

# FIND YOUR BLISS

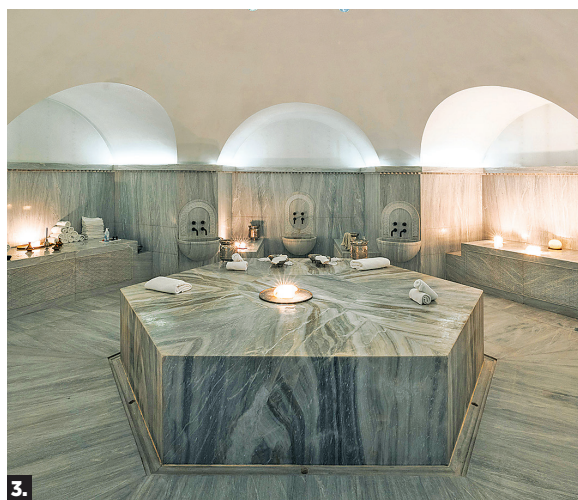
## GREECE'S EUPHORIA RETREAT OFFERS WELLNESS WITHOUT DENIAL



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**1.** While Euphoria offers plenty of classes, treatments and lectures, guests are also encouraged to slow down and relax poolside. **2.** Guests can book the Leoncini dining room (decorated with art and antiques from owner Marina Efraimoglou's private collection) for special occasions. **3.** Candlelit and hushed, the marble-clad Byzantine *hammam* room provides a luxurious setting for exfoliation and massage. **4.** Nestled just below the Mystras archaeological site, the resort makes a great home base for hikes. **5.** No visit to Euphoria would be complete without a swim in the domed indoor pool, modeled on Istanbul's Hagia Sophia and tricked out with underwater recordings of dolphins.



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BY JACKIE COOPERMAN

**I**n a sunny hilltop village on Greece's Peloponnese peninsula, Marina Efraimoglou has pulled off a deft wellness feat: creating Euphoria Retreat, where Greek and Eastern medical traditions provide an experience both clinical and pampering. "Ancient Greek philosophers embraced life with joy, sensuality and excitement," says Efraimoglou, a 62-year-old Hodgkin lymphoma survivor. A reformed investment banker, she opened the property in 2018, following decades of studying Eastern medicine and classical philosophy. "Euphoria is not linked to sacrifice and denial."

I visited last month, following two particularly hectic weeks touring colleges with my daughter. Straight from a nine-hour red-eye flight to Athens, which I spent horribly close to an incessantly shrieking toddler, I relished the opportunity to test Euphoria's restorative ethos.

The hotel's driver guided me to the car and offered a plush pillow so that I could lie down for the nearly 155-mile drive. I woke to views of wisteria-covered stone houses and fields of olive, orange and lemon trees.

The 45-room wellness resort offers a distinctly holistic approach, based on ancient Greek theories that five elements — water, wood, fire, earth and metal — govern our existence, and that balancing them leads to optimal emotional and physical health. There are optional hikes, lectures and exercise classes, a pilates room and a pristine fitness center full of Technogym equipment, but guests are also encouraged to idle around the lushly landscaped outdoor pool.

My stay began with a quick pinprick blood test to assess my glucose and glutathione levels. Then I wore a mask contraption called a Pnoé device for a respiratory test evaluating how I metabolize protein and carbohydrates, discussing the results with a nutritionist. (Visitors focused on weight loss can opt for more comprehensive metabolic testing, including urine analysis, and have their meals planned accordingly.)

With those baselines established, it was time to enjoy the four-story spa.

After laps in the outdoor pool, I swam through a door to the circular indoor version. Inspired by Istanbul's Hagia Sophia mosque, it has a skylit dome and an oculus, perfect to gaze upon while floating. Underwater speakers play a recording of dolphins and whales, while massage jets spray in 13 semi-enclosed individual pools around the perimeter.

Suitably relaxed, I visited every stop in the adjacent tepidarium: the sauna, the steam room, the icy cold plunge pool, the multi-headed shower and finally, the heated, tiled chaise longues.

An hour later, after a massage, I found myself in the Spa Oceana Hydration Pod, a hydrotherapy machine that looks like a cross between a small spaceship and a bathtub. A therapist guided me to a platform suspended over the tub. She lowered its lid, activating a series of Vichy showerheads, targeting my entire body with alternating pressure and temperatures, and triggering a flashing

series of colored lights. It was high tech, but also high touch. The therapist followed the hydrotherapy with dry brushing, a full-body mud mask, and a scalp and face massage. The name Euphoria in no longer seemed hyperbolic.

Euphoria's spa menu includes more than 50 treatments, addressing concerns aesthetic (cellulite, wrinkles), physical (acupuncture, lymphatic drainage) and spiritual (chakra balancing, reiki). There are three-to-21-day programs targeting weight management, yoga and nutrigenomics. The resort also hosts retreats addressing emotional trauma and leadership and interpersonal skills. The five-day Odysseus Journey prompts guests to identify their *nostros* (reason for being) through a guided reading of Homer's "Odyssey," forest meditation and movement classes.

The second day of my visit, I woke early to explore the beautiful ruins of Mystras, an abandoned Byzantine trading city just a mile from Euphoria. Hiking amid wildflowers, I visited remains of a 13th-century castle, enjoying the sweeping views over Sparta. A rocky downhill path led to palaces, churches, monasteries and villas, many with original flooring and remnants of frescoes, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries.

Dusty and exhilarated, I returned to Euphoria's Byzantine-inspired *hammam*. I lay on a marble plinth in the candlelit room as I was scrubbed, rinsed, covered in bubbles and massaged, emerging cleaner, lighter and — yes — slightly euphoric.