



Sun, sea & sanctuary



Emma Tuzzio explores a refreshing new approach to health and wellbeing in the serenity of a Corfu hideaway

The scent of lavender, thyme and rosemary floats on the breeze as I arrive at my hilltop sanctuary in Corfu. Birds, bees and butterflies seem to flutter in greeting while I gaze transfixed over olive groves and forested hills to the glistening Ionian Sea beyond. It feels like I'm halfway to healing already, and my wellbeing holiday has hardly begun.

Like many health-conscious women, I've chosen to combine my summer break with

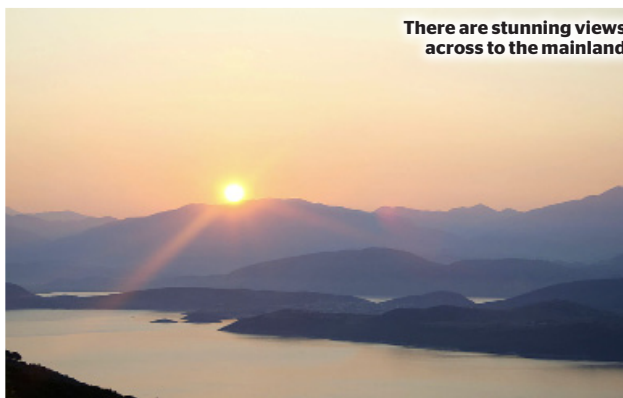
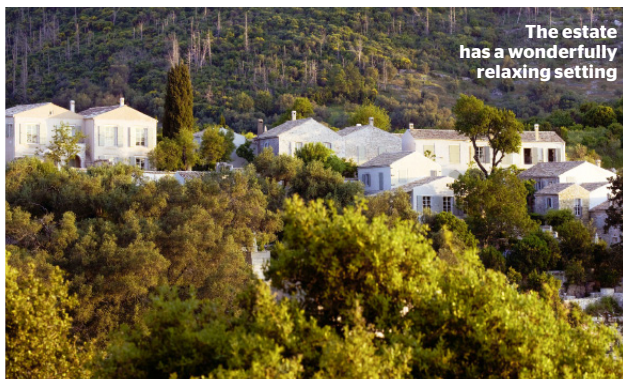
what I hope will be a life-enhancing exercise in self-development. I'm eager to relax and recharge my energy levels, but looking at the bigger picture, I'd also like to address a few wellbeing issues and learn how to sustain a healthy, balanced lifestyle once I'm back home. And what better place to do all this than Greece, arguably the birthplace of the wellbeing retreat? Way back in the day, Ancient Greek health-seekers would pay an overnight visit to an *asclepeion*, a temple

dedicated to Asclepius, the god of medicine, where they'd bathe in spring waters, pray, meditate and even undergo dream analysis.

My modern-day Greek temple to healing is called a Health Hub, an idea conceived by the wellbeing company Health Matters 360. As the name suggests, it's a fully rounded, holistic approach, and takes place in the Rou Estate, an exquisitely restored hamlet in the hills of northern Corfu. Accommodation is in a series of super-stylish stone villas, connected by pathways and beautifully landscaped with borders of herbs, irises, alliums and native shrubs.

My en-suite room is in a jasmine-draped house I'm to share with two other women. A sanctuary of soothing neutrals and natural materials, the villa even has its own plunge pool, but best of all is the view - a coastal panorama stretching across turquoise waters to Albania and beyond to mainland Greece. I learn later that the hamlet is thought to have been built over a ley line, and I'm not surprised - the place certainly has an air of magic about it.

The seven other Health Hubbers in the group are mainly women, with a range of ages and personalities. Some, like me, have come to reboot on the inside as well as the outside, while others are seeking relief for specific ailments. We're also joined by the smiling team of Health Matters 360 experts, who will be helping us on our journey through three key areas during the week ahead - Physical, Nutritional and Mind



Matters. Exercise, food and emotions (and how they interrelate) are all on the agenda, and judging by the printed timetable of activities, we'll be cramming a lot in.

A PHYSICAL EDUCATION

A typical day on a Health Hub holiday involves three Physical Matters sessions, which increase in intensity throughout the day and over the week. Things kick off gently at 7.30am with a power walk and stretch, then there's a yoga session from 8am to 9am and a full body workout from 5pm to 6pm.

I find the power walk an easy way to warm up my muscles, and some of us break into a light jog as we follow the picturesque hill trail each morning. Yoga sessions take place

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outside on a verandah with a sea view, where our teacher, Melissa, starts us off with some easy hatha yoga postures. Melissa has a graceful serenity about her, and as she demonstrates each *asana* with her seemingly elastic joints, she explains its benefits. My favourite is *balasana*, or child's pose, which relieves mental tension as I lie on the floor with my arms outstretched. Working my way up to more challenging postures, I learn to focus and connect to my inner strength

as I assume the warrior pose. At the end of each session, I discover the true meaning of relaxation as we enter *savasana* (the corpse pose), lying on our backs as the sun's rays emerge over the trees. It's a wonderful way to wake up, and I leave every class feeling rejuvenated and hungry for the healthy breakfast that awaits us in our villa.

Later in the afternoon, when the hot sun has receded behind the hills, we pump up the tempo for the full body workout. As well as stretching and toning exercises, I try my hand at resistance training to build core strength and increase my vitality. Instructors Jimmy and Ian encourage me to push my own boundaries, and when things get tough, I find that focusing on the sea view helps get me through. I'm also pleased to learn that most of the moves we're practising can be perfected at home - no fancy equipment or costly gym membership required - which enthralls me about my fitness potential.

FOOD VALUES

The nutrition bit of the week proves to be the least challenging! It's easy to get excited by the delicious healthy fare served up by chef Costas Tsigiotis, following menu plans created with a Michelin-starred consultant chef, Adam Simmonds, and nutritionist Jenny Tschiesche. Although we breakfast in our villas, we all enjoy lunch and dinner together alfresco, surrounded by lavender beds and olive groves. Ingredients are locally sourced and seasonal - the goat's cheesecake sweetened with figs quickly becomes one of my favourites.

Daily food workshops and a one-on-one session with Jenny make me realise how little thought I've been putting into my food. Sitting comfortably in the Garden Room, a shaded terrace with a stunning ocean



view, Jenny and I chat over my health issues - the main problem being an underactive thyroid and its dampening effect on my vitality - as well as my guilty sugar habit.

Along with the general benefits of eating seasonally and locally, Jenny tells me the trick to boosting energy is to keep my blood sugar levels steady by eating three main meals a day, plus two snacks of nuts and seeds, keeping refined sugars and carbs to a minimum. She gets quite scientific about the foods to avoid if you have an underactive thyroid, and I'm surprised to see these include veggies like spinach, broccoli and Brussels sprouts. It's a relief to hear I can still enjoy treats like peanut butter and avocados. At the end of the week, I come away armed with a personalised nutrition plan and some recipes to try at home,



Emma learns to connect with the core of her energy



There are daily consultations on food and emotions

including one for avocado and chocolate mousse that promises to take me out of my culinary comfort zone. That's no bad thing, though - the sessions have re-educated me about nutrition, and I now appreciate what the Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates meant by 'Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food'. Here's hoping I don't fall off the wagon come cake o'clock.

RETRAINING THE MIND

Letting go of bad habits is one of the goals at the Health Hub, and Mind Matters coach Janice Haddon is on hand to help, using both group visualisations and one-on-one counselling. Staying calm, positive and focused in all situations is our ultimate aim - easy in these glorious surroundings, I think, but not quite so simple on a packed train from Brighton to London at 8am. Still, as soon as we start the visualisation, I can see where Janice is coming from.

Sitting on the verandah, we gaze out over the shimmering landscape and practise the art of mindfulness breathing, becoming aware of the sensation of breath on our skin and learning to still what Buddhists call our restless 'monkey minds'. Other visualisations during the week include a guided meditation to our 'core' (via a series of imagined steps leading deeper and deeper into relaxation) and one to a 'safe place' (mine was a peaceful sunlit clearing). Both represent calm spaces where we can reconnect with the centre of our energy and power.

Life's stickier situations, Janice tells us, often involve us 'giving our energy away' when we really need to conserve it. Once we learn to locate this powerful core, we can harness it whenever we're stressed or anxious. I'm surprised by my own reserves of strength, and resolve to reconnect with this hidden part of my psyche next time I'm squeezed into that commuter sardine tin.

The one-on-one Mind Matters session is more intense, with the aim of identifying personal goals and removing emotional blockages. A keen painter, I suffer from a lack of creative confidence, and my talks with Janice help me realise this is the result of critical experiences at art school, which left me afraid to paint in case I fail. Janice teaches me to overcome this block using 'free flow' art, where you create something purely for the creative process, not the end result. If I sit down and paint from the safe

core I've found within myself, my artistic juices should start flowing again.

We also discuss practical steps to boost my vitality and creative enthusiasm, and agree on potential action points. These include improving my posture, inviting positive feedback from friends, chakra-cleansing techniques, endorphin-raising exercise and energy-boosting foods. I leave my final session feeling enthused and in control, and the action points are emailed to me the following week to act as a prompt if my joie de vivre flags again.

By the end of the week, I can sense the strands of Physical, Nutritional and Mind

‘Sitting on the verandah, we gaze out over the shimmering landscape and practise the art of mindfulness breathing’

Matters coming together. I wave goodbye to the island feeling tanned, toned and positive about making sustainable changes.

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

But did it last? Well, as part of the package, you get a follow-up session with Janice two weeks after the trip. When she calls, I'm proud to tell her that I'm regularly reaching into my safe core on the train to London. I have a packet of energy-filled seeds on my desk to nibble on, and I've started free-flow painting. In fact, when I summoned up the courage to show my pictures to my friends, their reactions were incredibly uplifting. I'm not saying I've made 360-degree changes, but I've certainly got lots of new angles on life - and how to balance it. I'm still working on that avocado and chocolate mousse, though... **SPIRIT&DESTINY**

FACT FILE

- Health Matters 360 offers a seven-day Health Hub in Corfu from £1,795, based on six nights' full-board accommodation. Prices include daily physical training, daily nutritional consultations and workshops, daily relaxation and coaching sessions, daily yoga, daily one-to-one nutritional and mind matters sessions, and use of the gym, pool and spa. Includes transfers, but not international flights. Health Hubs are also available at venues in the UK. Visit www.healthmatters360.co.uk
- Easyjet, Monarch, Thomas Cook and Thomson all fly to Corfu International Airport.
- For more about Corfu, visit www.corfu.gr

Traveller's checks

A BUDDHIST FLAVOUR

For a taste of Buddhism with a dash of luxury, tuck into authentic temple food at the Amanfayun resort in China.



Amanfayun: a temple to pure food

The village-style complex near the ancient city of Hangzhou serves a menu devised by the nearby Lingyin Temple. Spiritually purifying dishes include chrysanthemum and tofu soup, gravy noodles with fungus and day lily, and wax gourd with lotus seeds. No meat, seafood, alcohol or strong-smelling vegetables are used. Amanfayun lies on a pilgrimage route of five Buddhist temples and close to the Unesco-listed West Lake. Rooms from £395 a night. Visit www.amanresorts.com

GIVE IT SOME BELLY

Reconnect with your sensuality on a Healing Power of Belly-Dancing holiday in Tunisia, from 25 September. For ladies only, it includes five belly-dancing lessons, a drum workshop, a Tunisian cookery lesson, and a shopping trip for oils, spices and herbs. There's also a chance to practise yoga and meditation on a rooftop terrace with a sea view. Accommodation is bed and breakfast in the beachfront Sindbad Hotel in Hammamet. From £515, excluding flights. Call 0845-170 1747 or visit www.lotusjourneys.com

ECLIPSE DOWN UNDER

Start planning now for the trip of a lifetime to see the total solar eclipse in Australia's Northern Territory on 14 November 2012. In a spectacular astrological light show, the moon will completely cover the sun, and the tourist hubs of Cairns and Port Douglas will be among the best places to witness it. Cairns - a jumping-off point for trips to the rainforest and Great Barrier Reef - is hosting a festival in celebration. Visit www.eclipse2012.org.au

SALUTE THE SURF

Head to the island of Fuerteventura in the Canaries to combine holistic chills with surfing thrills on a Pilates, Yoga & Surf Holiday. As well as daily yoga and Pilates, you'll enjoy three days of surf lessons (four hours a day), morning meditation, beach walks and sand dune stretch sessions, and a 60-minute massage is also thrown in. From £574 for seven nights' bed and breakfast in a peaceful bungalow. Flights not included. The holidays run from 10, 21 and 28 September. Visit www.golearnto.com



The perfect trip for chilled-out beach babes

ADDITIONAL TEXT HELEN SAUNDERS PHOTOS EMMA TUZZIO HEALTH MATTERS 360