

THE 50 DIARIES

# Can You Have A Truly Relaxing Spa Break With Your Partner In Tow?

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BY KATHLEEN BAIRD-MURRAY

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There's a saying: the couple that spas together, stays together. And from the outset, I have to say, for this couple at least, it was looking good. We were booked into a three night Couples' Retreat at [Euphoria spa](#), in the UNESCO site of Mystras in the Peloponnese, southern Greece, and it seemed a great way to cement a four years-plus relationship: with some sunshine, some relaxation, and a few massages for good measure. Perhaps, as we said to one another in the car on the way there from Athens, dark grey clouds looming dramatically over distant mountains, if this worked well we should even do this once a year, as a sort of physical and emotional M.O.T. Keep us alive together for longer.

*Read more: [The Best Spa Breaks In The UK](#)*

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We stopped en route in a small port and ate the largest bowl of chips you ever saw in front of the world's second largest yacht, just in case this turned out to be one of those spas where you're expected to survive on a lettuce leaf. We wondered how much we'd sell the second largest yacht in the world for if someone gifted it to us, and what we would do with the money. My boyfriend/lover/partner (because we still don't know what to call one another), said he wouldn't buy his child a house, but would help with a deposit; I said, I'd buy *everyone* houses, but not give them a penny after that. And we were proud. Here we were, not even at the spa yet, and look at us go. Ready to listen to one another's needs, embrace our differences, and eat chips together.

Because apparently not everyone finds spa-ing together that easy. According to the founder, Marina Efraimoglou, the first rule of co-spa-ing is that you both have to be tuned into the experience. "We once had a couple here where the man ran away," she says. "In the beginning some men are sceptical. But when they leave here, there is a shift." The trick apparently is to engage men with physical training and massages, and then before you know it, they're happy to talk about other treatments. "We don't push anyone here."

Equally, if your relationship is going through a wobbly patch, a spa can be problematic, although Euphoria does offer a more spiritually intense programme for those who'd like to go that extra relationship mile. "A lot of things can surface, and if you don't have the time, you won't be able to process them. At least a week is needed to do the emotional work, but if you're both ready to work, we have seen miracles happen."



Euphoria Retreat STAVROS HABAKIS

One especially bonding treatment Efraimoglou recommends to all couples is the Couples' Watsu [a form of water massage therapy]. "You're in the pool receiving Watsu, and then your partner receives Watsu, and then the therapist shows you how to do some basic moves, and we leave you both on your own in the pool to try them out." I can see how this might work on paper – the art of Watsu when performed by a professional is truly transformative, as your body is gently cradled and massaged in the water, all the while leaving you feeling completely weightless and deeply relaxed. But me with my [frozen shoulder](#) and my boyfriend, at his height? "Watsu is about trust. You have to trust the person holding you, but equally, you're taking care of the other, so it's also about balance.

In life, invariably, one person in the couple takes too much care of the other, and so we have to learn as a couple how to be ready for balance.”

We settle instead for the hammam, where we sit like babies (or perhaps Sumo wrestlers) on marble slabs, and are taken care of by a therapist, who is tiny but very strong. We are washed, scrubbed, and washed and scrubbed again, before we move like Teletubbies, gingerly over the wet floors, taking in the ice cold plunge pools, the intense heat of the sauna, the dripping wet warmth of the steam room, enjoying the vast space to ourselves. Then we relax on the thermal beds, with no idea what time it is, or how long we’ve spent, comfortable in our cocoon – not speaking, just calm. “The hammam is so important because the level of communication here comes from a more vulnerable and tender place,” says Efraimoglou. “You have to be physically okay with one another, of course.”

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Could you unwind this much on any other holiday, or is it specific to a spa? Personally, I think a spa brings joint relaxation to a whole new level. Euphoria is built on the Chinese principles of the Five Elements – which separates nature into five categories, each reflecting patterns in human health and behaviour – with a healthy dose of ancient Greek philosophy being an additional component. Materially, that means everything is based around a circular structure, with a spiral staircase at the centre of the spa that seems to slow us down as we move from floor to floor. The colours are a reflection of the five

elements of life, with earthy browns, greys like metal, burnt oranges like fire, watery blues and airy greens.

When it comes to treatments, the Five Elements aspect ensures there is space to be both individual and couple, with each taking what they need from it. At the outset of our stay we each had to fill in a detailed questionnaire in order to determine which of our elemental needs most needed addressing. The most alarming question for me was “What is your greatest fear?” to which I answered, “DEATH.” Taking all my answers into account, Earth was designated as my element, and I perused the accompanying notes about it eagerly, fascinated to read it was common for mothers to find themselves feeling disappointed, resentful sometimes, and needing to make “little homes” everywhere for themselves – places that weren’t necessarily physical spaces, but were with us wherever we are.



Later, as we sat together by the pool and the afternoon slid into evening, the promise of another absolutely delicious and very filling dinner lay ahead of us (note: the pre-spa chips were not needed), and the blazing sun had found a gap between the pine trees

above us to shoot though and keep us warm in its spotlight, I contemplated the Earth-focused massage I'd just had; where my therapist's fingers had moved precisely, gracefully, firmly in vertical lines up the backs and fronts of my legs, teasing out knots along the way, and aiming to rebalance my neglected sense of Earth. And I felt peaceful.

"What did you write down for your greatest fear?" I asked my boyfriend, in our new spirit of Co-spa-ing.

"Oh, I didn't answer that one," he said.

And I realised that that's the beauty of going to a spa together. You're with each other, but you'll still always do things your own way. And at least he didn't run away.

*Rooms start from £380 (€456) per night for two people in a Superior deluxe room with breakfast. Programme costs £490 (€590) for two days. [www.euphoriaretreat.com](http://www.euphoriaretreat.com)*

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BY KATHLEEN BAIRD-MURRAY

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