



SLEEP MASTERS

# The Magical Euphoria Retreat: The Story

*Interview by Yan Vermeesch*

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The XO Private Founder, Yvan Vermeesch, sits down for the exclusive interview series with the mastermind behind the concept, Mrs Marina Efraimoglou, the owner of the Euphoria Retreat. Find out more about the story behind this mystical holistic property nestled on the pine-clad hillside of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mystras

**When did you start your destination spa adventure? What lies at the base of it? What motivated you?**

Euphoria Retreat opened its doors in July 2018, but the idea behind it started a long time ago. It represents my personal journey of transformation. It is a vision which has been a lifetime in the making, made possible not only by many opportunities and challenges experienced on the way but also by the support of those who have shared my dream.

Overcoming cancer in my late 20s, I was driven to success but ultimately also exhaustion in the world of investment banking. It was only then that I sought to bring much-needed balance back to my life. After this pivotal personal experience, I shifted my attention from the financial world into the worlds of holistic medicine and self-actualization. Committed to leading a more spiritual life, I studied in depth with very well-known pioneers in the field including Deepak Chopra and travelled the world sourcing knowledge and experience in its most authentic form. After completing my studies in Chinese Medicine, I worked in transformational healing for over a decade.

As well as beginning my work in transformational healing by leading workshops and retreats, I visited many healing places and spas around the world. Each time I was filled with ideas and inspiration, but also the feeling that something was missing. Not so much in the amenities and treatments, but in the soul of the place. I discovered that the answer lay in my Greek heritage. For Ancient Greek philosophers, individual freedom of choice was a cornerstone of their world view. Most of all, they viewed life as joyful, sensual, full of exciting potential for growth and discovery and this inspired me to create my own place which would incorporate all these aspects.

**How did you choose your corner of paradise and get started?**

It took me a decade to find a suitable location for Euphoria Retreat, but only a second to make my decision. The UNESCO-protected town of Mystras, in the mythical Peloponnese, encapsulates all of this – the balance and power that inspired the Spartans in the 5th century BC, the energy and mysticism that allowed Byzantine intellectualism and art to take root a millennium later, and an incredible life-force that continues to allow nature to flourish.

**How long did it take to get your property up and running? What were the major challenges and hurdles you came across?**

Euphoria Retreat is a tourist investment of more than € 20 million, offering specialized wellness services to specific affluent audiences. Despite its incomparable beauty, Lakonia and specifically Mystras are less popular touristic destinations. However, Peloponnese has been lately considered one of the best destinations in the world, with many new high-end hospitality investments to show up recently, and as one of the safest places to travel, as very low covid-19 cases have been reported. Moreover, Greece is a country well-known and strongly connected for sun and sea vacations. And even though ancient Greece had a direct relationship with wellbeing (Hippocrates), the modern Greek world did not have any strong connection with wellness tourism.

That was a challenge for us, but also an opportunity, as to place Greece within the wellness travel map. Another important challenge that we had to overcome, was the location of Euphoria Retreat. Euphoria is placed next to Byzantine castle of Mystras, which has been preserved as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The protection of such an important cultural and historical sight is of very high importance and we needed about 10 years to get permission for the property.





*The Euphoria Retreat Spa offers a transformative experience at every level*

**Was starting a hospitality business a natural development/evolution for you? What did you do before getting into the hotel business?**

I come from an entrepreneurial family and in my early years, I had a successful career in the financial sector, founding the investment banking business Telesis with my two partners, in 1993. In 2000, I was awarded the National Award for Growth and Innovation, in recognition of my role as the only female major shareholder, and specifically as President and Managing director of a bank.

The life-changing health issue I have experienced, made me understand that I should focus more on myself and on a healthier and more balanced lifestyle. I sought to bring much-needed balance back to my life and a visit to a destination spa inspired me to start my meditation and yoga practice. I did not have prior experience in hospitality, but I wanted to share my experiences with others and bring balance into their lives too. Then, I promised myself, that one day I would create a place in Greece, where people would feel totally nurtured and guided to start their own personal journey, and so I did.

**What does the Euphoria Retreat name refer to? How did you come up with the name?**

Euphoria Retreat's name is inspired by the Greek word 'euphoria', that it comes from two words, the word 'eu', which in Greek means 'good', 'well' and the word 'pherein' which means 'bringing' or 'carrying'. Thus, the meaning of the

word 'euphoria' is that what brings the good. The word 'eu' is used in many words like 'eu-zin' which means simply to live well with joy in order to reach the state of euphoria.

Ancient Greeks like Plato and Hippocrates believed and craved a life where every aspect would be celebrated and enjoyed – in other words, a blissful life. This innate admiration for life is what we also have and support at Euphoria Retreat.

**Which markets are your most important markets today?  
Which markets will you focus on more into the future?**

Euphoria Retreat is not only focusing on people who are familiar with wellbeing and are considered to be spa-goers, but also on luxury travellers and people who want to rejuvenate, relax, detox emotionally and physically. Since we opened our doors, we have been mainly targeting European markets that are considered mature and familiar with the wellness philosophy, like the UK, DACH, Switzerland, France, Belgium, and of course the USA.

Currently, the world is going through challenging and unprecedented times, which have totally transformed our everyday lives, our habits, and plans, as well as the landscape of the travel and tourism industry. Consequently, Euphoria Retreat has been also affected, something that highlighted the importance of the domestic market as an audience.

Greece has always been the main target audience for Euphoria, and now more than ever, we have the opportunity to introduce the meaning of holistic wellness to Greeks, share with them our unique philosophy, and further educate them in a healthier and more balanced way of life.

However, we are optimistic about the future of wellness



*Marina Efraimoglou, the owner of the Euphoria Retreat*

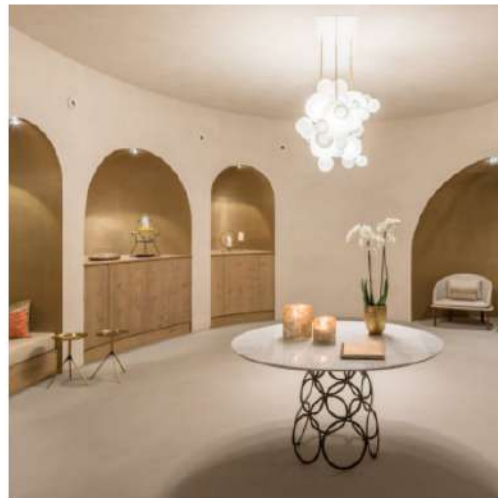
travel and we are keen to make plans for expansion into other international markets too.

**The industry has changed significantly over the years since you started your adventure. Which element, trend or similar has impacted your business most?**

Indeed, the wellness travel industry has gone through a lot of changes and has been affected by many trends that arise now and then.

During this last year of the pandemic, the sector has seen unpredictable changes and has gained a lot of popularity and attention. Even people who were not familiar with spirituality, or were not considered to be wellness-oriented, are starting to feel the need for self-care and self-actualization and transformation.

They are keener to live a healthier and more balanced life that will defend them from external threats, as for example this virus and all the emotional burdens this situation has created.



*The therapy rooms inspire intimacy and reflection*





*Euphoria Yoga and Mindfulness*

**What does the word 'experiential' mean to you and does it play a role of importance in your business?**

Experiential for me is what touches not only your senses, but also your heart and soul. This that uplifts your spirit and show you the way to real transformation and growth.

In Euphoria Retreat, every moment is experiential, from the way our people will welcome you to the premises, to the architecture and design, the amazing nature, and our healing food. This is not a trend for us, but a part of our DNA and philosophy. This is what we do and offer – an experiential journey to healing and real change.

**Could you share a most inspiring or hilarious anecdote that happened at one of your fine properties?**

Back at the beginning of 2018, during the pre-opening phase of Euphoria Retreat, we were about to welcome and host our first press visit from a top journalist. However, the night before her visit, there was a huge crane on the premises, as part of them were still under construction.

What seems hilarious now, but was proved really challenging back then, was the fact that almost 400 people worked together in a few hours and in last-minute mode, to remove the crane from the premises, so everything would be perfect for our visitor. This might be a very difficult task, but after all, it proves how teamwork, passion and hard work can move mountains.



*At the very heart of the spa experience is the innovative Sphere Pool*

**How would you best define the DNA of Euphoria Retreat? What differentiates your property from the competition?**

Euphoria Retreat is a new entry in the Wellness industry but has already been recognized by some of the most popular media, awards, and wellness organizations around the world. What makes Euphoria Retreat unique, is that it is found in a mythical location with great historical and cultural importance, next to well-known Ancient Sparta, and within a totally natural environment. A symbiotic relationship with nature and culture is at the heart of the Euphoria Retreat experience, where someone can start their healing process. Many destination spas around the world follow specific methods and have their own philosophy, but the 'Euphoria Methodos', is unique and comes from our core DNA. This Methodos encompasses our therapies and retreats, our food, our location & design, and even the way in which our staff interact with guests, with ethos and integrity. It is an approach built on a unique blending of ancient Hellenic and Chinese philosophies and practices and a belief that we each can become our own healer.

The ancient world's five elements and their related energies find expression and balance within our therapies and retreats, which are personalized by a team of consultants and therapists, according to scientifically proven testing methods and bespoke healing plans. Also, on leaving Euphoria Retreat, guests receive guidance and support on how to incorporate what they have learnt, into their daily lives. Above all, they are encouraged to see life as a celebration and transformation as a joyous process.

**What are your plans for the future? How do you see your business developing over the next five to ten years?** The main purpose I had when I created Euphoria Retreat was to help people find their balance, be reconnected with their inner selves, and find their personal path to happiness and purpose of life. As already mentioned above, we had developed a new philosophy, called "Euphoria Methodos", a method which continuously evolves and grows. But there are more to come. I hope that Euphoria Retreat will expand further in the future, not only in Greece but also in other regions as well. Finally, we are also looking for a city centre, which will be an extension of our practices at Euphoria Retreat.

**What would be your most important piece of advice to give to someone wishing to start a similar adventure?**

Our motto at Euphoria is 'Your life, your journey' - this is our tagline and the main message we want to spread to people, that they should always have a freedom of choice to follow their own path and discover their own way to reach their true potentials.