

A PARENT'S PARADISE

Unspoilt beaches, fabulous food, jam-packed kids' club — this chic Portuguese resort is a hit with all the family

by MAUREEN
BROOKBANKS

THE potential for holiday relaxation did not look good. Baby Lily, 12 months, was waking five or six times a night, frantic with teething pain.

Adding to the agony, newly walking, she resembled a small drunk, staggering haphazardly with zero care for her physical safety.

Despite my fantasy of lying on a lounger, head in a novel, our equally energetic four-year-old Grace was insistent we were going to spend every minute in the swimming pool.

My husband, meanwhile, was muttering worryingly about having some 'quiet time' on the golf course.

So off we go to the [Pine Cliffs](#) resort — perched on a spectacular stretch of coast in the Algarve, just outside Albufeira, an easy 30-minute hop from Faro Airport — a sprawling collection of high-end apartments, hotel rooms and villas. The words 'chic' and 'peaceful' don't quite do it justice. It's just a shame the Brookbanks en vacances don't quite manage the same vibe.

We arrive in an elegantly tiled lobby with delicately tinkling fountains, crashing past a group of women padding through in Chanel flip-flops, my husband straining under the weight of our suitcases and carrier bags with baby wipes and colouring pens spilling out.

Once in our room, I marshal the girls into swimming costumes and sunhats while he

enjoys a large beer by the pool. Throughout our nine-day break, the words *cerveja grande* were said worryingly often, and he discovered

the local bitter almond liqueur, *Amarguinha*, in record time.

Yet, despite the poor odds at the start, we managed to have one of our easiest and loveliest holidays ever.

Partly because there's so much for children to do at Pine Cliffs: nine swimming pools, a bouncy castle, trampoline, swings and a slide, toy sports cars to race, two large wooden pirate ships, a basketball court, face painting, bird and lizard shows, tennis courts, mini golf and more.

There's also a children's cookery course, where Grace and I have great fun making delectable *Torta de Amêndoa*, a type of almond roll served with ice cream. Later this summer, there'll be a children's football academy with ex-Premier League footballers John Barnes, Wes Brown and Joe Cole, which would surely earn boasting points when school starts again in September.

It becomes clear Grace is a whizz at mini golf, scoring two hole-in-ones on her first go, unashamedly thrashing her dad. The pair are soon mucking about on the driving range, leaving me to wander the avenues of the resort, each lined with huge pine trees, with Lily asleep in her buggy.

ALL this may sound too kids club for words — but fear not. Adults accustomed to nice hotels will be perfectly at home here, too. As I wash Lily's hair one night with the complimentary hotel shampoo — my husband informs me that the exclusive Byredo products I'm lathering on cost a pretty penny in Selfridges.

As well as this splendour, Pine Cliffs is a vast place, with so many pool and dining choices (11 restaurants), our favourite being O Pescador for its delicious spaghetti vongole. There's also a fabulous buffet at the O Grill restaurant.

The rarest of beasts, it's a buffet that doesn't taste like a buffet. We demolish grilled squid, steaks and jumbo prawns each night before the slim bottle of Amarguinha is opened yet again.

You certainly don't feel surrounded by screaming babies because hell, without doubt, is other people's wailing children. We spot many families who've travelled with the dreamy holiday essential — a grandparent happy to step in with the occasional spot of swimming-pool ping pong.

And there's plenty for the average glamorous gran or grandad to do when not on baby duty.

We even find ourselves breakfasting with former Strictly star Len Goodman, looking toned and bronzed with his family, each day.

There's a nine-hole golf course. Visitors up for a challenge will want to attempt the Devil's Parlour, the hellish signature hole built over a ravine that requires a 215-yard

carrying shot to reach the green.

Tennis lessons are at the on-site Annabel Croft Academy and, of course, there's the indulgent Serenity spa. I spend a pleasant morning being turned into something akin to a big Terry's Chocolate Orange — scrubbed in fresh orange oil mixed with sand. I'm painted all over with deep brown chocolatey carob paste, before being lowered into a massage bed filled with hot water. Bliss.

We venture from the resort just a handful of times. Once to the beautiful Falésia beach, just below the hotel, accessed by a panoramic glass lift and a short stroll along a wooden walkway and rust-coloured gorge, so striking it's reminiscent of the Grand Canyon.

But while there are some very chi-chi

families at the Portuguese resort — tiny children wear Missoni swimsuits, and there's a distinct preponderance of young Jagos and Allegras poolside — generally, there's a happily collegiate atmosphere among the parents of the small children.

It's all aided by the rather immaculately clothed, beige-uniformed staff, who magically appear the precise moment you need anything.

If only I could take one of them home with me.

TRAVEL FACTS

BA (ba.com) from London to Faro from £64 return. A two-bedroom residence at Pine Cliffs Resort, sleeping a family of four, from £150 per night, room only. Breakfast is £17pp per day (pinecliffs.com).