



# ONE FOR ALL

A trip to one of Corfu's most luxurious hotels offered sun-drenched sands, a sky blue infinity pool, hot tub on the private terrace and as many watermelon martinis you could shake (or stir) before midnight. Georgina Farrer visits the Marbella Beach Hotel on Corfu's east coast

I don't do things by halves. If I order wine I choose large. If I want a curry I pick the one with three chillies on the menu. If I buy a dress I get the shoes too. So if I'm going to do something, I have to do it properly, and consequently when I needed to make a decision between full and half-board for my package holiday, there was only one option.

A package holiday isn't something I've done before, because as well as never doing things by half, I'm also an obsessive organiser – leaving the booking of the flights, airport transfers, hotel and itinerary to someone else is a nerve-racking experience. On this occasion though, it was actually quite refreshing to not worry about a single part of our trip, and instead simply turn up with someone else having done the hard bit.

Corfu is one of Greece's seven Ionian Islands and the five-star Marbella Beach Hotel is in Agios Ioannis Peristeron, half an hour's drive from Corfu Airport. Arriving late at night, we assumed we had missed out on what should have been our first feast in the hotel's restaurant, but we were welcomed with a Greek platter of breads, meats and cheeses, and our first of many drinks: two of the hotel's signature fruit punches and champagne.

Heading into our accommodation, we were very happy to find our Deluxe Panorama room had its own hot tub on the private terrace, which was larger than my garden and overlooked the resort and beach. On a clear day (which just so happened to be every day) you could make out mainland Greece. Not that

we'd be venturing there or anywhere else for the next few days.

Breakfast is probably my favourite meal of the day, so the English, American and Continental buffet made my mornings especially enjoyable. With bacon and eggs, waffles, muffins, cereals, fruit, cheeses, hams, cakes, sweet Greek pastries such as rich custard-filled bougatsas, and more than five types of freshly baked bread, it was a shame I only had five days to eat my way through it. I found I had a similar problem when it came to my other meals too.

Lunch is served as a buffet in the main restaurant or in the à la carte restaurant, Cascade, by the pool. The food is Greek/Mediterranean and it's where my partner

and I chose to have lunch most days, not only because we enjoyed the lighter food menu, but because it was literally only a few steps from our sun-loungers – which we spent most of the holiday attached to.

With three sea water pools to choose from there was plenty of opportunity to change the location of our sunbathing, but beside the impressive infinity pool (described by my boyfriend as the 'disappearing edge pool') was without doubt our favourite place to lounge as the pool water and sky seemed to melt into each other; a beautiful and surreal sight.

A narrow set of steps lead from the poolside down to a small piece of shoreline reserved for guests of the hotel. We found that it was relatively quiet there first thing, and made it the location for our early morning swim. With the gently lapping sea the only sound, the sun at an optimum height for reading, and the temperature not yet too hot, I still now, several months after our return, haven't found a better way to start the day.

My partner however, wasn't always part of the tranquillity. While my number one holiday rule is to avoid any exercise other than raising a glass of gin and tonic from the bar to my mouth and back again, he will not go for more than a day without pounding a treadmill or some other form of exercise machine. Fortunately for him, the hotel had a gym, with (I was told) 'all the kit he needed for a full body workout'. Sadly, due to my number one rule and sun bed securing duties, I can't verify his claims, but taking into account the very sweaty body he brought to the beach each day I assume he was telling the truth.

Dinner can be eaten in the main restaurant (which offers a full buffet and themed nights such as Greek and Asian twice a week) or the à la carte Italian restaurant. On the all-inclusive

package guests are able to reserve a table once during their stay, and all dishes on the menu are included in the package. The food in both restaurants was some of the best I've ever tasted, and the choice of dishes overwhelming.

We are all too often one of those couples who are last to leave a restaurant. We eat late and consequently end up drinking late too, but unlike in England, where you get the 'please move on we want to clean up' look, in Corfu it's very acceptable to sit, chat and drink for as long as you wish. We did relocate to the outside bar most nights though, as we thought it rude not to sample the hotel's generous cocktail menu (part of the all-inclusive package).

Apart from an hour's pedalo hire when it was too hot to sunbathe any longer, we chose not to leave the complex during our five-night stay. This may seem strange and slightly unadventurous, but for us it was heaven. If you want to add a bit of culture to your holiday, nearby Corfu Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and I'm told it offers amazing architecture and history. For us however, and for those content with a beach, hot tub and endless supply of martinis, the Marbella Beach Hotel is the only destination needed on your Corfu itinerary.

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Classic Collection Holidays offers seven nights at Marbella Beach Hotel, Corfu, from £686 per person on a half-board and £882 per person on an all-inclusive basis, based on two adults sharing. Price includes return flights from Newcastle to Corfu and private transfers. Departs Newcastle from 9th May 2014.

Classic Collection Holidays  
0800 294 9318  
[www.classic-collection.co.uk](http://www.classic-collection.co.uk)

