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The Rise of Wellness Tourism: How a Retreat in Greece's Peloponnese Redefines Euphoria

Cassandra Karpiak Jul 15, 2024 Updated 18 hrs ago



Image Credit: Euphoria Retreat.

Twenty-three million international air arrivals were recorded in Greece from January to October last year, an **increase of 11.5 percent**. According to a National Bank of Greece (NBG) survey, Greek tourism is poised to shatter arrival records in 2024, the number of visitors forecast to **surpass 35 million**.

While poolside holidays once offered a chance to escape and unwind, **experts suggest** they no longer effectively alleviate stress. Inevitably, problems resurface when returning to daily life. Thankfully, many in the hospitality industry recognize this and have adjusted.

Euphoria Retreat in mystical Mystras, Greece, offers an alternative to traditional vacations.

Instead, it is a transformative journey that integrates personalized holistic spa treatments and spiritual healing practices based on the wisdom of the five elements in the southeast Peloponnese.

Wellness Tourism Growing Fast

A Global Wellness Institute (GWI) report says wellness tourism's 36% annual spending growth and 30% annual wellness trip growth from 2020 to 2022 surpass growth rates for overall tourism expenditures (28.4%) and trips (23.8%). The GWI projects **wellness tourism spending** will grow 16.6% annually through 2027.

Wellness tourism's speedy growth mirrors humans' instinctual need to connect to themselves and others.

Rolynda Simpson, a Counselor, M.Ed, CCC, at **Mindwise Counseling**, says strong connections and supportive relationships are the ingredients for safety, happiness, and contentment.

"When those aspects are missing from our lives, our nervous systems experience constant stress, and it is harder to navigate life's natural ups and downs, and we seemingly can never get out from under the need to drink, sleep, or zone out."

Simpson believes wellness retreats offer respite from the frenetic pace of a day-to-day schedule, a chance to turn off the world's noise, and a pause in the demands of life to create space for present-moment living.

Wellness retreats create space to quiet the mind and connect, heal, and deepen one's relationship with themselves. This results in self-awareness that transforms how one moves throughout daily life.

Euphoria at Euphoria

Euphoria's Sanctuary for Busy Minds treatment was among the three exclusive services I received as part of the leadership retreat run by owner Marina Efraimoglou and spiritual teacher Mary Vanorou.

The treatments resonated with me. To say I left feeling emotionally stronger than when I arrived would be an understatement. After five nights on the property and three days of emotional, physical, and spiritual workshops — a voice and drama class, meditations, dancing, spa treatments, and forest bathing — I emerged feeling contentment that has eluded me for years.

I shed many tears, all within the safety of the lecture rooms and under Marina and Mary's nurturing and encouraging gaze. Although I sometimes felt uncomfortable during exercises, I connected profoundly with fellow retreat-goers.

The leadership retreat addresses the three levels of existence (self, small groups, leader at large), explores the power of yin energy, and centers around the five elements of Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, and Metal.

The tableau vivant, or "living picture" exercise, was among the most powerful emotional tools I experienced during the leadership retreat. In this theatrical activity, resort-goers work together to silently and motionlessly enact a particular moment. Leaders photograph the arrangement, and the group revisits the pictures during discussions later in the day.

The full-circle exercise culminated in group feedback. The safety, security, and nurturing that Marina and Mary had established during our stay amplified the group's honesty.

With nowhere to hide, we sat in self-awareness of our inner dialogue. The power of the exercise was in its simplicity.

It may seem cliché, but sometimes it takes stepping away from your daily life to truly understand who you are and where you want to go.

Magical Mystras

The Arcadian property sits on a hillside above the village of Mystras, around four miles from legendary Sparta in Greece's greenbelt. While Ancient Spartans were famously stoic, the founders of Euphoria Retreat were gentle and compassionate.

The new highway, which runs from Athens to the Peloponnese, opens the country and the retreat's location, creating a sense of peace and connection with nature. Panoramic views of the Taygetos mountain range, lush olive and citrus groves, a medieval castle, and terra cotta roofs provide a stunning backdrop for guests to unwind and relax in equanimity.

Guests can enjoy guided tours to nearby destinations, such as Mystras, a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its Byzantine architecture. Multiple hiking routes are also available for guests to explore independently or as part of their daily activities.

The contemporary spa is the heart of the property. The spa symbolizes the five elements, and a three-story circular staircase with a cold and hot foot bath invites you to begin your journey.

The sphere in the indoor pool encourages blissful floating under the skylight while dolphin sounds serenade you underwater. The outdoor pool, accessed by a sliding hatch door, contains seats with hydrotherapy jets.

Plush loungers in the relaxation area surround both pools, where guests can hydrate with fresh herbal teas, infused water, or smoothies.

As you enter the tepidarium, heated tiled loungers invite you to relax and bring up your body temperature before heading to the sauna or steam room. A cold plunge beckons you to practice breathing as your body slowly acclimates to the frigid water.

Euphoria's signature Byzantine Hammam Ritual combines traditional Turkish hammam practices with modern techniques to detoxify and revitalize the body. The treatment rooms sit on the second floor, and the workshop rooms are on the third floor, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows.

Concentric art adorns every corner, constantly reminding guests of the five elements. Euphoria Retreat's ethos is very much Greek. Chinese medicine, ancient Greek practices, and India's holistic influences are all part of the experience, but the Greek touch is evident throughout. Hospitality has always been an integral part of life in Greece.

"It's natural for Greeks to welcome guests and foreigners," explained Efraimoglou during the leadership retreat. "In Greece, we have historically welcomed the light, abundance of produce, good weather, and an easy life."

Quest for Wellness

Increased stress levels, a desire for digital detoxification, and a growing focus on holistic health **drive the wellness retreat market**. Individuals seek refuge from modern-day pressures and embrace immersive experiences that promote mental, physical, and emotional well-being. This demand drives the expansion of wellness retreats, offering diverse programs tailored to rejuvenate and revitalize guests.

Ophelia Yeung and Katherine Johnston, senior research fellows at the Global Wellness Institute, **told Forbes** they "expect to see especially strong wellness tourism growth in regions that are not just marketing the typical standalone spa and wellness resorts, but can develop a holistic wellness offering for visitors that builds upon their unique and authentic local healing/wellness traditions."

Wellness tourism “is strongly and positively correlated with several health outcomes ... including life expectancy, healthy life expectancy, infant mortality rate, under-five mortality rate, and risk of premature death,” a [recent GWI analysis](#) concluded.

The success of such retreats is evident, as attendees generally depart feeling much better than when they arrived. Having experienced it firsthand, I can vouch for the profound environment Euphoria Retreat fosters for personal growth and self-exploration, which was nothing short of transformative.