

# True blue

Sun, sand and spa  
await on a relaxed  
beach break in  
Skiathos, finds  
David Golledge

It's a great feeling when you travel somewhere new to know there's someone waiting for you, but as we came in to land at Skiathos airport, I hadn't expected to see a whole crowd of people awaiting the arrival of our flight.

Peering through the tiny aircraft window, there was a throng assembled on the road just beyond the airport's perimeter fence, greeting our arrival with excitement.

Little did I know that this is Skiathos's signature party trick. As aircraft come in to land mere metres above the coastal road, crowds flock to take a look, getting precariously close to the powerful jet blast from the engines to do so.

It's as big a thrill as you're likely to get on an island where the pace of life is pleasingly slow,

the locals warm and friendly, and the scenery just as stunning whether you're hiking through its lush interior or kicking back on one of its golden-sand beaches.

With the opening of five-star hotel Elivi Skiathos adding another option for luxury-loving guests, we checked out a handful of the most relaxing activities around the island.

#### ► BEACH BEAUTY

Skiathos's 60-plus beaches are undoubtedly its star attraction, with sandy stretches that wouldn't look out of place in the Caribbean.

The long, sweeping Koukounaries beach – where a verdant pine forest meets crystal-clear waters – is particularly impressive. The area enjoys ecological protected status and is a popular draw for

visitors travelling by water taxi from the island's capital.

Despite Koukounaries' attractions, it would be a shame not to head at least a little off the beaten track. The island's forested hills provide more than just a dramatic backdrop, with the many trails offering great opportunities to explore on foot.

Shortly after grabbing a map and setting off, we found ourselves far from any crowds, with the only noise coming from the crunch of pine needles underfoot. Better still, we were rewarded with the most spectacular sunset overlooking secluded coves.

#### ► JOIN THE YACHTS

With Greece so renowned as a seafaring nation, it seems only natural to take to the water. The port in Skiathos Town is





→ a constant hive of activity, from billionaires' mega-yachts to vessels ferrying fans of *Mamma Mia!* to neighbouring Skopelos, where they can visit its famous chapel perched on a rock – whatever floats your boat.

Of the many vessels on offer, few are likely to have a captain quite as affable as Babis onboard *Diamanti*, our yacht for the day. Accommodating a maximum of 12 guests, it felt pretty exclusive.

Dolphin sightings are likely if you keep your eyes peeled, although it takes much less effort to spot deserted coves and picture-postcard whitewashed houses along the hillsides that line the rugged coast.

We dropped anchor at the uninhabited island of Tsougria and had the entire, idyllic place to ourselves, with the exception of a few goats trying to climb the rocks. However, such solitude is no reason to go hungry, and while we took the opportunity for a dip, Babis proved himself not just a great host but a talented chef, rustling up a seafood feast of mussels and prawns



**LEFT:**  
Skiathos town

**BELOW:**  
Elemis spa, Elivi Skiathos



**We had the entire, idyllic place to ourselves, except for a few goats trying to climb the rocks**

bursting with garlic and peppers, all washed down with some obligatory ouzo. This was the life.

#### ▶ A SPA IS BORN

If a holiday here is all about embracing the laid-back local lifestyle, then it seems only fitting to make sure a visit to the hotel spa is on the agenda. The three treatment rooms in the Elemis spa

at Elivi Skiathos sit alongside a pool, sauna and hammam, offering a calming space in which both guests and non-guests can relax.

An hour-long, deep-tissue massage proved invigorating, working away any lingering tension – though whatever your issue, there is likely to be a treatment for it. The spa's signature option is a



## ✓ Tried & Tested

### ELIVI SKIATHOS

In a setting that would impress Poseidon, Greek god of the sea, Elivi Skiathos sits majestically atop the Punta Peninsula, with panoramic views of the Aegean. Think relaxed, contemporary luxury, with works by local artists and decor complementing the area's natural surroundings.

The family-owned hotel has 161 rooms, suites and villas across three areas – Elivi Xenia Hotel, Grace and Nest – with a funicular lift and golf carts. Accommodation varies widely, but expect plush showers, minimalist decor and high-tech fittings.

Guests already torn between beach and pool are unlikely to resolve their dilemma here, with

four of the island's best beaches close by.

While all of the beaches in Greece are public, some are less public than others, and the Ambelakia Beach within the Grace area enjoys a particularly exclusive feel. Alternatively, opt for a villa or suite with a private pool.

The resort opened last summer, but several new facilities have been added for the coming season, which begins on April 26. Grace has expanded from 11 rooms to 67, including some with hot tubs and private plunge pools.

There's also a kids' club, three new restaurants and a new bar, bringing the total up to five restaurants and seven bars across



the resort. Particular highlights include the Elevate Bar, where the extensive cocktail and sushi offering is served overlooking Koukounaries Beach. The Leda

and The Swan, are perfect for fine dining under the stars.

**Book it:** Rates start at €194 per night based on two sharing a room. [elivihotels.com](http://elivihotels.com)

Tested by David Golledge

→ 90-minute body wrap and facial ritual, based on the rejuvenating properties of the pine trees abundant nearby. You can also embrace the best of the sea with an Elemis ocean wrap using seaweed (€110 for 75 minutes).

### OUT ON THE TOWN

Skiathos town has an enjoyable cosmopolitan charm thanks to its port, and although boats might be heading out to the other Sporades islands, it's worth sticking around to explore the town itself.

It's easy to while away a few hours exploring the maze of colourful side streets filled with ceramics, jewellery shops and artists' studios, or people watching from one of the pavement bars.

Just out of town, the Evangelistria Monastery dates from the 18th century and rewards visitors with spectacular views from its tranquil grounds. Minibuses depart regularly from the port for the two-and-a-half-mile journey.



**ABOVE:**  
Street-side dining  
in Skiathos

**ABOVE RIGHT:**  
Skiathos town  
waterfront



### EATING OUT

While its waterfront teems with nautical life, Skiathos town's culinary scene is just as vibrant, ranging from fast food to smart tavernas. We discovered that to blend in with the locals, it's best to order a feast to share between a group – and don't be shy with the number of dishes either.

The Borzoi offers global cuisine away from the crowds, in a stylish, white courtyard. The restaurant doubles as a club and has a creative cocktail menu. If you fancy something a little fiery, try the Parmella, resident mixologist Arnaud's signature concoction. With Tabasco sauce, tequila, agave nectar and celery bitters, it certainly packs a punch. **TW**

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*Chris Wright.* Managing Director

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