



The Greek Retreats Redefining Wellness Travel

In Greece, wellness is not a trend, but a fact of life.

By [Drew Schwartz](#)

Published on Dec 5, 2024 at 9:16 AM

I've spent the past two months living in [Greece](#), falling ever deeper in love with a country that keeps finding new ways to bowl me over—with its godsent [beauty](#), and its cultural allergy to pretension, and its people's inexhaustible capacity for kindness. I've come to view it as a place defined by its embodiment of what "wellness" really means, or, perhaps better put, as a place where wellness is not a trend, but a fact of life.

Here slow living is not a choice. It's a matter of necessity as you wait three hours for your ferry at a dockside cafe in Rhodes, or pull over on a dusty one-lane road in [Crete](#) to let a flock of sheep swarm past your car. You exercise all day without ever really trying to: climbing up and down the unending stairs of Greece's hilly island towns; swimming in the cool, opaline bays of the Aegean Sea; wandering the backstreets of [Athens](#), where mopeds and militant pigeons turn walking into a form of agility training. Healthy food is about the only food there is. You don't have to seek out fresh-caught fish and local produce—it's just what's on your plate. Wellness, in a fundamental, atavistic sense—what it meant before it became an industry—is baked into everything here, even the language. The Greek word for hello—*yiasas*—means, in literal translation, "health to you."

It makes sense, then, that when Greece actually tries to "do" wellness, it excels. The country is home to more than a dozen world-class wellness hotels, offering everything you'd expect from such a place (yoga and exercise classes, spa treatments, farm-to-table food) and lots of things you've probably never heard of: "craniosacral therapy," "reflexology," "bio-impedance analysis," "modern alchemy harmonizing rituals"—the list goes on.

Over two weeks in late August and early September, I visited as many of these properties as I could. The best of them, I found, are built less around “wellness” in the popular sense than simply living well: using your body, eating fresh food, swimming in the ocean, seeing beauty, sitting with silence, and slowing down. They embrace the broad-minded, endemic breed of wellness I see as part of the fabric of this country—and in so doing, they give you a chance to experience, even if only for a few days, what life in Greece is all about.



Andronis Concept Wellness Resort

Santorini

There are no “rooms” at Andronis Concept, a hotel in the quiet Santorini town of Imerovigli, far from the glitzy, tourist-packed hubs of Oia and Fira. Instead there are 28 lavishly appointed suites and villas, each of which felt, to me, like a cross between a Bond villain’s lair and a Buddhist meditation chamber. I stayed in a two-story suite the color of sand, with an eight-foot stone bathtub and a rainfall shower on the bottom floor and, on the top, a king bed framed by softly glowing, space-age pendant lights. A sliding glass door opened onto a patio with a plunge pool overlooking the Aegean Sea.

I had a sweeping view of Santorini’s caldera: a basin formed here 3,600 years ago when a volcano erupted and collapsed in on itself, leaving behind a circular pool of ocean, 10 miles wide, ringed by jagged, thousand-foot cliffs. From my patio, I could trace the curving ridgeline west to the tip of the island, where the white stucco homes of Oia hovered over the water, shimmering in the heat.

I spent my afternoons at the pool perched above the hotel's garden, where a farmstand's worth of produce—white eggplant, acorn tomatoes, chili peppers, wild garlic, rosemary and lavender and thyme—spilled down a terraced slope, dotted with sunflowers and prickly pear. As the sun seeped into my skin, I'd order a Summer Cooler, a pale green cocktail made with gin, elderflower liqueur, and fresh cucumber and mint, picked from within my sight line. It tasted the way I imagine the color sage might taste: cool and soothing, remedial, somehow, like an ancient, life-giving potion.

Each night, I'd have dinner at Throubi, Andronis Concept's restaurant, where waiters in white linen caftans floated across a concrete courtyard overlooking the caldera, and slender black lamps threw dim light on butcher block tables. Every time a new course came out, I'd notice that something from the garden had resurfaced on my plate. Throubi's chef, Charalampos Koukoudakis, culls his ingredients from the patch of herbs and vegetables that grow 100 feet from his kitchen.

On my second day at Andronis Concept, I woke up to the sun setting the caldera on fire outside my window, painting Oia gold. At 8 a.m., I headed for it on foot with Nina Kasiteridi, a wellness practitioner at the hotel, who led me and five other guests on a hike to town. As we picked our way along the ridgeline, we passed ancient churches, abandoned cave dwellings, blue-domed lighthouses, stopping every so often to catch our breath and take in the views. Everywhere I looked I saw the stuff of postcards.

A few hours later at the hotel's spa, Nina dripped three different essential oils onto my wrist, and asked me to choose my favorite. I opted for "Balance"—a blend of orange, geranium, and sandalwood sourced from an organic farm in Crete—and slipped under a plush towel.

A few minutes into the massage, I entered a dream state. I saw baskets of lemons, the faces of my friends and family, airport terminals, roadside kiosks. I bought tickets to events I couldn't name, boarded vessels bound into walls of white. Nina kneaded into my hands, my wrists, my calves, my shoulder blades, deleting tension from my body I never knew existed until it was gone.