urchin. Again nothing is compulsory and once signed in, if a child wishes to leave all they have to do is ask and a staff member will go and find a parent to sign them out.

Jordan was a little unsure about going but we said he didn't have to stay if he didn't want to. But when we walked into the Urchins' room under the main pool area, he took one look at the kids already signed in and that was it – gone straight in without so much as a look back, and this was the trend for the rest of the week. Activities included the usual videos and games but more importantly an hour's on the water sailing tuition. As an instructor I enjoy teaching sailing, but it's not always the easiest thing to teach your own urchins, so having a trained instructor to make it fun while they get on the water is an excellent idea.

The size of the grounds at Phokaia is another of its selling points. During our stay, there were in excess of 400 guests, 200 of which were children of varying ages. But not once did we have a 'we have to get out of here' moment! The

“ Jordan took one look at the kids' club and that was it: straight in without so much as a look back ”

only time the Kids Clubs were really noticeable were as they marched through the club on the way to one of their many activities, singing at the top of extremely loud voices.

Hit the beach

One down, two more to entertain. For me it was time to head to the beach front. There are briefings and clinics available daily for those wishing to try new types of boats or just refresh their existing knowledge, while for the more competitively-minded there are also race days running throughout the week. Or there are oodles of spare dinghies and windsurfers if you just want to go for a sail.

Phokaia opened for the first time at the start of the 2006 season and the equipment on the beach was all brand-spanking new. Even after a full season it was still in excellent condition and the range is good, although a little lacking in high performance craft. Still, there are enough for all guests to get on the water in a wide variety of dinghies, windsurfers, canoes and yachts. It was rare that we had to wait for a boat and as soon as you enter their domain the waterfront staff would persuade you of the



virtues of yet another pre-rigged dinghy, patiently awaiting your return in the shallows to save you the hassle of de-rigging at tea-time.

The sailing area of Phokaia is safe and large, well protected by the spectacular island that contains the world-famous Siren Rocks from Homer's Odyssey. The sailing is generally a flat water experience, while the most noticeable thing is the area's length and breadth which allows great long legs, ideal for planing (if the wind is up) and, of course, the entire area is well patrolled by the safety team ready in case someone falls in.

And relax...

Two down, one to go. For Claire the main attraction of Club Phokaia were the indulgences such as the Serenity spa, gym, hairdresser and Turkish baths. In fact the most stressful part of this new addition to the Sunsail experience is choosing how to be pampered: there is a huge selection of treatments available, from a soap-sudded double massage in the Turkish baths to facials, pedicures, wraps and waxes. If you can't decide there is a 'taster' package offering mini manicure, pedicure and facial which lasts an hour and a half. Unfortunately these aren't included in the cost of the holiday but from the look on Claire's extremely relaxed face they are well worth the cost!

Carrying on with the relaxation theme there are hammocks and large 'bed-sized' squishy chairs for guests to laze in around the complex, perfect after filling up on the inclusive lunch or the equally good bar snacks.

Of course there is also that other favourite female pastime: shopping. Within the hotel complex there is a local carpet shop offering some stunning rugs and real bargains if you are confident enough to haggle. Alternatively take a trip outside the hotel, where Foca is a five minute trip by taxi, or 20 minute walk. Unlike other areas of Turkey, Foca is still undeveloped in

Mum's the word

A non-sailor's view

As neither I nor Jordan are sailors I was a little concerned about going on a sailing holiday as we had no idea what to expect, even if there was a pool and Kids Club for us to fall back on. I admit to being pleasantly surprised – there was no pressure to take part in any of the water-based activities but should you pluck up the courage then the support was there with lessons or clinics to build your confidence.

The great advantage of having such fantastic kids clubs is that the youngsters get to have an action-packed fun-filled week with children of their own age, whilst you get to relax in the knowledge they are well cared for. The clubs were simply outstanding, making this one of the most stress-free holidays I've had since becoming a parent. Jordan went from not wishing to go to kids club, to not wanting to come home at the end of the week!

And whilst the kids are away, mum gets to relax by the pool, catch up on reading by the beach whilst watching everyone else do the energetic stuff. Or – my personal favourite – indulge in some serious pampering: I can fully recommend the deep tissue full body massage, an hour of pure bliss.

I would definitely book a Sunsail holiday again, and next time I might even give some of the sailing lessons a go!



terms of tourism and you don't get the hassle of hawkers bothering you every five minutes. Of course, this means the shopping doesn't offer a huge selection but there are still a few bargains to be had. Whilst there take the opportunity to dine at one of the great restaurants, the king prawns are the best and biggest I have ever had, all set in magnificent scenery.

The verdict

As a family, we had a fantastic week, even with the long transfers. We had a great holiday and one that managed to keep us all entertained even though we all prefer different pastimes on holiday, me sailing, Claire relaxing and Jordan, well, everything really. Sunsail still provide a superb service from booking, right through to the moment when the staff as a group wave you goodbye at the hotel. The final vote goes to Jordan, who asked when we are going back to Turkey again? ■

Above left The sailing area is well protected and usually calm, but with large stretches of clear water to enjoy.

Further information:

One week at Sunsail's Club Phokaia cost from £579pp (departing September 30, 2007). Kids clubs, watersports tuition, day yachts, and use of sailing & windsurfing equipment is included, while additional activities such as waterskiing, wakeboarding and spa treatments are payable locally. Visit www.sunsail.co.uk for more information.