

# Greek charm

Yolanda Zappaterra heads to Corfu and mainland Greece to experience the Mar-Bella Collection's trio of resorts

Corfu is one of those iconic Greek islands – the type you associate with *Shirley Valentine* and proper, old-school Greece; the Greece where feta and calamari taste better than anywhere else in the world, where craggy peaks swoop down into crystal-clear water, and where staff at family-run hotels know your name by day two. For clients keen to see the island in style, the Mar-Bella Collection's two resorts – the family-friendly MarBella and adult-only Nido – are just the ticket. Along with younger sibling Elix, on the mainland, they were voted in the top 10 of *Condé Nast Traveller's Readers' Choice Awards* last year, and after a few days at each, I quickly realise why.

#### FAMILY FUN: MARBELLA

With 357 rooms across a wide range of configurations – including 67 newly designed bungalow rooms and suites, some of which sleep

up to six – MarBella is a firm favourite with families. The rooms: Coolly neutral in design, these are set across five blocks on an extensive site that (for a travel writer with no sense of direction) is something of a challenge. When I manage to locate my own bright and modern space, I find I've been lucky enough to bag one of the many swim-up rooms – perfect for doing lengths before breakfast. The prospect of the resort's many activities, restaurants and cocktail-filled bars soon draw me out to explore beyond it, though. The family offering: The excited squeals of children guide me to MarBella's two large pools, where it's surprisingly quiet; most families are drawn to the Anemelia Aqua Park and a kids' club that offers activities including robotics and ceramics workshops. The food: With two of my three Rs (refreshed and relaxed) achieved, I head for the third and most important: replenishment. Of the six cuisines on offer – including Pan-Asian, Italian and French à la carte ➤

The beach at MarBella

PICTURE: Heinz Trill

# DESTINATIONS

## GREECE & CYPRUS | IONIAN COAST



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Nido; MarBella's Anemelia Aqua Park; swim-up rooms at MarBella; Aquavit pool and bar, Nido PICTURES: Heinz Troll

– I opt for Greek restaurant Platea, which is, as I've come to expect in the few hours since my arrival, as gorgeous as it is excellent. A total of 11 bars and restaurants means none of the space feels crowded, and a drink or bite to eat is always easy to find.

### THE COUPLES' CLASSIC: NIDO

The Mar-Bella Collection's adult-only option is within a few minutes' walk of the MarBella – and it's a truly scrumptious affair. The name Nido, which translates as nest, and a brass plaque outside the luxurious, intimate foyer say it all: Nido is a Small Luxury Hotel of the World.

**The rooms:** With just 70 coolly elegant suites climbing up the foothills of southwest Corfu's Agios Ioannis Peristeron, Nido feels like an exclusive village in which every home has a perfect sea view. Local ceramics and materials add colour and style, while the over-bed fan is a nice touch.

**The food:** Guests can opt for bed and breakfast or half-board, while a stay in a Deluxe Junior Suite for at least seven nights gets them a raft of benefits included in the brand's Signature Life programme, such as the chance to hire a car for a day, once

per stay. With a new menu from acclaimed Greek chef Sotiris Evaggelou, it's tempting to take a table at gourmet restaurant Apaggio, complete with sweeping views – but it's 11 am, so I opt for complimentary Greek coffee and sweets instead, served three times a week at the new Kafeneio coffee shop.

**The facilities:** Nido has just one pool, as well as two restaurants, two bars and a wellness space – but that's all part of the charm. This pared-down offering makes it feel more like an ultra-exclusive tranquil hotel than a large-scale resort, and it's a very short walk – or a lift in a golf buggy – down the hill to MarBella for its many amenities, for even more choice. **TW**

### BOOK IT

**Families:** **Sovereign** offers three nights' all-inclusive at MarBella and four nights' half-board at Elix from £1,598 per person, based on a family of four sharing. The price includes catamaran transfer and Gatwick flights on May 26, 2024.

**Couples:** A week's B&B at Nido costs from £1,169 per person based on two sharing, including transfers and flights from Gatwick on May 7, 2024.

[sovereign.com](http://sovereign.com)

## TRANSFER IN STYLE

Moving hotels in a luxury catamaran would be a highlight for most people – unless you're a nervous sailor, like me. I clambered aboard for the trip from MarBella on Corfu to Elix on the mainland warily, but I needn't have worried; it was a glorious experience, with snorkelling stops and the chance to wander the whitewashed streets of Paxos.

What could top it? Elix, of course. Set on a pine-forested hill above Karavostasi Beach, the Mar-Bella Collection's newest hotel has a grown-up,



design-led aesthetic based on this area of Greece's Ottoman heritage. It has more of an adult-only vibe, but families are welcome and can choose half or full-board packages, as well as a new premium all-inclusive offering. The Signature Life programme here includes a two-hour bike tour, emphasising the hotel's activity-based focus. From the large beach (accessed via 200-plus steps or a funicular), I watch guests kayak, canoe and snorkel in the clearest water I've ever swum in, and reflect that the Mar-Bella Collection really does, via just three hotels, offer something for absolutely everyone – even non-sailing travel writers with no sense of direction.

