

Finkelstein family finds luxury in Crete

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How to leave the fiscal gloom behind on a luxury escape in Crete

Look, it's not my fault. Every time I hear some hand-wringer on the radio saying that "in a sense we are all to blame", I shout back the same thing. It's not my fault. Did I fail to regulate the banks properly? No. As I recall it, my jobs are the dishwasher, the rubbish and the clearing up. I am not above forgetting the odd chore, but if my wife had mentioned regulating the banks, I am sure I would remember.

My origami skills aren't up to rolling up debt and the only thing I've ever bought from Iceland is a frozen cheesecake. So there are lots of feelings I have when I hear about the credit crunch - fury, bewilderment, banks-shmanks, what's on the other channel - but guilt isn't one of them.

So when I was asked whether I felt bad about taking a more-posh-than-necessary holiday while the banks were crashing, my interlocutor was rewarded with a blank stare. I replied that even without a degree in high finance, I was fairly confident that the two events were not correlated. Now let's get on with it.

You don't have to be a plutocrat to travel with Powder Byrne to Crete, and you are not in danger of bumping into billionaires. It's just slightly more expensive than is perhaps, ahem, strictly essential.

Let me start by telling you that we had a helipad. It had a big H on it. We didn't use it because we usually leave the helicopter at home when on holiday, but we knew it was there because we could see it while sitting around our private pool. You get the idea?

The resort at Porto Elounda in Crete was good, really good. Our room, quite apart from the private pool, was spectacularly, laughably, big. We had enough baths and showers that we could each take one at the same time and still have one spare for a guest.

"My bathroom's bigger than yours" was not, however, the hotel's most impressive feature. That was the good management. Lots of hotels are like the curate's egg, good in parts. Elounda was consistent throughout, from swimming-pool towels through to concierge service.

But you had to pay for it. A club sandwich for lunch cost £16.85. You had to think twice

before splashing out on a Diet Coke (and that isn't a sentence I ever thought I would type). And Greek Night for two adults and two children costs £178. The shopping on-site was ideal if you wanted to buy two postcards, a bucket and spade and a Bulgari watch.

Slightly disturbingly, however much money you think you are spending, there is always someone spending more on an even more splendidly sited deckchair. You can allow this to make you feel envious, but I would recommend, instead, congratulating yourself on your restraint. This is a fine thing to be able to do when sitting in the lap of luxury.

Well, I was sitting. I like sitting. My wife prefers something more strenuous, although the gusty winds made sailing and windsurfing too strenuous even for her. She received some top-class waterskiing instruction, though, that everyone was going on about. I took their word for it.

What, then, about Powder Byrne? Did the company add much value? Yes. The problem with luxury and young children is that they don't mix. Luxury means posh mushrooms, quiet areas, elaborate sauces and breakable crockery. Children mean noise, simple food and cups that bounce. Somehow, Powder Byrne made oil and water mix, and it was its childcare that made it worth the price.

The secret was providing all-day care with activities (a visit to a water park, football sessions), feeding the children properly and being on call for help with babysitting. We have experienced holiday childcare in many forms, but Powder Byrne's was a cut above.

About halfway through the holiday, my wife and I sat under an olive tree. The sun was shining, the wind was blowing gently, our children were off playing with new-found friends, we were between swimming and lunch. As we sat there we thought we should try to find something seriously wrong with our holiday or the review would be irritating. We sat in silence for a long time. And then for a little longer.

Need to know

Powder Byrne (020-8246 5300, www.powderbyrne.com) offers a week at Porto Elounda in a two-bedroom suite with private pool from £9,880 for a family of four. A week in a standard room is from £1,688 per person, based on two sharing. Prices include half board, Powder Byrne resort service and airport transfers, but not flights to Crete, which can be arranged.

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