



[VIEW WITH A ROOM](#)

Greeking Out

The unlikely inspiration behind Euphoria Retreat, an intriguing new health spa, is nothing less than Homer's *Odyssey*

BY VICTORIA MATHER
 JULY 8, 2023
 READING TIME: 3 MINUTES



We are a materialistic society; the sirens sing from every vodka martini and designer handbag. Occasionally, they can make us forget our very souls. (See *Succession* if in doubt.) We have to have a plan so we do not get lost, and recently I've been on a journey of wellness—a sentence I never thought I'd write, since “journey” and “wellness” are overused to the point of nausea. And now, having returned from a visit to Euphoria, a retreat in the Peloponnese, I'm feeling downright blissful.

Euphoria, founded by Marina Efraimoglou, a former investment banker, is in Mystras, an ancient town once the last stronghold of the Byzantine Empire. Now, when the sun is shining above the modern village, the ruins which once included both mosques and churches appear to be spangled in powdered gold. The contemporary architecture of the spa, which is new, undulates with curves and circles. The building is set in a scented, prehistoric pine forest, and guest rooms are cool and decorated in serene, minimalist furnishings. Many come with their own private garden, so that guests can enjoy meals there when they prefer to be alone.



Euphoria Retreat is located in the middle of a pine forest in Sparta.

After surviving an aggressive form of cancer, Efraimoglou left banking to explore the world of wellness, founding Euphoria based on the ancient Greek and Chinese philosophies of Hippocratic medicine and Taoist spirituality.

And a lot of sevens, Pythagoras's indivisible sacred number. The seven heavenly virtues: truth, love, wisdom, creativity, tolerance, freedom, and bravery. Common sense seems a bit mundane in the inexhaustible well of wellness but, hey ho, I am here for the five-day Odysseus Journey, an homage to Odysseus's decade-long trip home after the fall of Troy. It includes drama-therapy lessons—fun!—and dance classes, which sound less appealing.

There's plenty of time for lunch on the terrace, which has a view over the Sparta plain. It's a vision of olive groves, accompanied by the jingling of goat bells. Wine may be ordered, and the food is fresh and healthful, if a bit repetitive—the menu is only changed seasonally. But the local taverna, located nearby, is oozing with ouzo and the kind of basic dishes of fish and vegetables that have made Greek cuisine so popular.

Odysseus is my hero. The hero of heroes, the star of Greek mythology: handsome, intelligent, and cunning inventor of the Trojan horse. He definitely had a sly sense of humor, although Homer's *Odyssey* does not recount him cracking any jokes. I loved Greek mythology during my Corfu childhood, who knew Odysseus's fraught journey could be interpreted to harmonize mind, body, and spirit? A therapy group enhanced by spa treatments!



At Euphoria, the pools are gorgeous, inside and out. Dive and you hear dolphins singing (if only metaphorically). Although during my watsu massage, in which I was cradled and stretched in warm water, my dolphin sounded like he might have been playing the xylophone.

Efraimoglou and her friend and retreat co-creator, Mary Vandoru, interpret Odysseus's challenges as they relate to our mental health. The idea is to make us more conscious of who we are and thus live more conscientiously. I'm all for it. Navigating the Scylla and Charybdis of existence is fearsome, but Efraimoglou and Vandoru teach that fear can be overcome by vigilance, and it is exciting—joyful even—to be in control of our challenges.



Each day at Euphoria is governed by one of the five elements: water, air, metal, fire, and earth. I want to be glamorous, emotional fire, but without the hysteria. I learn that anger is a positive force, that fire flames with sensual pleasures and governs our fight-or-flight response.

But I discover that I am more earth, a nurturing homebird like Odysseus. He wanted nothing more than *nostos*, the Greek word for home, and his faithful wife, Penelope, and his son. Which person, place, or thing was our *nostos*?, Marina asked. A mother? A husband? A house? I was empowered to say publicly, "I am a recovering alcoholic and my *nostos* is the strength of A.A." It was a moment. It is true.





So, cocooned in comfort, and pottering around a village where the cats curl up on streets lined with orange and lemon trees, I found peace. As the Greek C. P. Cavafy wrote in his poem "Ithaka," read at Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's funeral:

*As you set out for Ithaka
Hope your road is a long one,
Full of adventure, full of discovery.*

That's my sort of journey. ☺

The writer visited Euphoria Retreat as a guest of the hotel

Victoria Mather is a London-based travel writer and editor who has contributed to Tatler, The Daily Telegraph, the Evening Standard, and Vanity Fair