

WHAT THE PRESS SAY...

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The Magic of Martinhal

Finding accommodation that suits both adults and young children isn't easy. Sarah Peters heads to Portugal to one of Europe's newest family-friendly resorts to check it out.

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If you're keen to avoid the drudgery of self-catering family holidays and hanker for the style and luxury of pre-baby holiday destinations, then I have found the place for you. Somewhere that is family-friendly, but not over-run with screaming kids doing the conga round the pool; somewhere that is stylish but still sumptuously comfortable; somewhere that is chic but not extortionate; somewhere called Martinhal Beach Resort & Hotel.

Martinhal is located in acres of coastal nature reserve at the very western tip of Portugal's Algarve near the small fishing port of Sagres. From the very moment you check in and the kids are handed a goody bag to dissect while you chat to the receptionist, you know you are going to love it here. When you're done checking in, there's a little golf cart to whisk you off to your house and before you even get



there your baggage has been delivered on your doorstep, such is Martinhal's efficient service.

The Ocean Houses at Martinhal come in 2 and 3 bedroom sizes and have a funky, retro feel about them. The master bedroom has floor to ceiling windows onto a large patio edged with sweet smelling lavender bushes complete with traditionally woven sun loungers and views of the sea.

The living quarters are on the first floor as this allows you to make

the most of the magnificent views whether garden or ocean facing and as most houses have two balconies you get to see the peachy sunrise on one side and ruby sunset on the other.

Inside the modern cubist houses everything has been thought about: from the ipod/iphone dock, nespresso machine, washing machine and dishwasher to the kids cutlery and crockery; flat screen t.v. with children's channels, movies on demand and luxurious organic toiletries.

One of the nicest things about Martinhal, speaking as a parent, is the fact that they will provide many of the gadgets you need for your little ones. On arrival, the nursery was practically set up: a steriliser, bed guards and highchairs were all in position, a baby welcome pack with nappies, wipes and baby food was on the counter. All was prepared, awaiting the exhausted, sleeping babe to be popped in

between the crisp white sheets in the

beautifully prepared cot.

When we turned round, we then found the grown-up welcome pack: packet of rich coffee for the percolator, a bottle of local Portuguese wine and some tasty local biscuits. Welcome to your holiday!

There are so many things to do at Martinhal apart from lounging around and relaxing by the pools or strolling the nearby sand dunes. Tennis, padel tennis, kayaking, surfing or the gym are available. You can hire bikes, play in the lovely kids' playground or with the giant games such as Connect 4 or Jenga in the village square.

The swimming pools are always warm – what a treat! So often they look an inviting shade of turquoise, but the toddlers come out after a five minute splash and their shivering bodies are nearly as blue as the water! Not here. There are four beautifully designed swimming pools and shallow paddling pools. The sun loungers are well spaced so everyone has room to spread out even in the busy season and there are enormous beanbags scattered around the pool areas too; absolutely perfect for a toddler to take a snuggly nap in the shade of a parasol while you read a book. There are pool toys and inflatables to borrow too.

If you fancy a real break from the demands of your little ones, you can invite them to enjoy Raposinhos, the fantastic crèche and kids' club that is sited in the village square. It is suitable for babies from six months to children of eight years. Full of good quality toys, games, arts and crafts, bikes and scooters, books and building blocks it is a friendly and happy place for the children to stay and play while you get a rest.

The Blue Room is laid on for older kids. A high-tech games room you can often find dads trying a nifty new X-Box, Playstation or Wii game, tinkering on the computers or trying to score goals at the table football.

Mums should make time to have a treatment at the Finisterra Spa. There

are six treatment rooms providing all sorts of delights: a steam room, sauna and a relaxation garden that is tranquillity itself. All the staff speak English and the spa is not so uber chic that we normal people would find it uncomfortable. It is stylish but unfussy with treatments that sound inviting rather than torturous!

When it comes to food, you are spoilt for choice with four restaurants plus pool bars. Os Gambosinos, the pizza and pasta restaurant, offers a good kids menu and provides various puzzles, colouring sheets and games to entertain them while they wait for their food. At night the village square

comes alive with families strolling about the place, with little ones playing games or sitting in the evening warmth and eating handfuls of delicious Portuguese olives.

O Terraço, overlooking the ocean, is the hotel's formal restaurant and is probably best kept for a glamorous baby-free evening. Qualified baby-sitters can be booked in advance. Failing that, take advantage of the take-away food service offered by Mercado, the gourmet village shop.

I have to admit that Mystery Mummy was unashamedly enchanted by this resort, the charming staff and the opportunity to enjoy a luxurious, but comfortable stay with the children was sheer magic. Do I really have to go home? ☺



READER OFFER

For families staying at Martinhal until 15th April 2011, including February half term, all children aged up to (and including) 12 years of age are entitled to a complimentary children's menu in all restaurants at all regular times. The offer is valid whenever the parents are ordering a full price adult meal at the same time as the children (please note that meals do not qualify as a full price meal for breakfast, lunch and dinner and there will be daily children's menus in each restaurant, however are not included. Offer based on a maximum of two children per night that cannot be a long-term stay home. This offer is fully combinable with the Family Offers for children up to the age of eight.

Transfer: 90 minutes from Faro airport on a very direct, well-signed motorway road. **Official Star Rating:** 5 star hotel and luxury houses.

Accommodation: 130 houses plus villas and 38 hotel bedrooms

Baby Concierge Service: pre-book baby equipment: potties, thermometers, socket protectors, door protectors, baby baths, bottle warmers, safety gates, changing mats, and carriers are all free of charge! Cots and pushchairs are €25 per night and €5 per day respectively.

Getting to Portugal: Daily flights from London airports that take approx 2½ hours.

Getwick Airport: Worth trying the valet service simply drive up to the airport, a uniformed valet drives your car away, parks in a secure car park and meets you on your return. www.help-me-park.co.uk; Telephone 0845 272 8790

* Martinhal specialises in holidays for families with pre-school age children. In March and April, the two bedroom Ocean Houses start from €152 per night including complimentary childcare at Raposinhos kids' club. Please check the Martinhal website for the latest packages. Martinhal Beach Resort & Hotel, Sagres, Portugal - www.martinhal.com.