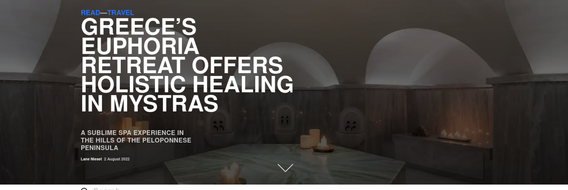
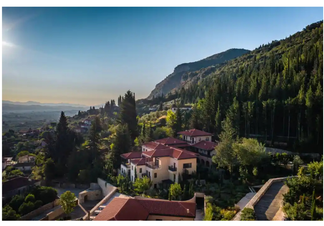


GREECE'S EUPHORIA RETREAT OFFERS HOLISTIC HEALING IN MYSTRAS

A SUBLIME SPA EXPERIENCE IN THE HILLS OF THE PELOPONNESE PENINSULA

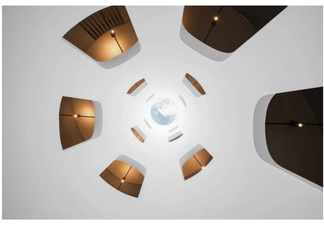
Lane Nosal 2 August 2022

Designed around an 1830s mansion located at the base of an energy forest on the edge of Mystras, Euphoria Retreat is located in one of Greece's lesser-known areas, at the gateway to the Peloponnese peninsula. About a 2.5-hour drive from Athens airport, the fortified medieval city (which is also a UNESCO World Heritage area) sprawls along the slope of Mount Taygetos and overlooks a valley blanketed in citrus and olive groves—an ideal view for rest, relaxation and reconnecting.



Before Athens-born Marina Efraimoglou purchased the land upon which Euphoria Retreat exists in 2007, the area had been abandoned; there were a handful of dilapidated aristocratic homes, crumbling churches and 13th-century monasteries.

It took seven years for Efraimoglou to get the permit to renovate the ruins and design the Byzantine-inspired buildings that open up to 45 rooms and the centerpiece four-story spa, which blends Eastern and Greek philosophies in a state-of-the-art space that takes inspiration from ancient hammams and Turkish bathhouses.

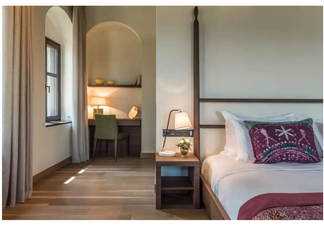


With its new retreat called Feel Alive Again (which focuses on restorative energy for those recovering from COVID and burnout), Euphoria is transforming into a destination spa like no other, drawing travelers away from the islands to an entirely different part of the country. The idea is that through treatments and activities at the spa—which come in the form of meditation, dance work, journaling and mandalas—guests will be able to enhance certain elements to feel more balanced emotionally and spiritually.

Efraimoglou overcame cancer in her late 20s, but it wasn't until she reached burnout status as an investment banker that she hit the reset button on her life and looked to alternative forms of medicine and healing, working with experts in traditional Chinese medicine in Thailand and studying Hippocratic healing in Athens. Euphoria Retreat opened in summer 2018, but Efraimoglou had been leading workshops for a decade before that.

"At Euphoria, it's all about the balance between limits and discipline, but you find your own balance—it's how far you want to push yourself," Efraimoglou tells us. This balance can be seen in Euphoria's design, which blends elements from healing centers and retreats across the world with more luxurious touches from some of Europe's top spa hotels. The spa embraces the Greek principle of El Zin (or wellbeing) with therapies and treatments designed around the Taoist concept of the *Five Elements*—water, wood, fire, earth, and metal/ether—as well as Chinese medicine. Each element is associated with a season, specific organs and meridians of the body, as well as emotions and frequencies.

But even if the New Age aspect with crystal and sound healing (and private sessions with a psychic) is a bit too much, the spa is an architectural marvel in itself. Monastic arches give the space a cathedral-like feel, while the dramatic, light-drenched well (with hot and cold foot baths) extends 82 feet down with a skylight opening up to the sun or stars. The futuristic, dome-shaped ceiling of the pool was modeled after Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, while the marble-clad hammam nearby is a modern interpretation of a traditional Turkish bath.



Euphoria provides all the facilities spa enthusiasts could want (infrared sauna, experience showers, salt room, watsu pool) with Hellenic touches that nod to a distinct sense of place. The rooms in the former mansion are outfitted with antiques and objets d'art from the owner's collection.

While guests can arrange for a specific nutritional program to go along with their retreat of choice, the property's restaurant, Oasis, offers a menu of locally and seasonally driven fare that is intentionally designed to be nourishing without feeling like a detox. "It's summer and the cicadas are growing loud—this energy, it can be chaotic," says Efraimoglou. But while sipping a glass of Greek rosé and watching the sky shift from soft pastels to stars, the cicada chorus is less distraction and more of a melody, adding to the mysticism of Mystras.