



# Body language

How will a British family fare at a German-owned sports resort? Robin Searle heads to Fuerteventura to find out

@robinsearle

**W**hen Tui announced plans to start selling its German all-inclusive Robinson clubs brand through independent agents in the UK, it's fair to say a few eyebrows were raised.

Cue the obvious jokes about towels on sunbeds and bratwurst for breakfast – even before rival Thomas Cook put sunbeds at the top of the news agenda – plus doubts about whether Brits could be persuaded to forgo their home comforts for a holiday alongside their European neighbours.

But Tui clearly felt the Robinson product could fill a gap in the UK market, appealing to families and couples keen to move on from fly and flop and find a healthy holiday option without booking a spa retreat in the Alps.

The idea of an active holiday is hardly new, of course. Customers have been enjoying tennis, cycling and water sports at the likes of Mark Warner, Neilson and Club Med resorts for decades, and a gym is increasingly high

on the checklist for many holidaymakers. But for Robinson, the concept of health and wellness is integral to its offering, with healthy dining options placed front and centre at every meal, and sports and fitness options ranging from football, tennis and swimming coaching to spinning classes and personal training sessions on the beach.

We put Robinson to the test with a family break at its Esquinzo Playa resort on Fuerteventura's south coast,

about a 90-minute transfer from the island's airport. Situated on the clifftops of the Jandia peninsula, above a stunning beach that runs uninterrupted for miles in both directions, the resort is a sprawling but low-rise affair which has the feeling of a village in comparison with the towering behemoths in nearby Morro Jable.

Having researched the resort beforehand, we knew it would be a very German experience, with German the undisputed first







**LEFT:**  
Fitness  
centre

**RIGHT:**  
Roby Club  
staff member  
Jordy with  
Bronwen  
and Evan



→ language and everything from entertainment to cuisine geared to that country's clientele. So the million-dollar question was whether the cultural differences would be a barrier to us enjoying our trip, or an eye-opener to a hidden treasure for the UK trade to promote to customers.

## ▶ FIT FOR PURPOSE

It didn't take long to realise that Robinson's commitment to health and wellbeing through its WellFit programme was more than just a marketing ploy. As we headed down to breakfast, the sheer volume of guests in gym gear going to or from morning activities showed that the facilities were being put to good use, and there was a reassuring mix of body shapes and sizes too – this isn't just a resort for the super-fit to strut their stuff.

Checking out some of the classes in the studio and gym,



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it's fair to say some non-German speakers may be put off by the instructors' exclusive use of their native tongue. But ultimately, it doesn't take long to figure out what's going on – if the person on the spinning bike next to you starts going hammer and tongs, just follow suit.

For those who like to tune the body and mind in more peaceful surroundings, the resort also boasts a sizeable adult-only gym, spa and pool area. And with Fuerteventura's renowned

winds always a presence, the windsurfing and sailing conditions down on the beach are first-class.

## ▶ FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Of course, as any self-respecting gym-goer knows, half an hour on a treadmill doesn't make much difference if you proceed to stuff yourself with cakes and biscuits for the rest of the day.

That's not to say there aren't plenty of treats on offer at the vast and varied buffet. But the first thing you see as you enter the main restaurant is the WellFood station, featuring healthy dishes, whole foods and nutrition-conscious cuisine, so at least you have a fighting chance of staying on the straight and narrow.

The shared tables for most meals may not be to all tastes, but there is usually a chance to grab a private table for

dinner, and the three speciality restaurants – La Terraza, La Tasca and La Vita – offer an array of choice away from the main restaurant.

## ▶ CLUB CLASS

With two children aged six and eight and only a handful of British guests in the resort, the acid test of the culture divide was always likely to be the kids' club, and on this front, we were met with a slice of good fortune buoyed by some considerate decision-making from the management.

The good fortune came in the fantastic form of Mancunian Jordy who, as one of only two British members of staff, was able to take Bronwen and younger brother Evan under her wing to make sure they didn't miss out. And with the usual divisions kindly waived to allow the children to attend the same club, rather than being split →





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## DO

Tell parents it's a great opportunity for kids to interact with other nationalities and to pick up a few German phrases.

## DON'T

Forget to emphasise the value and variety of included sports and activities as a big selling point.

→ purely along age lines, it took them no time at all to mingle with their German counterparts and get stuck in to a range of activities in the amazing adventure playground and across the expansive grounds.

Of course, the experience might not have been as positive without a native English speaker to help them overcome the language barrier – but the fact that they couldn't wait to don their Roby Club caps each morning suggests they certainly didn't feel out of place.

## PAINT POTS AND GLOW STICKS

While Robinson's health and fitness credentials are an undoubted selling point, the club's sports and wellness facilities are by no means the only options if you want a break from enjoying the beach or one of Esquinzo Playa's five swimming pools.

One of our favourite areas was the fantastic Family Studio, where parents and children alike can get creative away from the midday sun and produce artworks ranging from paintings to models and collages. Although this was one of the few activities with an extra cost attached, it was a lovely haven of peace, and the only real challenge was working out how to get that oil-painted masterpiece on the plane home.

After dark, the entertainment team puts on a range of shows in the sizeable theatre. *Shrek the Musical* may have been a little hard to follow in German, but the following night's Eurohouse party complete with glow sticks and UV lighting was a kitsch highlight.



ABOVE: Jandia peninsula, Fuerteventura

“It took the kids no time at all to mingle with their German counterparts and get stuck in to activities in the adventure playground

## THE VERDICT

It's important that clients know exactly what they're getting – if they prefer completely familiar surroundings and an all-English-speaking resort, a Robinson holiday isn't going to be the best option.

We spoke to one British family who loved the resort, but felt the language barrier had prevented them from

mingling with fellow guests and staff as they usually would. One of the resort managers even admitted a few more British members of staff would help UK guests feel more at home.

However, it was interesting to hear that a number of Brits – those willing to step outside their comfort zone and embrace something a little different – had become regular visitors.

From our family's perspective, the Robinson facilities and ethos, twinned with a friendly clientele and fantastic staff, mean it would certainly be an option we'd consider again. And, for the record, we didn't have an issue finding a sunlounger all week.

**Book it:** A week's all-inclusive at Robinson Club Esquinzo Playa in Fuerteventura leads in at £2,738 in August for a family of four sharing a family room, excluding flights.

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