





I was keen to spend as much time as possible outside.

The daily programme of activities includes yoga on a rooftop deck with spectacular views of the Spartan hills, HIIT classes in an outdoor gym hidden away in the forest and 'warm up' 5km bike rides to the amphitheatre training ground. Even in the winter months, the Greek sun shines brightly, and I feel my heart lifting with every blast of vitamin D and fresh mountain air.

There's plenty of science to show the extra health benefits on top of the muscle building and calorie burn of regular exercise when you take it outdoors, and after months of rather lacklustre indoor Zoom classes my experience inspired me to try an outdoor bootcamp when I returned back home and to take my yoga mat into the garden.

### ALL IS CALM

Even Spartans need downtime and, mercifully, relaxation and recovery forms an important part of the Euphoria mix. In fact, you can opt out of all organised activity if you prefer and just spend your days lazily wafting in and out of the sauna, steam room, salt cave and hammam instead.

On arrival every guest is given a health assessment and prescribed spa treatments to help keep everything in balance. The resort ethos combines Chinese medicine with traditional Greek healing and modern technology (blood and breath analysis) to create a



GIVE A SIMPLE OMELETTE A GREEK TWIST (an omelette 'Mystras style') by adding thin slices of red onion, piquant purple olives, aromatic tomato and crumbled feta cheese.

SIP GREEK 'MOUNTAIN TEA' infused with local herbs. The local blend served with every meal is packed with antioxidants, polyphenols and essential oils, including flavonoids said to boost the immune system and help ease indigestion and anxiety.

RETHINK YOUR MOUSSAKA
Euphoria-style by using
minced shrimp (in place of lamb)
interlayered with chargrilled
aubergine slices, and topped
with a soya milk sauce.



seductive mix of spirituality with cutting-edge science.

My prescription included a massage so rigorous it made me yelp, and instructions to allow time each day for reflection and mindfulness. It was only then that I realised I'd let 'me-time' slip through the net. Euphoria's tranquil poolside lounge areas and all-inclusive mindfulness sessions were precisely what I needed.

### FRESH AND FABULOUS

My health prescription also advised de-stressing my body by bringing breakfast back into my life (I'd been trying to skip meals in an attempt to lose a few lockdown pounds) and to rein in the carbohydrates in the evening.

Thankfully the Euphoria breakfasts are spectacular (buckwheat pancakes drizzled in honey with berries, green juices, plus good strong coffee and a wide choice of plant milks) and the Mediterranean-inspired lunch and dinner menu is delicious, plentiful and packed with health-giving antioxidants. We could choose from soups, salads and risottos, local specialities (such as a deliciously moreish feta-stuffed filo parcel called 'Laconian saiti') and healthy twists on Greek classics.

Vegetarians and vegans are catered for, but you'll find nothing deep fried on the menu. This is proper fancy fine dining: my request for a simple Greek salad was met with bemusement. Dinner each night kicked off with a mini amuse-bouche, and the



Travel



mushroom soup was poured with a flourish from a carafe over a scattering of fairy-size enoki.

# HIKING IN HISTORY

The spa resort, only two years old, is a cluster of stone buildings cut into the forested slopes of Mount Taygetus on the edge of Mystras, a 13th-century Unesco-protected castle town on the Peloponnese mainland, two-and-a-half hours' drive from Athens.

On three or four mornings each week, all the guests at Euphoria are invited to join a guided hike into the hills to visit castle ruins, explore an old chapel cut into caves, or marvel at the brightly coloured frescoes inside the renovated churches scattered along the ridge of Mount Taygetus.

It's not arduous climbing, but it's tough enough to clear your lungs of fuggy lockdown air, and I relished the opportunity to fall into step (and conversation) with other spa guests visiting from around the world. It is



so easy to get wrapped up in how well – or badly – the UK is coping with pandemic issues and fascinating to hear that life for the Greeks, Israelis, Croatians and Irish is little different from our own.

### **PUSHING BOUNDARIES**

Euphoria offers a smorgasbord of yoga classes (vinyasa, yogilates, yin yang, expressive dance yoga) and I was keen to try them all, but one in particular caught my eye: aerial yoga. I'm pretty experienced on the mat, but I'd long yearned to try yoga suspended on lengths of cloth, and finally here was my chance!

As I was led out of the resort, through the sleepy village of Mystras and into the olive groves, I discovered my lesson would be taking place in a silk hammock draped over the gnarly bough of an old olive tree.

It is not often you get the chance to step outside your comfort zone like this, to trust in the tree and the fabric, and to feel the stress flowing out of your body as you bend and twist and flip upside down.

Switching up one's fitness and workout routine has lots of benefits, and I hoped I'd find my own kind of euphoria in the 'runner's high' of elevated fitness levels, burned calories and strengthened muscles, but it turns out it wasn't *more* that my body really needed, it was *less*.

After several days of Spartan exertion, this gently swaying yogic dangle was utter bliss. ■

Clockwise from above left: the Sphere pool; a Byzantineinspired suite; Mediterranean fare at the Gaia restaurant: writer Louise finds a prayer bell on a hike to the ancient chapel; the retreat at night; buckwheat pancakes for breakfast





# **HOW TO BOOK**

A bed and breakfast stay at Euphoria Retreat starts from €342 per night in a double occupancy Superior Deluxe Room. The Euphoria 'Spartan Spirit of Adventure' Group Retreat (three days) costs from €2,010pp based on two sharing a Superior Deluxe Room on full board, including daily healthy snack and smoothie.

BA (ba.com) flights from London to Athens cost from £120 return. Transfers to the resort from Athens cost €230 each way. For more information, visit euphoriaretreat.com

