

## DESTINATIONS

HOTELS, RESORTS & SPAS | GREECE



### PERIKLIS GOMPAKIS, SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, MARBELLA COLLECTION

INTERVIEW BY Laura French



#### Q. MarBella Corfu (pictured) opened last July for the summer season – how did it go?

A. We were the first five-star hotel to open in Corfu last summer, and operated at around 70%-75% of our regular capacity, opening around 300 rooms. Based on those numbers, the hotel was actually full, with more than 7,000 guests from July 4 until the end of October. Bookings were very last-minute – some up to one day before travelling. We expect a similar trend this year, at least for the early part of the season, but I believe consumers are more confident in booking ahead for later in the season.

#### Q. What Covid protocols were in place at the hotel and how did the experience differ for guests?

A. We enhanced our mobile app so guests could check in, order in-room dining and pre-book tables, spa treatments and activities on their phones. We also replaced printed materials with QR codes. We recommended that guests wore masks in indoor areas, although this was at their discretion. The fitness centre was closed, so we enhanced our outdoor fitness offering; this summer we'll be hosting a running club, aqua fitness, outdoor yoga and more. Spa facilities will also be open, respecting social distancing measures and indoor capacity limits.

#### Q. How do you see Greece reopening to tourism?

A. In early March, the Greek government said the tourism sector would reopen from May 14. We



PICTURE: Heinz Troll

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are now expecting a clear roadmap on how this will happen and are preparing for our hotels reopening with these dates in mind. In terms of travel more generally, it's a matter of having a solid date and a plan of how people can travel. I believe the most important thing is not to create a system where you can travel if you're vaccinated but can't if you aren't. Greece is trying not to exclude different age groups or categories by accepting visitors who have either been vaccinated or who have had a PCR test.

#### Q. What new features can guests expect at MarBella Collection hotels this year?

A. Last year taught us that it's really important to constantly enhance the guest experience, so we implemented new activities and culinary offerings. For example, we introduced a Local Dining Discovery programme at

MarBella Corfu and will be rolling this out at Nido (also in Corfu) and Elix (in Parga) this year. This means guests can dine at a local restaurant for no extra cost as part of our all-inclusive package or as part of our Signature Suites programme, which we also introduced last year for guests wanting additional benefits, such as a car for a day. We will also be hosting a series of pop-up events with well-known Greek chefs, and we're opening a beach bar and grill at MarBella Corfu and a Greek-style coffee lounge at Nido.

#### Q. MarBella Elix is opening in Parga on the Greek mainland this year – what do agents need to know to sell this hotel?

A. Elix is aimed at travellers looking for luxury in unspoilt surroundings.



#### PERIKLIS'S TOP TIP

We will be enhancing our protocols further this year by offering an on-site PCR or rapid test for guests that need it to return home or just want peace of mind.

Parga is an authentic region surrounded by mountains and coast, with great history, so there's lots to do in the area. The hotel will also have a big family offering, including a mythology-themed

kids' and teens' club focusing on outdoor activities.

#### Q. And finally, what are the key lessons you've learnt from the pandemic?

A. The pandemic has given us all a chance to take a bit of a step back from our day-to-day work and think about how we do things. I believe the most important thing we've learnt is how to be flexible and adapt to new market trends by working together. It's shown us we need to think outside the box and keep innovating. We also need to spend more time with our family and our loved ones, so we want to give our guests the chance to do that and create lasting holiday memories for them. **TW**