



The Spartan health spa that nursed my foot injury to recovery

Max Pemberton

Situated amid a pine forest on the edge of the UNESCO world heritage sight of Mystras and with breathtaking views down to the ancient village of Sparta just a few kilometres away, this retreat is steeped in ancient history that relaxes and inspires in equal measure. The backdrop to this Spa really sets it apart and what's more, many of the treatments and activities have been ingeniously designed to make the most of the location, with yoga in amongst the woods, for example, or meditation overlooking the valleys.

The symptoms

18 months ago I broke my navicular (a bone in the foot), which proved to be tricky to heal. Several operations later walking was now no longer painful, but it had left me with a

collapsed arch and very weak leg muscles, meaning my posture was poor, I was prone to leg pain and had problems balancing – things were so bad I couldn't even stand on one leg for more than a few seconds without falling over. My podiatrist, physiotherapist and surgeon all recommended yoga, but on the one class I'd been to I struggled with everything and left feeling a bit of a failure. I needed something one to one and more intense.



The treatments

I opted for the 5 day mindfulness and yoga package, although it's worth noting that the attentive staff are more than happy to tweak the package if you find when you arrive you want to try something or don't feel like doing one of the scheduled activities. One of the guests confided in me over lunch that she had wanted to go hiking, but then changed her mind and had a massage instead.

There's a dizzying array of treatments on offer and they blend Ancient Greek and Chinese philosophies and healing practices. The highlight was what was termed 'outdoor holistic experience' but in reality turned out to be aerial yoga in an ancient olive grove. It counts as one of the best two hours of my life. Suspended from an olive tree, gently swinging in a hammock made of parachute silk while birds sang was utter bliss and, despite not being at

all religious, it felt intensely spiritual. It was incredibly relaxing but what's more, helped me feel more connected and in tune with my body.

Other activities involved a Forest Fit and Energy walk, which was much more focused on the Chinese healing system and was also very relaxing and again, helped me to learn to listen to my body, rather than feeling it was something that needed to be beaten into submission in order for me to overcome my injury. I was pretty much a novice when it came to yoga but I needn't have worried – the teacher was so incredibly patient and understanding. He encouraged me to see my injury in a holistic way as part of a life that had become a little frenetic and out of control, and my body's way of attempting to get me to slow down. For other novices who are perhaps a little wary and unsure about where to start with yoga, I'd really recommend a package like this. As sessions are one to one, you're in charge and set the pace. There's no embarrassment or awkwardness in not understanding or needing extra time, and you have the luxury of undivided attention to ensure you perfect your technique and get the most from the week.

The process

I had personalized yoga sessions every day, and it was on a steep learning curve. I was taught how to exercise every joint, and how to synchronize these exercises with breathing correctly to maximize the benefits.

Underlying the ethos of Euphoria is a mixture of eastern philosophies and medical approaches, but over all the emphasis is on seeing the person holistically, something which a purely western medical approach tends to not be so good at. You're encouraged not to drink coffee or alcohol (although this isn't strictly enforced, so don't worry) and the food in the restaurant is utterly delicious.



The Verdict

Over the course of the programme my foot began to ache less. What's more, since returning home, the improvement has continued. The morning stiffness and discomfort has now entirely gone and I've managed to get back in to the gym to do weight to build up my leg muscle again – something which before this programme seemed like a distant dream. My balance has also significantly improved. What's more, with following the guidance of the yoga teacher, I began to practice trying to touch my toes – something which I can now do effortlessly. I'm now more flexible than I've ever been.

I feel like I've been given my life back. It's hard to under-estimate the effect that the mindfulness – especially given the extraordinary backdrop – has had on my overall well being, so I've already vowed to return next year to improve my yoga technique and brush up on my mindfulness practise. This place is a real gem of a find.

The Details

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com; 020 8131 9953) can arrange a 3 day yoga and mindfulness programme from £1,486 per person sharing, including flights, transfers and full board accommodation.

