

## All-inclusive Ikos Olivia reviewed



**N**ew resort Ikos Olivia in Greece is on a mission to change your preconceptions about the all-inclusive holiday

The all-inclusive holiday has been likened to a cruise ship on dry land – something not meant as a compliment. Fans love the convenience and certainty that ordering cocktails by the pool won't deliver a nasty shock on the bill come check-out.

But, for detractors, it conjures up visions of long queues for pile-'em-high buffets that are all about the margins. Others argue that as you rarely venture out, there is little to distinguish your Greek resort from any other in the Med.

Mindful of those criticisms, Ikos Olivia is one of a number of resorts giving the all-in holiday a major upgrade. It pitches itself as a new luxury travel brand with plans to develop up to 10 new resorts over the next five years. Olivia, situated in the Halkidiki region on Greece's Aegean coast, opened last summer and has proved an instant hit.



It's easy to see why, as it has successfully reinvented the all-in formula. Three of its four restaurants feature menus by Michelin-starred chefs. Ouzo's was created by Lefteris Lazarou, who has the honour of being the first Greek chef to earn a Michelin star and does a refined take on his nation's food. It also counters the charge that all-in resorts, with their cooped-up tourists, damage the local economy. Ikos employs staff from the region and uses locally sourced ingredients in its restaurants.

*Director* recommends the 'dine out' option (included in the package), for which Ikos books you into a Halkidiki restaurant. We ate at Mouragio, a traditional taverna big on atmosphere and what Greek restaurants do best – grilled food that is all about flavour, not frills. It is also an opportunity to explore Halkidiki. You can book excursions, too, another point of difference. We went to the Ktima Gerovassiliou winery – a must for any oenophile and an education in winemaking from grape to bottle.

The resort is particularly popular with families and caters for kids of all ages, with a crèche facility and range of activities including watersports, football and basketball. It's all done to a high standard but the devil is often in the detail, right down to the UK plug sockets in each room. Further, staff consistently strike the right balance without ever being over-attentive.

The Ikos Olivia just might give the public perception of the all-inclusive holiday an overdue overhaul.