



Gift from THE GODS

Euphoria Retreat, Mystras

Following a spate of new retreat and hotel openings, wellness tourism is set to be a key factor in Greece's economic recovery, writes **Fiona Vlemmiks**

Despite being crippled by years of economic crisis, Greece's tourism figures have steadily grown over the past four years and are expected to achieve the highest growth rate in a decade in 2019.

These encouraging statistics, coupled with the country's natural attributes and the global appeal of the wellness market, have caused the Government to prioritise promoting the development of Greece's health and wellness tourism alongside other areas of tourist potential.

Speaking during a press conference at the World Travel Market in November last year, Greek tourism minister Elena Kountoura said that 2018 was the best year for Greece's tourism in almost a decade and that the market was expected to grow by a further 2.5% in 2019.

"This was a performance beyond everyone's expectations," said Kountoura. Key to the success, she

continued, was extending the tourism season in Greece, establishing it as a "365 days a year destination".

To enable this, Kountoura said the development of "thematic tourism forms" such as health and wellness would be a strategic priority in 2019 and it's not difficult to see why. In addition to its outstanding natural beauty, a clement climate and good travel infrastructure, Greece is the birthplace of medicine and, as such, has a long history of healing. It boasts 850 thermal and mineral springs in different locations across the country.

Global wellness players have spotted this potential and made sizeable investment into the country. Greece's first wellbeing big hitter Euphoria Retreat opened in 2018 in the Peloponnese peninsula, and entering into the Greek market for the first time this year is Four Seasons, with Astir Palace in Athens, and Banyan Tree with Angsana in Corfu, both due to open in Q1 of 2019.

ANGSANA CORFU

Tipped to open this summer is Angsana Corfu, marking the appearance of the Banyan Tree Group in the Greek market. Spa treatments combine Angsana's ancient Asian wisdom with modern Western techniques and the extensive menu offers more than 50 treatments. Facilities comprise 16 treatment rooms, a gym area, 25-metre indoor pool and an outdoor yoga deck facing the Ionian Sea. Guests can also try signature Angsana innovations such as the revitalising Rainmist Experience, which combines a rain shower and steam bath with body treatments, or unwind with a signature massage, which works on key pressure points to strengthen inner qi. Wellness activities for the family include a mindfulness trail.



EUPHORIA RETREAT, MYSTRAS

Having opened last year, Euphoria Retreat fuses ancient Taoist and Hellenic philosophies with Chinese and Hippocratic medicine. The five elements are the cornerstones of the retreat's healing philosophy, with wellbeing programmes revolving around earth, fire, metal, water and wood. The concept of happiness and healing through joy is also an integral part of its philosophy, hence the name Euphoria, which in its original Greek form translates as "a state of happiness and bliss".

Guests receive bespoke guidance from a team of multidisciplinary experts spanning mentors, energy therapists and doctors. There's a wide choice of massage therapies, signature bodywork experiences, holistic healing, wellness coaching, nutrition and meditation classes, and fitness activities including, yoga, qigong and Pilates.

FOUR SEASON ASTIR PALACE, ATHENS

Set to open on March 29 (when WSW went to press), this wellness complex is Four Seasons' first foray into Greece. Located just minutes from Athens city centre in a pine-clad peninsula jutting into the Aegean Sea, there's a strong emphasis on hydrotherapy – inspired not only by the location, but by Ancient Greek bathing rituals and Hippocratic healing.

Extensive spa facilities include the hydrotherapy zone in the Fountain House, which includes a lap and indoor pool, aroma steam grotto, hammam, vitality pool, chill showers, relaxation lounge, eight treatment rooms, two suites and a spa bar. Guests can also workout in the two Fitness Centres and Wellness Studio. In addition to the ample range of bath experiences, unique massages and several relaxation journeys star on the menu.



RIVIERA OLYMPIA & AQUA PARK, KYLLINI

Inspired by the rotunda at the nearby Ancient Olympia, the Elixir Thalassotherapy Centre at the Riviera Olympia and Aqua Park in Kyllini is designed to emulate the look and feel of a complex of Greek temples. The luxury retreat combines the age-old wisdom of the Greeks, who valued the healing properties of the sea, with modern wellness programmes to relax the body and rejuvenate the spirit.

Guests can enjoy hydrotherapy in the thalasso pool, lap pool, open-air whirlpools, saunas and steam rooms. There is also a relaxation area, gym, juice bar and treatment rooms, with rituals ranging from full-body mud wraps and facials to caviar therapies. **WSW**