

Move, rest, repeat

From e-foiling and sea scootering to sound baths, padel and spa sessions, **Lucy Miller** tried Sicily's most active holiday – and returned completely relaxed

Sicily has always been on my travel bucket list – short flights (just two and a half hours), white sands and turquoise seas – but when I finally found myself in those turquoise waters, with a beautiful reef brushing against my toes, all I could think was, 'What on earth are you doing?'.

The reason for this? I was trying out an electric e-foil and nose-diving over and over again into the Mediterranean Sea at such a speed that I felt incredibly grateful for my impact vest. We'd already spent more than an hour out on the water paddleboarding, zipping around on sea scooters and snorkelling before it was time to try e-foiling. And if you've never heard of it (I hadn't), an e-foil is essentially an electric surfboard fitted with

a hydrofoil beneath the water. Controlled by a handheld remote, it uses an electric motor to propel you forwards. As you build speed, the foil lifts the board above the surface, creating the sensation of gliding silently above the sea. It sounds effortless. It isn't, but that's part of the fun.

In truth, I probably wouldn't have tried it at all had it not been for the encouragement of the staff. In fact, that became the theme of my entire trip.

The activities

I first heard about e-foiling during a guided 5K run across just about every terrain imaginable around Neilson X Mangia's Torre del Barone Resort: sand, steps, trails and one whacking great hill. Our guide

▼ Mark Petchey helped Lucy improve her tennis skills



had convinced me to give the e-foil a go, so I did. But first, there was a vinyasa yoga class, an abs & core session and, naturally, a coffee stop. It's no wonder my legs were already feeling pretty tired.

Luckily, I'd fuelled up properly. Breakfast had consisted of eggs on toast, followed by a cannolo or two, and enough coffee from Giuseppe, the resort's resident barista, to power me through until lunch. Now, at 11am, here I was in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, trying out some of the resort's most exciting watersports.

After an hour or so, our instructor asked if I was done with the e-foil and I very quickly nodded. I had a padel coaching session with former professional tennis player Mark Petchey – who has coached both Andy Murray and Emma Raducanu – to get to. Then there was an e-bike ride into the nearby spa town of Sciacca. But first: lunch, and perhaps a little sunbathing on the adults-only Calm Beach.

That's the magic of a Neilson holiday. One minute you're sea scootering across the Mediterranean, the next you're stretched out on a sun lounger with an iced coffee in hand. Somehow, the constant activity never feels exhausting. Instead, it leaves you feeling energised, accomplished and, surprisingly, more relaxed than when you arrived.

New to Neilson

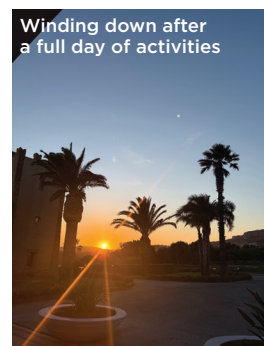
I'll admit, I didn't know much about Neilson holidays before my trip. Founded in 1978 and voted Best Holiday Company 2025, the brand describes itself as 'the home of good energy' – a place where freedom, encouragement and fun come together to create unforgettable holidays.

And bring people together it does. From the moment you arrive, there's a buzz about the place that's hard to ignore. The staff are incredibly knowledgeable, passionate about coaching and enthusiastic about helping guests get the most from their holiday. Everywhere you look, guests are on the move – setting off on bike rides, returning from the tennis courts, or taking part in the Workout of the Day on the shaded fitness deck overlooking the sea.

Take our first day, for instance. We arrive after a very early start and, following a guided tour of the hotel, a Mediterranean buffet lunch and a stroll up to the courts, we're overtaken by runners, hikers and cyclists heading off to explore the scenic trails surrounding Sciacca. As we approach the racket sports hub, a tennis session is already in full swing. Nearby, padel matches are underway, while



▲ There are plenty of opportunities for relaxation



Winding down after a full day of activities



Getting around on the resort's mini train

another group is giving pickleball a go. With six tennis courts, two floodlit padel courts and six pickleball courts, there's plenty of space to play – and everyone seems to be having a great time while making new friends along the way. Think: competitive spirit plus friendly holiday banter.

Before long, we find ourselves caught up in the atmosphere, too. We join the resort's Superdrills session – a fun, fast-paced way to improve your tennis while hitting as many balls as possible. Miss one? No problem. Another is already on its way.

The concept is simple: hit around 300 balls in an hour, building endurance, confidence and technique through repetition, all under the watchful – and very encouraging – eye of a coach.

Sixty minutes later and perhaps, unsurprisingly, new skills and new friendships have formed. We take turns hitting forehands, backhands, volleys and lobs, laughing our way through drills while getting to know fellow guests. Before you know it, you're on first-name terms with people you'll continue bumping into around the resort all week.

It's the perfect introduction to the Neilson experience: active, sociable and relaxed, with like-minded people quickly becoming familiar faces around the pool, on the courts and over dinner in the evening.

As we wander back towards the main hub of the hotel, some guests are taking part in guided

open-water swimming lessons while others are attempting SUP yoga – yoga performed on a paddleboard, which looks far harder than it sounds. There's a whirlwind of activity everywhere, but here's the thing: while you can happily spend your days relaxing on the beach, unwinding in the spa or topping up your tan by the pool, the activities are genuinely infectious. You can't help but want to join in – which says a lot, considering I'm usually one of those people who's perfectly happy to spend an entire holiday horizontal with a good book.

The food

As impressive as the activities are, I'd be doing the resort a disservice if I didn't talk about the food. Neilson seems to have mastered the art of the buffet. During our five-day stay, every meal we enjoyed – breakfast, lunch and dinner (although only breakfast and dinner are included in the package) – was fresh and varied. Although the buffet changed daily, the quality never wavered. One day, it might be a selection of freshly made pasta dishes; the next, grilled sea bass, tuna steaks or cod served alongside colourful Mediterranean

salads, grilled vegetables, quinoa and potatoes. For those wanting something from a menu, the Lime Pool Bar served everything from tasty chicken Caesar salads and wraps to burgers, risotto and pasta dishes – all served poolside and absolutely delicious.

Beyond the main restaurant, guests can dine at several speciality venues. We enjoyed wood-fired pizzas at Al Grano and spent a memorable evening at Donna Floriana, the resort's Sicilian bistro, tucking into traditional Sicilian appetisers including polpettine di carne (meatballs), polpette di sarde (sardines rolled into balls with pine nuts and pecorino cheese) and panelle (crispy chickpea flour fritters) before moving on to a perfectly cooked steak and finishing with some tiramisu.

Needless to say, we were always well fuelled for whatever adventure we'd signed up for next on the Neilson app.

Good energy

It's also worth talking about the atmosphere at the resort. I've rarely encountered such a welcoming vibe. Guests greet each other with warmth, while staff somehow remember your name and always

▼ Chill out on canopied sun beds



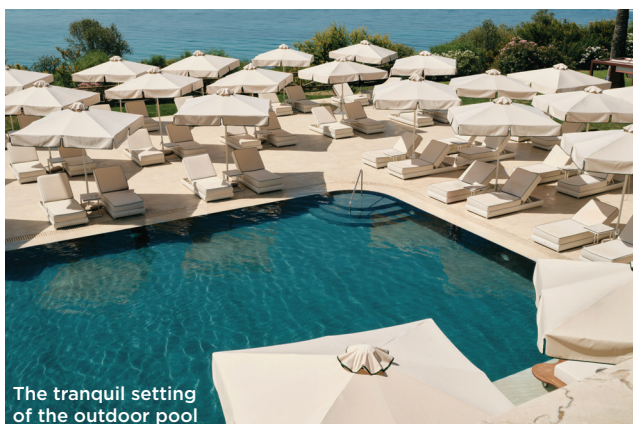
Staff and guests enjoy a run on the beach



Heated spa beds soothe aching muscles

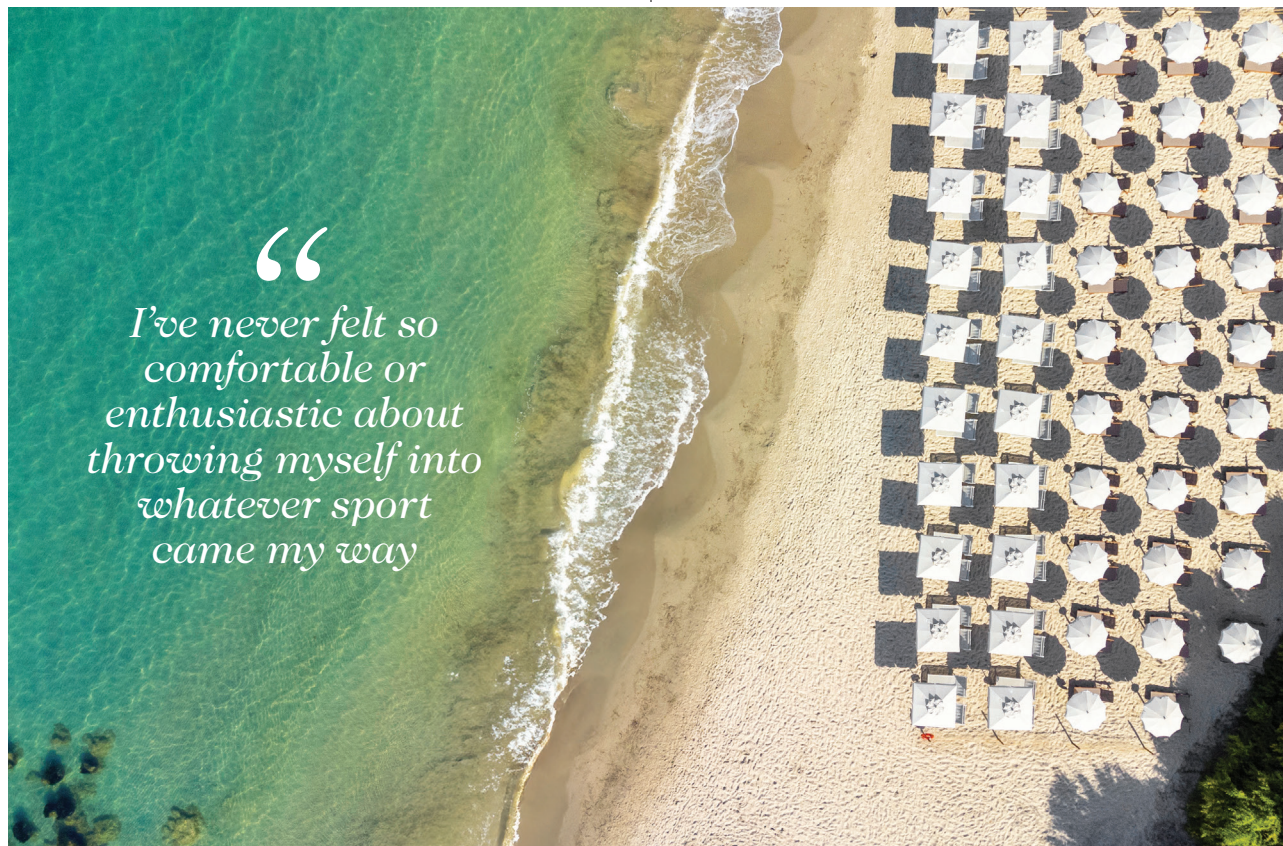


Take a dip in the spa's thermal pool



The tranquil setting of the outdoor pool

Words: Lucy Miller | Photography: Neilson, Lucy Miller



“
I’ve never felt so
comfortable or
enthusiastic about
throwing myself into
whatever sport
came my way

▲ Enjoying the sunshine at the appropriately named Calm Beach

seem genuinely interested in how your day is going. It’s a small touch, but it makes a world of difference. Whether around the pool, at dinner or in the evenings, everyone seems relaxed and genuinely happy to be there. Maybe it was the warm Sicilian sunshine, perhaps the endorphins from all the activity, or simply the sense of calm that comes from starting the day with yoga and ending it with a sound bath or spa session.

The spa itself is a peaceful retreat, complete with two indoor thermal pools, a sauna, a Turkish bath, an outdoor Jacuzzi and, for the brave and recovery-minded, an ice bath.

Every guest receives an hour’s access to the spa, which can be booked in advance, and there’s also the option to indulge in a treatment during your stay. Think the Power Breakfast Facial, a Work It Out Deep Tissue Massage, or a Hot Stone Neck and Shoulder Treatment – exactly the sort of thing that helps you recover from an active day and bring you back to self for some pampering and quiet time.

Trying new things

Whatever the reason, I’ve never felt so comfortable or so enthusiastic about throwing myself into whatever sport came my way while on holiday – no matter how new it was, or how bad I thought I might be at it. I’ve returned home feeling energised, inspired and determined to continue my new-found love of tennis and padel. I’m still telling anyone who will listen about my e-foil experience, sea scooter adventures and lessons with Mark Petchey. But more than that, I’ve come home with something I wasn’t expecting

– confidence. Confidence to try new things and to say yes to opportunities that would normally have felt outside my comfort zone.

I threw myself in at the deep end with e-foiling, sea scootering and making friends on the tennis courts, and I’m already looking forward to doing it all again. Perhaps I’ll choose Turkey next, or maybe Greece or Mauritius. With 10 Beach Clubs to choose from, this feels very much like a beginning rather than the end – and it’s something I’d love my children to experience, too.

If I can get this much out of stepping outside my comfort zone, meeting new people and trying sports I’d never considered before, I can only imagine what they’d get out of it. With kids’ clubs for children aged four months to 13 years, plus plenty of activities to keep teens active, it’s safe to say they’ll probably make as many friends as I did. They might even go back to school top of their PE class and itching to get a family tennis game going, too – which is never a bad thing. 🏆

▼ Lucy’s trip gave her confidence to try new things



TRAVEL FACTS

A seven-night stay at Neilson’s Mangia’s Torre del Barone resort in Sciacca, Sicily, starts from £1,339 per person, for two adults sharing a deluxe room with sea view departing from Gatwick, October 2, 2027.

The holiday includes return flights, airport transfers, activities and activity tuition, plus breakfast and dinner. Departures are available from airports across the UK, including London, Scotland, the Midlands and Bristol. Visit neilson.co.uk