

EAST

meets West

A group of young Chinese guests visited Vassaliki in Kefalonia for their first naturist holiday – Sheryle Daniels tells us more about their experience...

When the captain of a high-speed hydrofoil rings you from Hong Kong and asks whether you have apartments for his crew to stay in, you know you are in for a unique experience.

The captain, in this instance, was Captain Lawrence Lee, and he and his crew make the hour-long crossing from Hong Kong to Macau daily. It is common for the crews of these hydrofoils to take their holidays together, very much in the manner of team building. To us it may seem an unusual thing to do – going on holiday with work colleagues! I know that in many workplaces, one is out of the door as soon as the last bell is rung, and as for advertising the fact that you're departing on a naturist holiday... well. It also reminded me of the factory holidays of northern England when whole communities invaded Butlins for two weeks in the summer.

Captain Lawrence had had some experience of naturist beaches and resorts in New Zealand and, while surfing the internet for a holiday experience, came

across Sam's Story on the Vigla Natura website: www.viglanatura.com/sam. As Lawrence's own son works many hours for a banking corporation, the fact that Sam left a similar environment to set up an unusual business struck a chord with him. Also, her description of trying naturism for the first time at the age of 23 was exactly the motivation Lawrence wanted to convince his youthful crew that they

should give this totally new experience a try.

His crew are Senior Officer Jack, First Officer Chu, First Officer Choi, and stewardesses Imelda, Pamela and Cammi, the eldest being 33 and the youngest two ladies only 25. Armed with Sam's Story, these five young people had been persuaded by their Captain that this holiday would be an uplifting



and challenging life experience. Our travellers arrived at Vassaliki Naturist Club, on the Ionian island of Kefalonia, with some trepidation one sunny day in June. Vassaliki is becoming accustomed to guests of many differing nationalities, but these were the resort's first visitors from Hong Kong. Having been made welcome, the travel-weary guests were shown to their rooms.

Next morning the air was filled with nervous, excited Cantonese chatter as our visitors nervously emerged from their rooms cocooned in towels and sarongs, but one look at the pool and they flew down the steps, throwing off their coverings and descending to the water like beautiful oriental butterflies. Although they did admit that at first the prospect of a naked holiday was a little daunting and they were very nervous at the start, the whole group soon felt at ease. It was the resort that now needed to acclimatise to guests with a very different social dynamic.

One great difference was the noise! Our Chinese guests were extremely vocal and chattered away constantly in Cantonese; like a flock of birds they chattered noisily between themselves, and everything was translated and discussed: menus, drinks, rules, sunbeds, likes, dislikes, suncreams, goats... everything. The usually quiet area of the pool bar sounded like an aviary at feeding time. They did admit that Hong Kong was very noisy and they couldn't believe how quiet Vassaliki was, but understood when Sam explained that the pool area was designated a quiet/relaxing zone and games etc were to be played upstairs.

Games

Sitting and sunbathing did not feature very highly in the list of things to do. The girls seemed quite content to sit and relax, but the boys needed a much more physical environment. The football was brought out, much to Archie's delight – the resort's Jack Russell thought all his Christmases had come at once, and there ensued a delighted romp chasing the dog and ball. Sam also organised team games of boules and kubb for our visitors.

Exercise

New to Vassaliki this year is pilates. It replaced aquagym in the low season and continued in addition to the aquagym for the hotter months because it proved an enormous success. The whole group dedicatedly followed the instructions given and showed how beautifully pilates can be done in the open air and with youthful bodies. However, half an hour

was obviously not enough and

Chu then led the whole team for a workout closely resembling tai chi.

Photo opportunities

Everywhere, everything, everybody... Archie became the most photographed dog on the island, although being a Jack Russell, keeping still enough for photos proved a difficulty. The group were very conscious of the photography policy at the resort, but once they were out on the boat, with no other guests around, the cameras went crazy. →



Food

Now I don't suppose many of you have tried to explain eggy bread to a non-European, but, believe me, it is quite difficult. Breakfast was a hilarious adventure and as for lunch – Greek meze platters were a frenzy of laughter and pulled faces. Olives were definitely not top of the taste sensations! For evening meals they decided to cook for themselves and sent an order up to the mini-market for provisions. Then, armed with spices and sausage and pasta, Jack, the designated cook, rustled up a lovely east-meets-west pasta dish which Choi (assistant cook)

brought down to the bar for the Vassaliki staff to try. Jack, if you ever need a job...

Entertainment

It became very obvious very quickly that the staff at Vassaliki were going to have to work hard to accommodate the needs of their new guests as well as catering for their other guests. Mark decided that a boat trip out for the day would be a good way of entertaining our international guests and showing them the island. So he hired Denis and his crew on the luxury motor cruiser 'Lady O'. This might be

thought of as a busman's holiday for the group, but an amazing day was had by all – sailing into small coves, posing for photos on the beach, diving off the back of the boat and covering themselves in clay, a natural mud-pack treatment. Pamela took away a bag of mud which she said she was going to use when she got home. I wonder whether she got it through Customs?

I did my bit by volunteering to take the group shopping in Argostoli one evening, out for a meal and then cocktails and dancing at a bar in nearby Lassi. It was wonderful evening, apart from losing all of them on different occasions



(two of the party were found in the back of a bar in the town square drinking ouzo) and being a hour late at the cocktail bar due to the popularity of jewellery shops... They eventually returned home at 2am with Mark, who managed to lose Captain Lawrence yet again before he left Lassi.

The six days went by so quickly. They were such lovely people. They were so vibrant, enthusiastic and helpful that the hard work of catering for a group was lessened by their generosity of spirit and gratefulness. I hope that now they are home – Jack and Imelda, reunited with their two boys; Chu with his wife and four-month-old daughter; Choi and Cammi, starting their lives together, and Pamela with her natural kind and gentle nature – they look back on their time at Vassaliki and realise that it was what their Captain Lawrence had promised them: an uplifting and challenging life experience. We hope that they will come back to see us again. Myself? I am holding Captain Lawrence to his promise of showing me the real Hong Kong in the near future. 🌊



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