

## Greece is the word

13 November 2013 by Jane Anderson

Jane Anderson falls for Costa Navarino in the Greek Peloponnese



**Where:** The rumour mill is currently in overdrive that *Sex & The City 3* could be filming in Greece in 2015 in the beautiful Messinia region in the south-western Peloponnese. Suspicions were further fuelled after Sarah Jessica Parker spent most part of August travelling around the Greek islands on a private luxury yacht.

Although the reports have not been confirmed or denied, if the famous foursome of Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda reunite for a new film it will be the second time in recent years that Messinia has played host to a long-awaited sequel: *Before Midnight*, the romantic drama starring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy, was shot in and around the luxury resort of **Costa Navarino**.

I was lucky enough to explore this incredibly beautiful resort which strives like no other place I've visited to protect and promote local nature and culture. It's definitely one to put on your list of top girls getaways or romantic escapes.

**What:** I stayed in the **Westin**, one of two five-star resorts already here. Built in local limestone, it has a warm feel, planted all around with native lavender and thyme. The rooms are lux yet understated with their own chic pools or balconies. The presidential suites are like mini palaces of cool. The resort is spread out over a vast area set back from a stretch of caramel coloured sandy beach and deep blue Greek sea. There are no motorised sports, but you can treat yourself to a session of Stand up Paddleboarding yoga or go diving with the in-house PADI dive team to see the local caretta caretta turtles. The Bar Bouni (red mullet) restaurant by the beach is sublime, like a fabulous art installation on the beach – a wooden box on the sand, with a roof made of fluttering seaweed shaped drapes that move in the breeze like the sea. With the soft vby music, the crisp rosé wine and fresh calamari, it has a high-end Ibiza feel.



Ladies, if you have one reason to visit this place, it's the Anazoe Spa. The biggest investment at Costa Navarino has been trying to uncover the wisdom of the past. This is evident in this magnificent spa. Treatments use therapeutic olive-oil treatments (oleotherapy) based on local practises inscribed on clay tablets discovered at the nearby Palace of Nestor. I tried out the traditional olive nourishing facial using lime blossom, sage and olive leaf to give my skin a healthy glow, along with a collagen mask and a fabulous lymphatic massage. It was utterly divine.

There is also a serene heat and water area with a series of exquisitely tiled steam rooms and shower experiences plus an ice room to get your circulation going, followed by three thalassotherapy pools with jets and currents to stimulate the body. It's a great place to hang out and chat as you rejuvenate. Even the especially composed music based on ancient Greek harmonies is designed to enhance your well-being. If only everyday life could be this good we'd all be goddesses!

**Why:** There are SO many unique things to do at Costa Navarino, like the free Philosophy Walk with Eleni Volonaki, lecturer of ancient Greek Literature, University of Peloponnese. The topic of debate on my walk was 'a sound mind in a sound body' from the famous quotation by the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Thales demonstrating the close links between physical exercise, mental equilibrium and the ability to enjoy life. All deeply interesting stuff and not what you would expect from a beach holiday. Astrology nights are also available.

Another cool thing is its village-like heart with a vast auditorium space with a huge stage and screen for concerts and films screenings under the stars. Round about are high-end boutiques, an Italian restaurant, a wine tasting venue and Kefenio, a traditional Greek coffee house serving delicious Greek meze and selling Navarino Icons – beautifully packaged local olive oil, wine and something called 'olive spoon sweets' – local kalamon olives stuffed with almonds and soaked in honey. There's even a cute wedding chapel should you decide to tie the knot.





When I visited in October it was olive harvesting time and guests were asked along to see how the harvesting is done with long beaters to knock the olives off onto nets on the ground. We also took a trip one evening into the local village of Pylos where we visited a house overlooking the bay for some authentic Messinian cooking tips with the help of two local women, Loula and Anna.

There is plenty to explore in the region including many historic sites including the ancient fortifications of Methoni and Koroni, The Palace of Nestor and even Olympia, a 90 minute drive away. My favourite excursion was a scenic 30-minute bike ride to Voidokilia, one of the most incredible beaches I've ever seen as it's almost a complete circle, with just a small inlet. The sand is soft and the water is clear and sparkling, plus there's hardly anyone there. As this is a conservation area, there are no cafes or kiosks (all the better for it), so remember to pack a picnic. I can so imagine Carrie and the girls discovering this gem.

**Go there!** [Design Holidays](#) offers seven nights at The Westin Resort, Costa Navarino from £461 per person in a garden view room with breakfast daily. [easyJet](#) began flights to Kalamata this year (2013), so it's easy to get to – just a three-and-a-half hour flight from London Gatwick and about a 40-minute car transfer. Return flights from £130 per person.