



## THE NATURAL RETREAT

### ELIVI, SKIATHOS

Skiathos has a certain reputation. It all began in the mid-1960s, with a national drive to promote the former shipbuilding centre off the coast of Thessaly as a tourist destination. It was a beautiful oddity in the pebble-shored Sporades: a pine-forested interior, peacock-blue waters and more than 50 beaches with sand as soft and fine as wheat flour.

And when the international airport opened, a hop from London to Sporadic shore took just three hours. It was easy – too easy. But Elivi is different. In some way, it goes back to the beginning: it's a renovation of the Xenia hotel, built in 1963 as part of the original initiative, set in the Koukounaries nature reserve and black-swan-nested lagoon on the south-western peninsula. The towering Aleppo pines give the terracotta-painted contemporary low-rise a sense of privacy and maturity, its 32 rooms and 68 beachside suites and villas camouflaged in the landscape. This is an another-level hotel for Skiathos with a boutique, family spirit;

it's owned and run by Greek father and daughter Elias and Vivi Nathanailidi. Families are encouraged here, not least by the staff who, in seconds, learn toddlers' names and seem eager to serve ice cream to little dictators. Buggies zip guests between their residences – rooms have a Scandi-Med feel, all pale woods with linen curtains – two pools, an Elemis spa and hammam, yoga studio and tennis courts. Along with Leda and The Swan, a white-tablecloth restaurant on a purple allium-strewn terrace, there are four taverna-served narrow private beaches with Caribbean-hued waters. (One of them is nudist, cheekily named Little Banana). Water taxis can be taken from the beach to Skiathos Port, but why, oh why, leave this place? It's so easy, the right kind of easy.

Blockaded from the rest of the island by a fragrant natural fortress, it's like the time before they came. Skiathos's name is due a reappraisal.

CHARLOTTE SINCLAIR *Doubles from about £165. elivihotels.com*

