

PEOPLE & PLACES

ROSIE GREEN SPA STRUCK

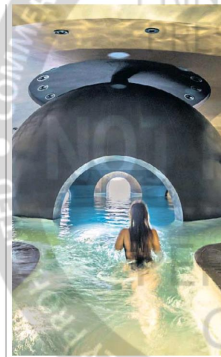


I've found my ultimate wellness nirvana

This is my current favourite. Why such lavish praise? Well it is a proper spa. Not a hotel with a spa attached. Everything is geared towards wellness. And you leave feeling lighter, brighter and happier. Who doesn't want that? Euphoria was created by Marina Eframigou, an investment banker who suffered illness and exhaustion, and was born from her desire to create a sanctuary to help her, and those like her, to recover. And she succeeded. Euphoria is perfectly suited to high fliers with burnout. Here, it's all about wellness and weight loss that doesn't feel punitive. You can feel totally comfortable visiting on your own and wearing a "warrior" robe, at leisure swimwear and paper pants for your entire stay. There's absolutely no need to stress yourself with

clothes that require thought or effort. Euphoria is two-and-a-half hours from Athens airport, which feels like a bit of a slog. You can fly into Kalamata, which is much nearer. And it's inland, probably its biggest downside. The area has the benefits of lush greenery and pure air, but it's no match for say, Santorini's caldera or Mykonos's breathtaking beaches. The wooden gates of the hotel slide open to reveal a slick, modern building - glass and honeyed brick. The bedrooms are well-appointed and chic, and the food is extraordinary. There are weight loss and detox menu options devised by the resident nutritionist, who takes a sensible approach: three balanced meals a day with two snacks. I was on the detox menu and the food was so fresh that it didn't feel like a chore: tomatoes, olives, fruit - it

all just tasted infinitely better than the comatose stuff we get from the local supermarket. The treatments on the whole were superb. I experienced reflexology, massages, twice-daily free exercise sessions and a truly outstanding hammam (two hours of being soaped and scrubbed: heaven), and the team is caring in a way that feels genuine. The only less-than-joyful experience was the cupping treatment (heated glass cups stuck on to your body using suction). It's said to detoxify and boost circulation but I just found it uncomfortable. And it left quite scary marks. My only other gripe was that the sun left the pool at about five. But short of moving the substantial peak behind the hotel, I don't know what they can do about that. So if you are looking for a spa retreat that is gentle, but still gets results, Euphoria is for you. However, if you are looking for the nightclub, then I believe there is one in Baltimore. Wellbeing Escapes (020 3735 7555; wellbeingescapes.com) offers doubles from £2,313 per person sharing for five nights this month, including full board, free upgrade to a superior room and five-day well-being detox programme.



Taking the waters: Euphoria

THE PROXIMITY PRINCIPLE What do people want from a spa? World-class therapists? Steam room to rebalance your chakras? Pro-standard gym? According to Google, proximity to London appears to be the number one criterion, at least for Londoners. Enter The Langley, in Buckinghamshire, which opened in June as a super-luxe, modern take on the country house hotel. The spa, rather than a few sad rooms down a depressing corridor, is a serious offering with vitality pools, hammams, juniper-wood sauna with pink Himalayan salt walls, amethyst steam room, a marble-lined indoor pool and an outdoor one by the lake. The Langley has partnered with prestigious brand Sisley (divine smells and textures) for extra kudos, as well as insider brands such as Margaret Dabbs, Gentlemen's Tonic, James Read and La Sultane de Saba. There's a spa lounge serving healthy food, and a Matt Roberts gym where you can book one-to-one sessions. Rooms from £425 B&B, Sisley treatments from £110, PT sessions at The Gym in partnership with Matt Roberts from £120 an hour (thelangley.com; for a full review, see telegraph.co.uk/tt-thelangley)

At Euphoria, it's all about wellness and weight loss that doesn't feel punitive

Top 10

ALTERNATIVE FESTIVE BREAKS

Tired of traditional Christmas? Nick Trend suggests some novel options

1 YULETIDE TROLLS
Icelandic folklore is rich in curious characters and at Christmas time the Yule Lads (Jólásevinnur) take centre stage. These 13 mountain trolls traditionally appear in Reykjavik from Dec 12, dressed in ragged, peasant clothes. Last year they took the form of holograms projected on to buildings. Each is named after their particular habits, whether its Huroaskrellir ("Door Slammer") or Eignakrakreifir ("Sausage Swiper") and locals and visitors can hunt for these creatures in return for prizes. **Romantic Iceland and the Northern Lights** from £1,565 B&B including flights, car hire and Christmas dinner. Departs Dec 23 2019. Best Served Scandinavia (best-served.co.uk).

beautifully decorated communal trees and fruit carols. Christmas Day fun includes sailing in an icy fjord, dog sledding and Northern Lights trips. **Christmas in Lullistaf** from £3,830 for seven nights including flights, transfers and some meals. Departs Dec 21 2019. Baltic Travel Company (baltictravelcompany.com).

3 PETERSBURG CHRISTMAS
Landscapes of frozen rivers and snow-covered forests make winter the most atmospheric time to visit Russia. Adventure operator Intrepid Travel offers a small-group tour from Moscow that coincides with the country's Orthodox Christmas on Jan 7. Take a train to the remote town of Veliky Ustyug, home to Ded Moroz (Father Frost, Russia's Father Christmas), and spend Christmas Day in St Petersburg with a tea party in a Russian home. **Russia Highlights - New Year** from £1,605 for 10 nights including some meals. Excludes flights and transfers. Departs Dec 29 2019. Intrepid Travel (intrepidtravel.com).

and festive light displays in the cities. It's not always subtle - on Christmas Day, Sydney's Bondi Beach is packed with revellers in Father Christmas outfits, tinsel and reindeer headbands - but there's no denying the bonhomie. **Melbourne, Cairns and Sydney** tour from £2,899 for 14 nights room-only including flights and four-star hotel accommodation. Excludes transfers. Departs Dec 14 2019. Travelbag (travelbag.co.uk).

5 MEXICAN RADISHES
The origins of Latin America's most quirky Christmas traditions are hazy but from Dec 23 to 24, the *noche de rábanos* (night of the radishes) takes place in the south-western city of Oaxaca. Grown to giant proportions, these pink and white vegetables are skillfully carved into a variety of scenes, mostly depicting the nativity. **Mexican Street Food** tour from £2,547 for 10 nights (with three nights in Oaxaca) including flights, transfers and some meals. Based on December departures. Journey Latin America (journeylatinamerica.co.uk).

choice for a memorable Christmas break. One of the big attractions is Midnight Mass at the Pantheon, one of the world's best-preserved Roman temples, originally built by the emperor Hadrian but now a church. The service is free, but arrive in plenty of time to bag a seat. The open oculi in the roof means it can be cold, but the simple candlelit service with sublime music and pungent incense creates a magical mood. **Five-star Grand De La Minerve** hotel from £1,098 B&B for four nights including flights, transfers and entrance to the Borghese Gallery or Vatican Museum. Departs Dec 22 2019. Kirker Holidays (kirkerholidays.com).

7 ARGENTINIAN FEAST
It's summer in Argentina and December temperatures are warm, so celebrations traditionally centre around a lavish late-night *asado* (barbecue) on Christmas Eve. Adventure operator Dragoman's three-week overland journey takes you through the Andes, from La Paz in Bolivia to the Chilean city of Santiago, in a four-wheel drive

own cattle and excellent wine from the surrounding vineyards. **Altiplano and Gaucho Explorer** from £1,037 for 20 nights including some meals. Excludes flights, transfers and a food kitty of US\$760 (£386). Departs Dec 12 2019. Dragoman (dragoman.com).

8 UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX
The Hutsul people of the Carpathian Mountains celebrate their traditional Christmas on Jan 7. New for 2019, Peregrine Adventures has introduced a small-group tour to this scenic area where winter temperatures can drop to -5C (23F). After two days exploring the city of Lviv, you drive through snowy forests to stay in a family-run guesthouse for Ukrainian carols, a traditional *zerpek* puppet show and a Christmas Eve dinner of 12 meat-free dishes, symbolising the 12 apostles. **Orthodox Christmas in Ukraine** from £1,420 for six nights including some meals. Excludes flights and transfers. Departs Jan 4 2020. Peregrine Adventures (peregrineadventures.com)

atmosphere. Martin Randall Travel offers a week-long, small-group tour of Munich accompanied by cultural historian and lecturer Tom Abbott. A lavish Christmas Eve dinner at a modern Bavarian restaurant is followed by a choice of Midnight Mass including Mozart's Coronation Mass in St Peter's on Petersplatz at 11.15pm, sung by the St Peter's choir. **Munich** at Christmas from £3,420 for seven nights including flights, transfers and some meals. Departs Dec 20 2019. Martin Randall (martinrandall.com)

10 HUNT THE ALMOND
Instead of Christmas pudding, the Finns eat rice porridge, often sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar or fruit. A blanched almond is traditionally hidden, with good luck for whoever finds it on their plate. On The Go Tours has a Christmas itinerary in the eastern region of Fulham that also includes a Christmas Eve journey into the snowy forests to find a tree for children to decorate, a church visit to light a candle for absent friends and a lavish Finnish buffet.