

# How to experience the forgotten, green side of Greece

Our expert picks her favourite softly scented stays overlooking dramatic inland gorges and pristine lakes where the Greeks like to escape to



A room at the Orizontes Tzoumerkon Hotel Resort in the Tzoumerka National Park

Dana Facaros | Friday January 16 2026, 5.00am, The Sunday Times

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**M**ost of us think of Greece for our summer holidays. But away from the country's beaches there is another Greece — a quiet, timeless place of pure air scented with wild herbs, pines and flowers. Of soaring mountains and fantastical lush gorges. Of pristine lakes filled with pelicans or flamingos. Of rushing rivers, waterfalls and ancient forests.

What makes these landscapes so exceptional and so unexpected is that they are in the Mediterranean and not in Scandinavia. The high drama of scenery, the warmer temperatures, the clear light and star-filled nights, the musical clanking of sheep or goat bells in the distance teases the imagination. It can give you goosebumps.

There's a lingering magic, an uncanniness. You begin to understand why so many gods and myths were born here.

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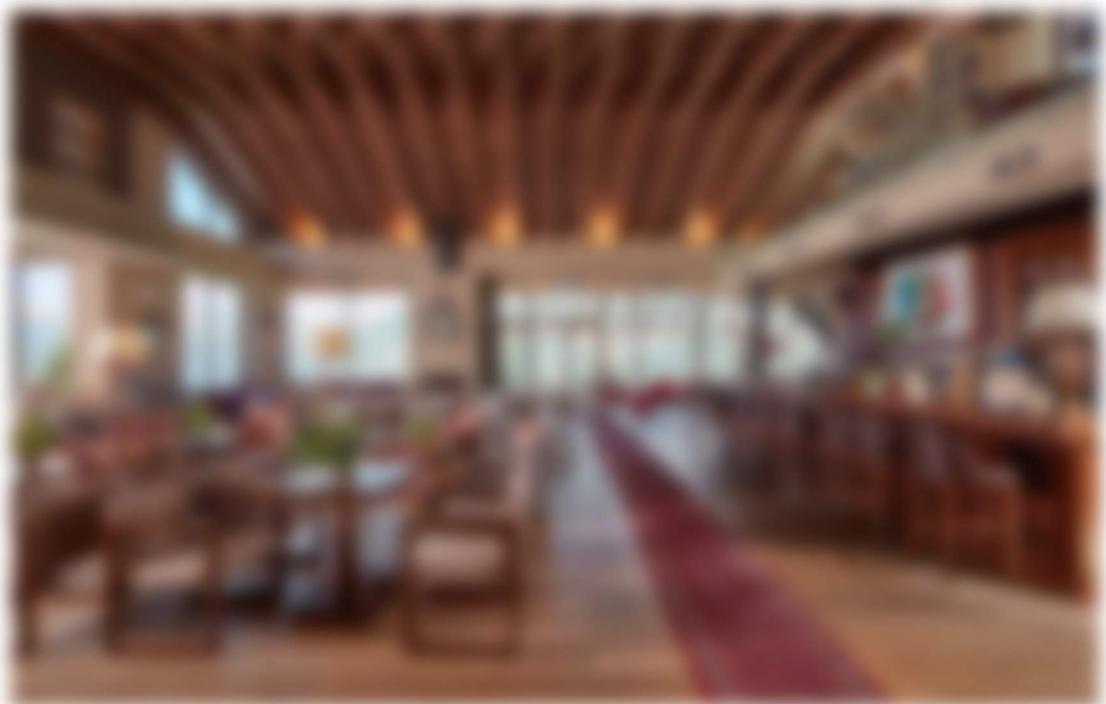
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The Greeks themselves love to escape into the countryside whenever they can. The past few decades have seen an exponential growth in rural retreats for every budget: there are chic wooden chalets in mountain forests and five-star luxury resorts in historic country houses with spas, yoga and Pilates teachers, celebrated chefs and one-off experiences. There are traditional family-run guesthouses, hotels with riding stables and agrotourism cottages on farms where you are welcome to join in the olive harvest or learn how to milk a goat (it's fun!).

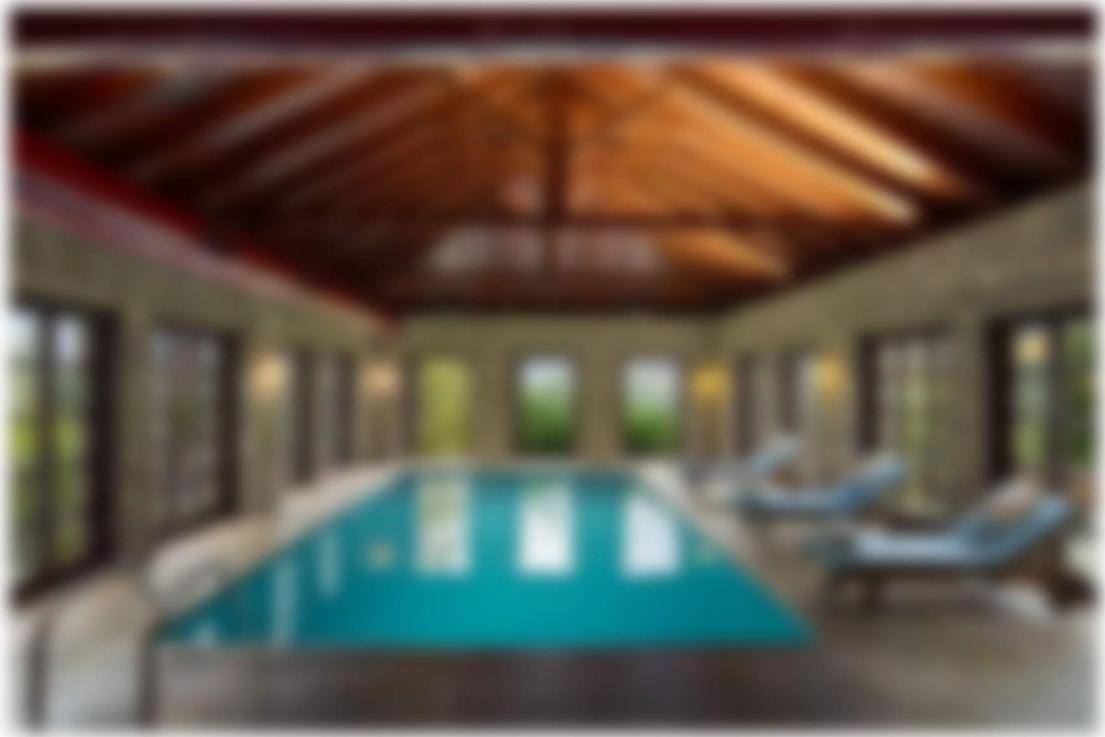
Unlike most beach hotels, which close in the winter, hotels in the mountains tend to stay open year-round. Go in the spring for the wildflowers and Greek Easter celebrations, summer for mountain sports, kayaking and swimming in lakes and rivers, autumn for the colours, the grape and olive harvests, winter for the snow and cosiness of sitting around the fireplace and experiencing a very different but very wonderful side of Greece.

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## 10. Hotel Marmaris Beach & Villas, Agamemnon, Turkey



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The hotel is the perfect choice for the village of Agamemnon, one of the most beautiful villages in the western part of Turkey. It offers a wide range of services, from the best food to a spa with a swimming pool. The hotel is a perfect choice for a relaxing vacation with a swimming pool and a spa. The hotel is a perfect choice for a relaxing vacation with a swimming pool and a spa. The hotel is a perfect choice for a relaxing vacation with a swimming pool and a spa.

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## 11. Euphoria Retreat, Mystras, Laconia, Peloponnese



The adults-only **Euphoria** Retreat offers holistic wellness programmes

STAVROS HABAKIS

If your perfect rural retreat includes access to one of the best spas in the world, look no further. Surrounded by gardens and an idyllic woodland of cypresses and pines near the Unesco world heritage-rated Byzantine ghost town of Mystras, the adults-only **Euphoria** Retreat offers holistic wellness programmes. The domed indoor thermal sphere pool, inspired by the architecture of the Aya Sophia, is spectacular. Rooms come in calming tints, with touches of medieval Byzantine design and 3,000-spring handmade mattresses; there are trails through enchanting scenery around Mount Taygetos and a healthy breakfast to start the day.

**Details** B&B doubles from £471 ([euphoriaretreat.com](http://euphoriaretreat.com)). Fly to Kalamata



Stavros Habakis, Founder, Euphoria

