

## For Your Next Healthy Vacation, Consider This Wellness Resort In Greece

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Published Mar 27, 2026



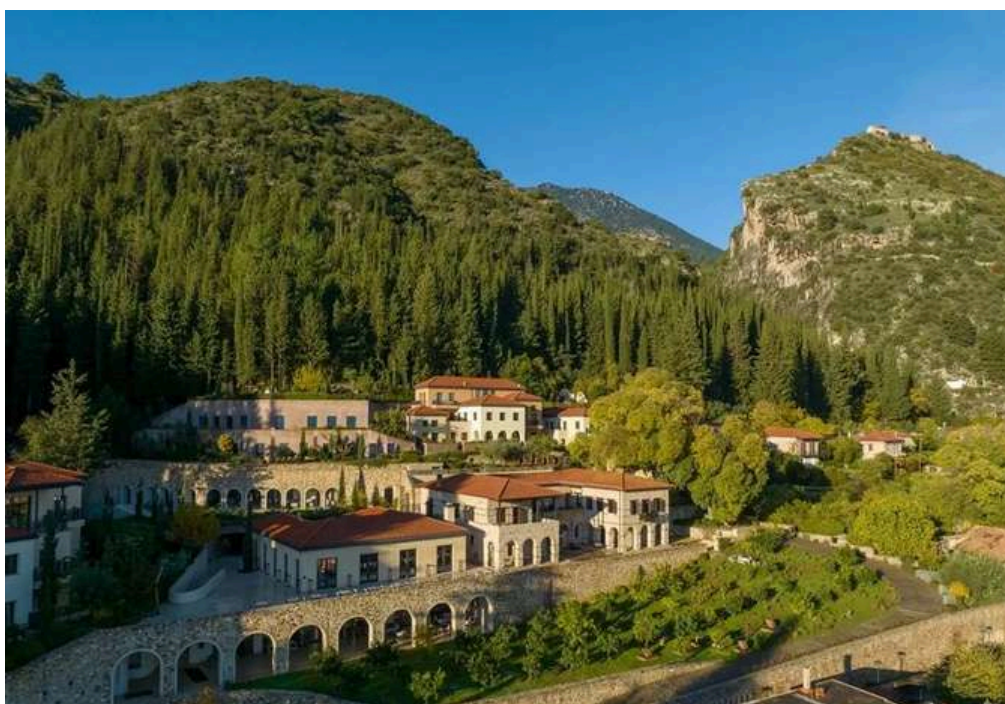
Wellness travel is red hot. Interest in all things fitness, longevity and “wellspan” are red hot. The Mediterranean diet is hot. And when it comes to places to go on vacation, few destinations around the globe have been hotter than Greece in recent years. All of this comes together at Euphoria Retreat, a uniquely comprehensive luxury resort that covers all the bases when it comes to healthy travel, from fitness to diet to spiritual wellness to spa and relaxation, coupled with all the things that make Greece so desirable: food, weather landscape and history.

After all, the Olympics, our global ideal of human performance and athleticism, comes from Greece. So does legendary epic hero Odysseus, about to splash back into cultural big time on the big screen, portrayed by Matt Damon and directed by Christopher Nolan in what looks to be a summer blockbuster. And of course, there are the Spartans, the epitome of hard-bodied warrior culture, who inspired their own big screen action epic, 300. In real life they lived and trained just down the road from Euphoria, and during my own “Spartan Adventure Fitness” retreat here I ran sprints, did crunches and was put through a testing outdoor circuit in Sparta’s stadium, next to ancient ruins and in the shadow of a towering statue of Leonidas, King of those chiseled warriors.



I'm a fan of immersive fitness retreats, and at Euphoria I went for their harder core offering, but the beauty of the place is that they truly have something for everyone. I hate the world "wellness" because it means nothing, conveys little and is usually misappropriated, misleading and misused, but it's hard to avoid in travel these days. In general, almost all destination fitness or wellness retreats have a narrow focus (and by "destination" I mean resorts focused specifically on aspects of health year round, rather than regular leisure resorts that have a visiting yoga instructor week or one-off programs).

Some are aimed at weight loss, others aggressive boot camps for the workout obsessed, while many are simply glorified spas with a focus on pampering and relaxation but little in the way of exertion. Some focus on specific goals, like better sleep or detoxification, while others are built around nutrition. Outside the U.S, many add a medical component, with testing, diagnosis and even treatments.



But [Euphoria Retreat](#) is the rare place that manages to check just about all of these boxes, which very few competitors do, and for that reason, it has something to offer almost everyone (I recently wrote here at *Forbes* about [another very well-rounded, multi-pronged, science-backed healthy lifestyle resort in Palm Springs](#) that even caters to golfers and tennis fans). You could go with a spouse or partner and enjoy two very different weeks of programming. Many upper class Athenians come here for weekends just to relax and use the ultra-extensive spa facilities, treating it as a simple luxury resort. Some come to reinvent themselves, to deal with issues, or in my case, to go Spartan, but definitely not in the austerity sense of the word. Whatever program you undertake here, the one constant is white glove service, with great food, even for those going low calorie, first rate staff, luxe lodging and great amenities.

And it's in Greece.

Most travelers need little convincing to visit Greece, and I am one of those. In recent years I have been several times, to experience history, to eat, even to explore [the country's new but world-class golf scene, which I wrote about here at \*Forbes\*](#) (and Greece's golf epicenter is not far from Euphoria, perfect for a golf meets wellness double up vacation!). I'm not a big cruise taker, but I made an exception for a remarkable [education and culinary themed Greek cruise](#) put on by world-class educators Smithsonian and boutique French luxury cruise line Ponant, which was awesome and I also covered here at *Forbes*. I even did [a one of a kind cycling trip to remote Greek and Turkish islands via sailboat](#), another fantastic active vacation you can learn more about here.

But let's talk Euphoria Retreat.



The resort opened in 2018 and is family owned, with the four siblings of founder Marina Efraimoglou all either working here or involved at some point, including one as architect. Efraimoglou was an investment banker in New York and Athens, eventually becoming co-owner of a large Greek bank. But an early bout with cancer and chemotherapy led to life changes, including visits to the renowned Golden Door wellness spa in the U.S. and extensive travels throughout Asia studying traditional Eastern medicine. She sold her interest in the bank and decided to build Euphoria from the ground up as a place where others could rebuild their health and improve their quality of lives.

She chose this hillside spot in Mystras, which was the second capital city of the Byzantine Empire after Constantinople (now Istanbul), and was once an extremely wealthy city on the Silk Road. The area is locally believed to be imbued with positive energy, and Euphoria sits below impressive Mystras Castle, a large and important historic ruin site that guests can hike up to. It is ten minutes from Sparta, on the Peloponnese Peninsula, attached to mainland Greece, which includes Athens, the major airport serving the resort, though there is limited service from European cities into closer Kalamata. The Peloponnese region is what people refer to as “Ancient Greece,” home to Olympia and Mycenae as well as Sparta and Mystras. It is also close to Navarino Bay, site of a key sea battle for Greek independence, renowned for its gorgeous beaches and huge luxury golf resort Costa Navarino. All of this makes it very easy to combine a stay at Euphoria Retreat with historic exploration, a beach vacation, golf or a weekend in Athens.



Programs are divided into Medical stays with lots of testing and Western science, and Holistic, more focused on relaxation and therapies such as yoga, meditation, breathing and fitness classes, as well as spa treatments. The third option is one of Euphoria's many "retreats," some of which are offered as scheduled group retreats on specific dates and all of which are available for private retreats on your schedule. Regardless which you opt for, there are also included daily and weekly activities open to all guests, such as local hiking or a guided visit to Mystras Castle.

The list of options is far too broad to cover in detail, but examples of Medical programs include "Immunity Reset," "Optimal Sleep" and "Advanced Medical Holistic Longevity" which are all offered in 7,10, 14 and 21-day versions, and include extensive customized testing that begins even before your stay with an at-home biomarker testing kit that you submit in advance. For this reason, the medical programs require advance booking of one month and cannot be done last minute.



Holistic Programs include "Relax & De-stress," "Inner and Outer Beauty," and "Emotional Harmony," all offered in 5 or 7-day formats. There are also diet and fitness programs including "Advanced Weight Loss," "Nutrigenomics & Biohacking," "Yoga & Mindfulness" and the popular "Euphoria Fitness," a 5 or 7-day program that includes nutritional consultation, personal training and coaching via a customized program developed for each guest after evaluating their current lifestyle, goals and movement patterns.



Then there are the retreats, including “Spartan Adventure Fitness,” the one I did. The description is “Build physical endurance and stamina. Train outdoors. Explore how Ancient Spartans were training to become great warriors. Spend an outdoor week with us exploring the region of Sparta while unleashing your physical fitness and celebrating your inner resilience.” Activities vary based on weather, but include interval training, trail running, cycling, hiking, rock climbing and even running steps in an ancient stadium. There are 2-3 hours of serious exercise daily, with each day visiting a different location, as well as some indoor time and an initial fitness assessment, included spa treatments, a customized diet after nutritional consultation (mine was light and low calorie but delicious, with Greek standards such as octopus, eggplant and local fish). All 5 or 7 programs, group or private, include the one on one fitness and nutritional consultations, a personal training session, 3GL Analysis (a diagnostic test that measures three biomarkers, glycogen, glucose, and glutathione), PNOE Metabolic Testing (a non-invasive breath analysis that measures how your body uses oxygen and fuels during rest and exercise that tracks biomarkers including VO<sub>2</sub> max and metabolic rate) and Bio-impedance analysis (shows the amount of fat, visceral fat and muscle in your body). Also included are several spa treatments and use of the extensive spa facilities.

Other Retreats include the “Odysseus Journey,” a more holistic and emotional take on the Spartan retreat, “Conscious Leadership,” and “Emotional & Physical Transformation.” Very detailed descriptions of each program and retreat are available on the Euphoria website. There is also an annual 10-day Wellbeing Festival each June that brings in a group of well-known experts and speakers in various practices and specialties for a series of workshops. Both Euphoria itself and the Wellbeing Festival attract a lot of repeat guests.



Regardless which program or retreat you sign up for, nutrition plays a big part and after an initial assessment, each guest gets a custom designed menu throughout their stay, with options to review each meal in advance for your approval.

The Spa is a big highlight of Euphoria Retreat and also a bit of an architectural wonder on its own, designed in a multi-level tower manner, with a circular staircase wrapping around a central tubular chamber with oculus at the top and a shallow walking pool with pebbled surface at the bottom, where you can introduce your feet to the therapeutic waters before moving further into the facility (in fancy spa terminology this is a Kneipp water well therapy pool). Design is based on the five elements of fire, earth, water, air and aether and these are incorporated inside and out, with multiple indoor and outdoor pools, outdoor hot tub and outdoor “Garden of the Five Senses.” Inside there is a Byzantine hammam, cold plunge pool, multiple experiential showers, Finnish sauna, infrared sauna, ice fountain, outdoor hot tub, speleotherapy salt room, steam room, warm tepidarium with heated lounge chairs and watsu pool for booked water therapy sessions.

One of the most unique features, which I have never seen anywhere else, is the “Sphere pool,” a swimming pool set within a sphere, with rounded roof and bottom and open arches, with the sounds of whales singing broadcast under water. It offers a purposefully womblike experience to invoke a feeling of rebirth. The sphere in turn is surrounded by many different water therapy stations, individual pools with a variety of massage jets and showers, and you move from one to the next, a pretty incredible way to follow up a Spartan workout. Of course, there is an extensive gym as well as a private Pilates studio, yoga and meditation rooms and a beauty salon.

The entire complex is built of natural and local materials and meticulously designed to fit into its landscape, full of olive and orange groves. There are just 45 rooms, mostly suites, in “modern Byzantine” style, and every single one is unique but most have private balconies, terraces or courtyards, and are outfitted with high-end handmade mattresses and custom organic locally made bath products with elaborate spa-like bathrooms. In theory, maximum occupancy at Euphoria is 90, but since it attracts a lot of solo travelers, a full house is usually more like 60, and not only is it never crowded, but you often have the feeling of having the entire place to yourself. There were several days when I did the entire water therapy circuit with seeing another guest.

Euphoria Retreat is open year round with extra-high season in May/June and September/October, high season July and August, and low season from December to March, with the switch sometime in April and November based on demand.



No matter how intense a fitness vacation is, you can only improve so much in 5 or 7 days, and what ends up being most important is the takeaway, learning to make lasting changes to take home. There are still exercises from my Spartan adventure that I now do daily, that I have added to my routine, and I eat more of a Mediterranean diet, so that short vacation has turned into long term benefits.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed Euphoria and found several notable things that set it apart from most of the destination fitness and wellness resorts I have visited, especially those in North America. The extensive medical offerings are much more aligned with the kind of retreats found in Southeast Asia and some places in Europe, especially Switzerland and Germany. The high degree of personal customization, with every guest on their own fitness and dietary program is notably different from these kinds of resorts here, and whether you go private or on a group retreat there is a very palatable feeling of one on one specificity to your needs. The food manages to be delicious and very tasty even though it's healthy and many guests are on a low calorie diet (and there is a full bar and nice selection of Greek wines). It's a tasty reminder that at the end of the day, food is medicine.



It's also quite reasonably priced, as are many things in Greece. For example, a 7-day Euphoria Fitness program is €4,100 and includes all the basic testing (3GL, PNOE, bio-impedance), wellness and nutrition consultation, personal fitness assessment, plus five hour-long personal training sessions, private reformer Pilates, daily infrared sauna sessions, full use of the spa, three personally customized meals daily, and a slew of spa treatments including deep tissue massage, Thai massage and the Royal Euphoria bodywork.

The resort is adult only (over 14) and since half the guests are from the U.S. and U.K., English is spoken by everyone, adding to the ease of a visit.