

GREEN AWARDS

This beats stringing beads, Mum

Julia Brookes visits a temple to all things eco in Greece that children can enjoy (really) — and, opposite, we pick your best Green Spaces nominations



WE ARE in Cape Sounio on the tip of Attica, near the ancient and beautiful Temple of Poseidon, where King Aegeus waited for his son Theseus to return after slaying the minotaur. And it is pouring with rain. But Joseph Maragoudakis, the agronomist at the Grecotel Cape Sounio, couldn't be more delighted by the deluge. "The soil is baked, it's so thirsty — we really need water," he grins. He has come to give my children, Holly, 8, and Rory, 4, a tour of the eco-friendly landscaped hotel gardens and a taster of the hotel's "Ambassadors of the Environment" children's programme.

This eco scheme was devised by marine biologist Jean-Michel Cousteau to help children to "reconnect" with nature. Grecotel, which thinks it is probably the only resort hotel group to employ a professional environmen-

talist and agronomist to develop organic produce and create eco-friendly gardens, opened it this year at the five-star Cape Sounio. Activities for four to twelve-year-olds range from underwater photography, snorkelling and kayaking to experimenting with solar power and "terrestrial ecology", or Smell, Taste and No Waste.

"We want the children to learn about saving water, composting and how to grow things in a coastal habitat without using lots of pesticides," says Joseph, who has worked at the hotel since it opened in 2004 when the gardens were nothing more than barren rock, and who draws on tales from Greek myths to make the eco-message more entertaining.

As the weather clears we set off to the olive trees by the swimming pool. Olive trees are a symbol of Greece, he explains, before telling the story of the goddess Athena, who fought with Poseidon over who would protect the settlements that would become



Julia Brookes and her children, Holly and Rory, at Cape Sounio



HEINZ TROLL

Snorkelling and kayaking is a fun way for children to learn about the sea

Athens. Athena planted the first olive tree and won the Parthenon was built in her honour. "You can use nearly every part of an olive tree," he adds — the fruit for eating, the leaves for compost and the wood for burning. As confirmed olive-haters, Holly and Rory are less impressed by this than the luscious bunches of sweet grapes hanging on vines near our bungalow, one of which they're allowed to pick — and scoff. They also do a lot of sniffing, scrunching and fondling of herbs and then we move on up to the vegetable garden.

The scruffy plot is, to put it politely, a work in progress, but illustrates the point that nothing gets wasted — the greenhouse is made from materials that the hotel would otherwise have thrown away and the rotting yellowing aubergines and pumpkins will be mulched down. The tour ends with some blindfolded vegetable tasting — the only way my two would eat a raw pepper without hardcore bribery.

After a huge organic buffet dinner we also manage some star-gazing,

looking for constellations with an Ancient Greek myth to tell. As we're 40 miles from Athens the night sky is black and the view over to the backlit Temple of Poseidon on the headland is truly magical.

Grecotel, the largest hotel chain in Greece, is proud of its green credentials: it set up an environmental department back in 1992; persuaded Coca-Cola to reintroduce returnable glass bottles to Greece rather than plastic; and set up a traditional farm in Crete which supplies many of its hotels with organic produce.

But it is in the luxury hotels business and you can stay at Cape Sounio without missing out on any creature comforts. It is also a great place to relax, knowing that your children are learning about saving the planet rather than stringing beads in the children's club. And if they get bored they can always help Joseph with his composting.

T Have a favourite Green Space? timesonline.co.uk/greenspaces