

# Spirit level

When a Greek retreat promised fitness, fun and rediscovering your sense of adventure, Hattie Parish jumped at the chance

I don't know about you, but I've been feeling pretty disempowered the last couple of years. With pandemic anxiety rumbling on, limited freedoms and the death of spontaneity, life was all feeling a bit 'meh'. So when I was invited to 'unleash my Spartan spirit of adventure', I leapt at the chance. Fitness, culture, and beautiful Greek countryside? Yes please.

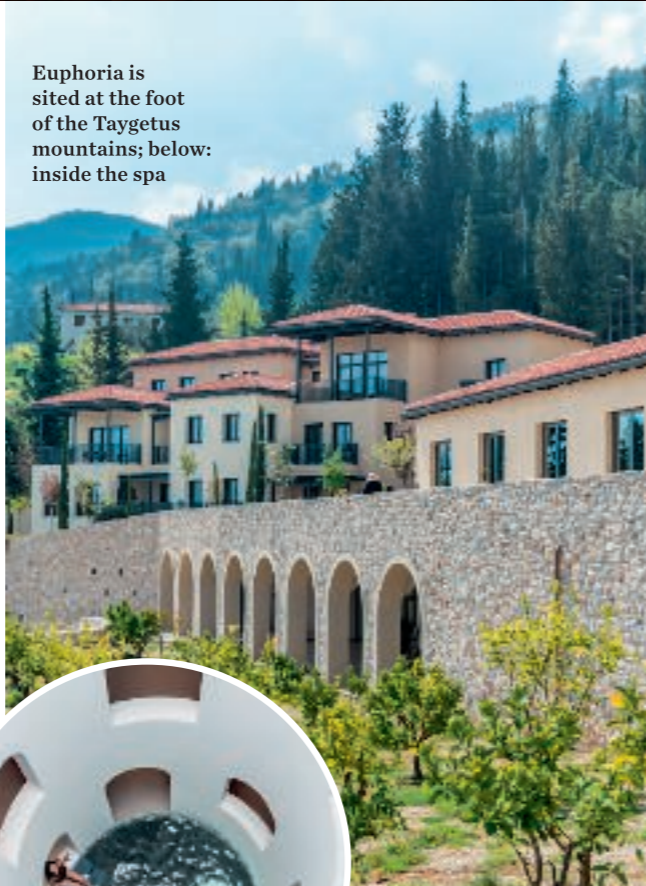
You'll find this invigorating blend at Euphoria Retreat in the Peloponnese region of southern Greece – an area renowned for ancient religious sites, mountain views and the birth of the Olympic games. Euphoria consists of a scattering of terracotta-roofed buildings at the foot of the Taygetus mountains, overlooking the town of Mystras.

## Sacred roots

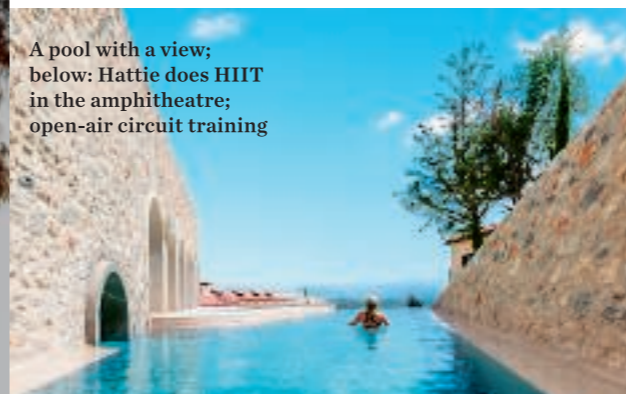
Founder Marina Eframoglou was formerly an investment banker. After recovering from Hodgkin lymphoma, she trained in wellness practices, from energy healing to Chinese medicine. Those twin traditions of Greek philosophy and Chinese medicine are at the heart of what Euphoria stands for but Marina still needed a location. In 2007, she found it at this Unesco World Heritage Site, bordered by cypress forests and studded with gnarled olive trees and citrus groves.

Food at Euphoria is based around locally sourced produce, including herbs from the gardens. Think fresh

Euphoria is sited at the foot of the Taygetus mountains; below: inside the spa



A pool with a view; below: Hattie does HIIT in the amphitheatre; open-air circuit training



## BOOK IT

The Spartan Spirit of Adventure at Euphoria Retreat costs from €2,159 (around £1,800) for 3 days, including accommodation and meals. The five-night programme costs from €3,920 (around £3,200). Flights to Athens are available through BA. For more info, visit [euphoriaretreat.com](http://euphoriaretreat.com)

Stack up on healthy pancakes; above: inside an executive suite



fish, wholegrains, salads and heaps of veg – and no added salt. As my training programme is as high-octane as it gets, my personal nutrition plan allows me free rein over the menu. The sea bream and saffron fish soup are favourites, and there's a wide range of vegan options – the buckwheat pancakes are exceptional. Tea is encouraged over coffee, and alcohol is available only on request.

Most people travel here alone and phones are banned from the table, so mealtimes tend to be silent, which is initially unsettling. But I soon get used to it and find it soothing, particularly after an intense day of activity.

## Natural highs

The Spartan Spirit of Adventure programme promises a playful way to explore the region, with amphitheatre-based HIIT, a mini triathlon in a former Roman port, hikes overlooking the ruins of Sparta, plus a generous range of classes on offer in the spa.

My first day finds me on the mat for a calming Vinyasa practice, training in and outdoors, trekking the surrounding forest, and, inevitably, falling asleep during group meditation. Yes, I snored. Yes, it was humiliating.

Trainer Ioannis takes us through outdoor HIIT, TRX and reps-based workouts, Tabata in the gym, plus numerous cycles and runs. I embark on two mountain sunrise hikes – one around 14th-century castle and monastery ruins,

another to a 15th-century church built in a cave in the rockface. The views over Sparta and the mountains are spectacular.

The amphitheatre training is a highlight. After a morning hike, we cycle (my calves protest) to meet trainer Demi at a sweeping stone amphitheatre that's still used for evening summer shows. Demi's enthusiasm is infectious, to the point that I find myself enjoying running up and down the many, many steps. Under bright sunlight, we are put through gruelling sets of bodyweight and resistance exercises, using the steps to whack up the intensity. As Demi says: 'It's meant to hurt, it's a Spartan adventure!'

## Renew and restore

No retreat would be complete without a spa and the one at Euphoria is world-class. Waters from the mountains feed the numerous pools and thalassotherapy circuit, plus there's a range of facilities and experiences to choose from, including infrared sauna, flotation, steam room, plunge pool and Himalayan salt room.

I have an initial wellness consultation to determine my treatments over the next few days. Everything from my stress levels and menstrual cycle to a long-standing sinus issue are considered before I'm given my personalised plan. I'm prescribed a deep-tissue massage and foot massage, plus the jewel in the spa's crown, the Byzantine Hammam. An ancient ritual consisting of various cleansing and massage techniques, it's easily the best spa treatment I've ever had, and the most fun – so many bubbles! It's deftly timetabled on my final evening too, so I leave Euphoria renewed, reinvigorated and ready to face whatever life has to throw at me. Spartan spirit discovered? Maybe. Zest for life restored? Definitely. **B**