

**2020
WINNER**
BEST FITNESS
PROGRAMME

EUPHORIA RETREAT

PELOPONNESE, GREECE

WEIGHT
LOSS

HEAVYWEIGHT ACTION AGAINST A HISTORIC BACKDROP

In the ancient world, the Spartans were famed for their fighting prowess, with only the strongest, fastest and most focused surviving their rigorous boot camps. Fast-forward a couple of millennia and Euphoria, one of Europe's best destination spas, sits on the Peloponnese town's doorstep. The Spartan Spirit of Adventure programme here certainly ticks all the boxes for modern-day workout warriors. It places emphasis on exercising outdoors, proven to burn calories, boost mood and lower blood pressure more efficiently than a gym session, with plenty of HIIT for devouring visceral fat. But, best of all, it weaves in the region's history, putting a 21st-century spin on the games played by those musclemen of old. The approach is typical of Euphoria. It arrived in 2018, with an imaginative health-boosting concept that fused the Ancient Greek wisdom of Hippocrates with Traditional Chinese Medicine, and quickly established itself as the best short-haul alternative to Asia's brilliant spiritual spas. Having already gained an impressive haul of accolades for its holistic excellence, it is turning its attention to fitness. Instead of standard box jumps in a boring studio, personal trainers Vasilis Papaioannou and Dimitra Karounou will test leg strength by having you leap onto stone blocks on the mountaintops of Menelaia, an archaeological site. And, rather than enduring a mindless 30 minutes on the StairMaster, you can bound up and down the steps of a classical amphitheatre, the view as breathtaking as the

INSTEAD OF BOX JUMPS IN A BORING STUDIO, LEG STRENGTH IS TESTED BY LEAPING ONTO STONE BLOCKS NEAR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

physical effort. Across a valley floor dusted with a silvery swish of olive groves the silhouette of 13th-century Mystras castle rises, clinging to a craggy peak of the imperious Taygetus mountains. Papaioannou leads hikes through pine-scented forests and jogs through town. Days might involve bike rides, meditation or seeking out centuries-old trees where hammocks are strung over the branches for soulful aerial yoga. It isn't all high-octane rush. The hydrotherapy pool is the perfect place to decompress. It has a vast, domed diving bell structure that sinks to 13ft, encouraging swimmers to take a deep breath and plunge down for a sense of blissful abandonment, before moving to the outdoor pool and terrace, overlooking endless misty mountains. Watsu with Papaioannou is a highlight. He will stretch out limbs as you float in a dim-lit private pool, a sensation akin to being a ballet dancer in outer space. The retreat's stunning design is almost as soothing as time spent on the treatment table. Built around an elegant 200-year-old stone mansion, the 45 rooms take a restrained cue from both modern and Byzantine architecture, while the four-storey spa in blush-pink, sharp-angled concrete has a yoga deck that leads directly into the woods. All visitors have the option to take a blood test to record their antioxidant levels, a key biomarker of overall health. There's simple advice on how to boost your count and which nutrient-rich dishes to order from the menu. Unless on a detox plan, there's a choice of Mediterranean-inspired meat, fish and vegetarian options, and even coffee and alcohol. Here is a rooted and relevant wellbeing experience which, after only two years, excels in delivering thrillingly tangible results – physical improvement as well as emotional clarity – that are up there with the best.

INSIDER TIP Time a visit to coincide with the Spartan Trifecta World Championship, an obstacle-course race that comes to town from 6 to 8 November 2020. The atmosphere is electric.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.com/condenast) offers a three-night Spartan Spirit of Adventure programme from £1,699 per person, full board, including flights and transfers. Healing Holidays exclusive: book 45 days in advance and receive a 12 per cent discount on accommodation and board. Valid for stays until 31 Dec 2020.

