

Style and substance by the sea

Martinhal Resort Algarve, Portugal

Sometimes when a hotel tells you that it's family-friendly, it means there are high chairs and (if you're lucky) a baby-changing facility. When Martinhal says it, it means it. The difference is, "family friendly" wasn't tagged on to an existing hotel – Martinhal started out with this ideal precisely in mind. And before you get the idea that there's a whiff of Disney or wipe-clean about the place, it rivals any of the design-led hotels that you might have stayed at.

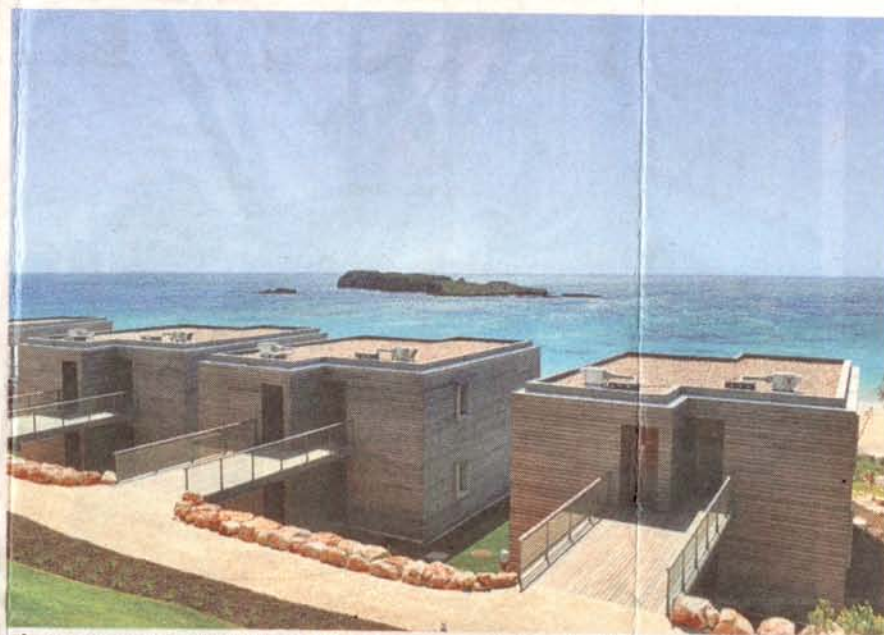
The concept of Martinhal Beach Resort, which fully opened last summer, comes from the founders of Luxury Family Hotels, Nigel Chapman and Nicholas Dickinson (Woolley Grange, Moonfleet Manor, Fowey Hall), who were responsible for marrying a family-focused resort with sleek, contemporary architecture by Conran+Partners. The new-build has, as you might imagine, been sensitively conceived, not least because it's in a nature reserve; the glass, wood and stone buildings are at ease amid the wilderness.

Which part you stay in depends on what you need. The boutique Hotel Martinhal, perched on a hill that sweeps down to the beach,

has 38 rooms, all of which have terraces or balconies with ocean views. Children are welcome here, but given that the rest of the resort is dedicated to spacious, self-catering cottages and villas – Village Houses and Luxury Villas – we decided it made more sense to let the hotel be the preserve of adults.

However, the hotel is peaceful and the resort large enough to accommodate both romantic getaways and family holidays comfortably. The hotel is the location for the fine dining restaurant, O Terraço: crisp white linen on the outside terrace sharply contrasting with the blue sea beyond and rows of sparkling wine glasses reflecting the sun.

Families are particularly well-catered for here. For parents with very young children, there's a new – UK standardised – crèche, fully equipped with qualified childcare professionals and a toy-box to rival Mary Poppins' handbag. There's a children's club too, and the "Blue Room" is a futuristic den for tweens and teens who might be in the mood to sulk out of the sun and play computer games, table football and board games. For older children and adults, there are classes and activities every day: horseriding, watersports, walking tours, "eco-kart-



First resort: a selection of beach rooms, above, and a beach suite, below

ing" (think of go-karting, then add a sail), pilates and yoga. That's in addition to the large gym and Club 98, a tennis and sports club. And if the Atlantic waves prove too bracing, there are five pools (including two designed with toddlers in mind) with food and drink bars attached, and plenty of "fat boy" cushions scattered around (oversized beanbags much beloved of the children they engulf).

Adults might be more interested in the food. The As Dunas restaurant serves freshly-caught fish and seafood (try the delicious tiger prawns), overlooking both the sea and a huge trampoline dug into the sand. Needless to say, this proves extremely popular with children who do their best to shake up what they've just eaten while their parents linger over a glass of wine.

Two more eateries, the modern European Os Gambozinos and a juice

bar, can be found at The Village Square, the hub of the resort. It lives up to its name, with cobblestones, a market shop for all essentials including fresh bread and takeaway meals, and a row of little play houses that seem to provide endless fun for pre-schoolers.

Location

The resort, in the quiet and

unspoilt Sagres area of the far western Algarve, is around an hour and a quarter's drive from Faro airport. If you're in the mood to explore, take a short drive to the historic port town of Sagres. It's a name familiar to Europeans thanks to the beer, but its historical fame is due to Prince Henry the Navigator, a patron of Portugal's



Martinhal Beach Resort

Quinta do Martinhal, Apartado 54, Sagres, Algarve, Portugal (00 351 282 240 200; martinhal.com)

Rooms

★★★★

Value

★★★★★

Service

★★★★★

Double rooms at the hotel start at €152, including breakfast. Garden houses from €162.50, self-catered.

Voyages of Discovery, who in the 15th century set up a navigation school nearby.

Comfort

The bespoke style throughout the resort, created by British designer Michael Sodeau, is worn easily in the beachy environment. Comfortable sofas and clean lines in muted shades fulfil the brief of luxurious functionality. Sodeau kept the Portuguese aesthetic in mind, too, which is why coffee tables are made from cork, and elegant lamps in every room are fashioned from straw. All in all, it makes for a very comfortable stay. Thanks to our wobbly toddler, we noted there are no sharp corners to worry about, too.

The Martinhal Village Houses and independently owned Luxury Villas (the latter can be booked through the resort) range from one- to three bedrooms, and come complete with washing machines, dishwashers, and private outside space; some have a private swimming pool.

The sizeable fridge comes stocked with complimentary water and essentials (bread, coffee, muffins) to get you started. We were staying in a one-bedroom garden house, which was much more roomy than the name suggests. The private garden area was a boon, especially for parents wanting to make the most of the sun while their child is having an afternoon nap.

At the Hotel Martinhal, the design is similar, but bolstered with bath products by organic company Voya (these are used in the spa, too), free Wi-Fi, soft drinks and water in the mini-bar and Bose ipod docking stations.

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