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# +wellness special

SPAS, RETREATS, AND EXPERIENCES TO IMPROVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE

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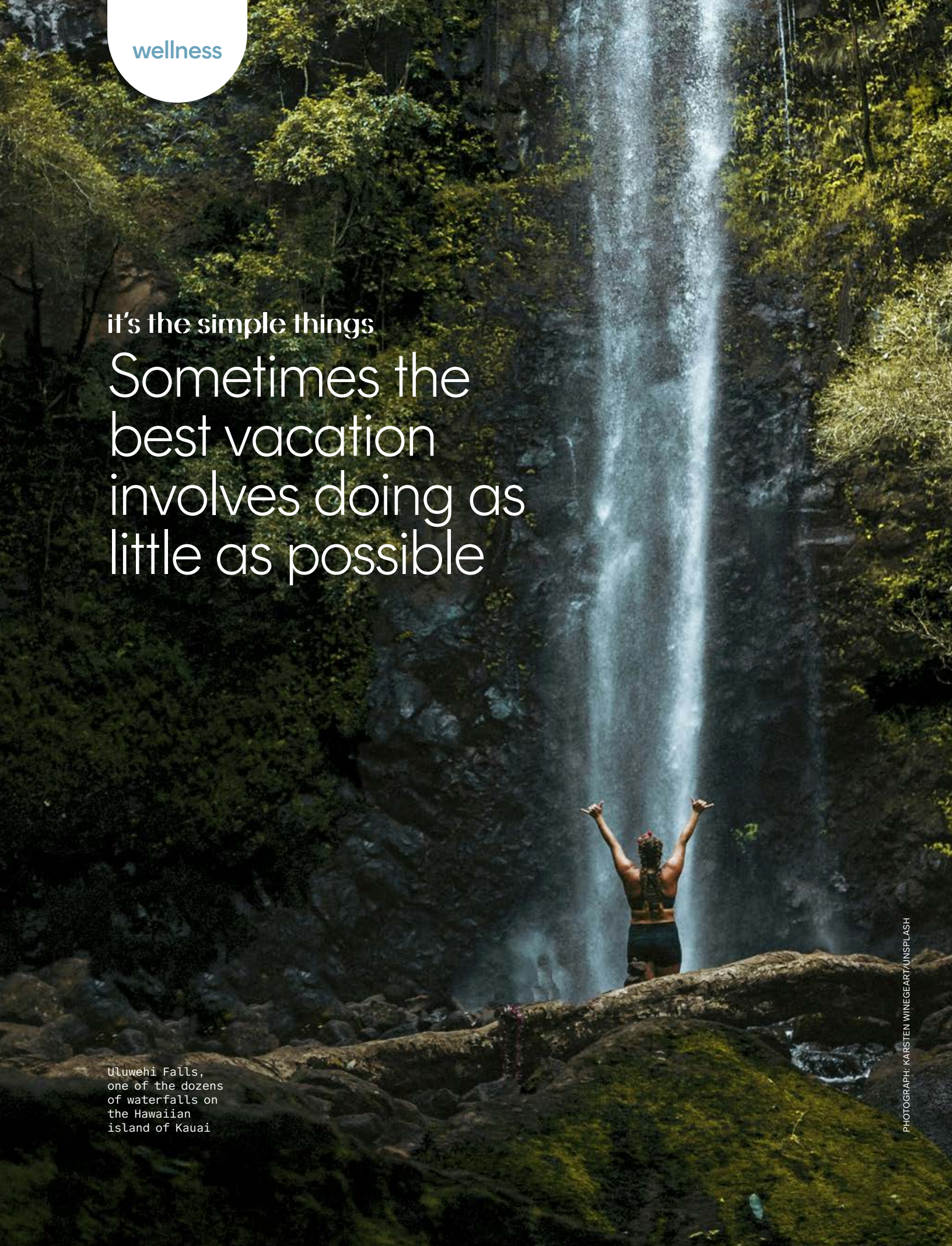
The four-floor Waterwell pool at Euphoria Retreat in Mystras, Greece

PHOTOGRAPH: EUPHORIA RETREAT

# what wellness is

There are so many reasons today for travelers to book a mind-body getaway beyond just wanting to unwind or lose weight. Here, we explore a few of those, from fostering emotional recovery to building leadership skills, from navigating menopause to becoming a better man. You'll also find our favorite travel specialists' takes on key trends and the spa openings we're most excited about. Be sure to go to cntraveler.com to visit Travel Well, our new always-on wellness resource, launching this month. To your health—wherever it leads you!



it's the simple things

# Sometimes the best vacation involves doing as little as possible

Uluwehi Falls, one of the dozens of waterfalls on the Hawaiian island of Kauai

PHOTOGRAPH: KARSTEN WINEGEART/UNSPLASH

**THE CHIMES** of my iPhone alarm reached a crescendo, signaling that it was 5:30 a.m. I longed to hit snooze but instead rolled from my bed and shuffled heavy-eyed to the coffee machine. A jolt of caffeine helped get me out the door just in time to make my 6 a.m. Pilates class. The early morning hustle would have felt routine if it weren't for the humid, plumeria-scented air, the sound of crashing waves, and the elevator-length commute to the gym.

I was in Kauai for a much-needed vacation. When I'd booked the weeklong trip three months earlier, I was feeling burned-out and sought a respite from days that were intensely structured around meetings and deadlines. Kauai seemed like the perfect tonic—I'd visited the island many times before, so on this latest trip I wouldn't feel the tug of attractions like the Nāpali Coast or Waipoʻo Falls in Waimea Canyon. I envisioned lazy, sun-soaked afternoons on the beach and mellow sunset surf sessions. My only agenda would be recuperation.

But my plan was foiled when the hotel emailed me its activities schedule one week prior to my departure. In hindsight, I should have ignored it. Instead, I rigorously pored over five pages of enticing programming ranging from hot Pilates and astrology readings to an opportunity to meet a local surf legend. Then there was the spa menu, promising restoration via flotation-tank sessions and herbal massages. Reservations were strongly advised for everything, and before I knew it my vacation itinerary was even more packed than my normal schedule.

And so, on day two, I found myself rushing from Pilates to paddleboarding. There was no time to sample the almond-cream-filled malasadas and tropical fruits at the breakfast buffet, so I grabbed a smoothie; while I waited for my order I texted the concierge to inquire about moving my massage a few minutes earlier so that I could catch the last pink swirls of sunset. By the end of day three, I'd posted a ton on social media—videos of myself sweating through a metabolic meltdown workout, paddleboarding, and mixing a perfect mai tai at a cocktail class.

But my new book remained closed, the deep soaking tub in my room had yet to be filled with bubbles, and I still hadn't lounged poolside or beneath a beach umbrella. By the time I checked out, I'd racked up awesome experiences but felt like I needed a vacation from my vacation. And the stats on my Whoop health tracker agreed. The app showed my body's physiological stress was higher than normal, my restorative sleep was poor, and my physical strain was above average, all implying I was even less rested and more stressed than when I arrived.

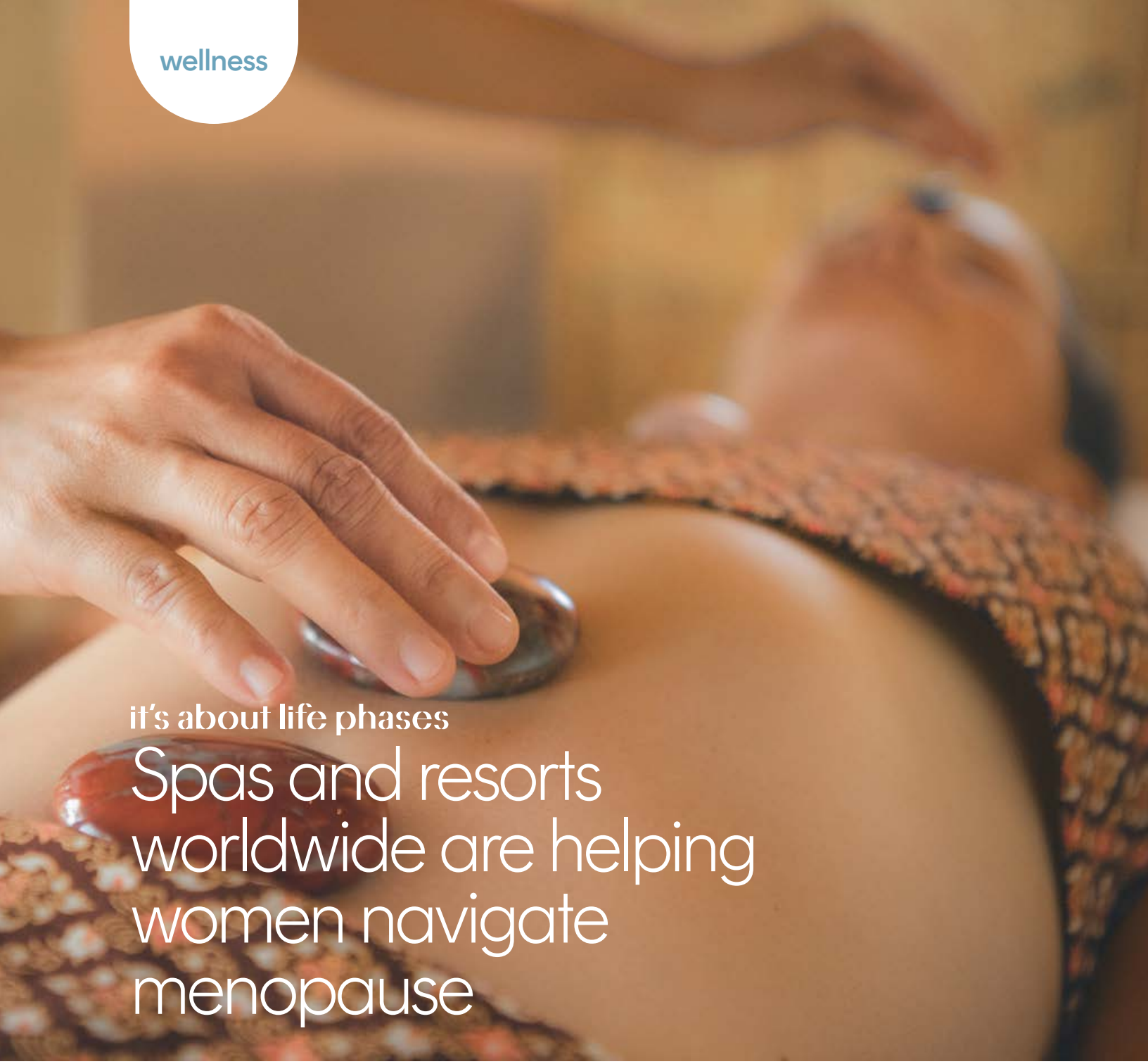
The importance of vacationing for health and happiness has been accepted for millennia. But in our more-is-more society, time off has become increasingly about collecting experiences—preferably over-the-top, FOMO-inducing ones. A holiday where you do nothing but sit on a beach can seem like a missed opportunity. Yet the very word *vacation* is from the Latin *vacāre,* "to be empty, be free, have leisure"—the opposite of my schedule in Kauai those first few days.

My overachieving, type A personality makes me a terrific traveler, but a terrible vacationer. It wasn't always this way. In my early 20s, I regularly bought cheap flights to the Caribbean so I could recover from the Manhattan grind by spending a few days napping on the beach. My goal was singular: Do nothing. Now that I'm in my 40s, my planned rejuvenation vacations are often derailed by a societal sense of urgency to do and see it all. I'm not alone. Jim Manley, the owner of The Ranch at Rock Creek in Montana, recently developed an activity called Respite on the Ranch, where staff take guests on horseback to a remote, cell-reception-free spot and leave them with a hammock, a picnic cooler, a blanket, books, and a walkie-talkie. "People were always telling me, 'When I come back, I just want to relax by the river and take it all in,' so we created an activity that forces people to just be in nature and relax," he told me.

Thankfully, I got a vacation do-over when I transferred to a hotel on the south shore for my final three nights on Kauai. I vowed to embrace what the Italians call *dolce far niente,* or "the sweetness of doing nothing." At check-in, I politely accepted the activities calendar and promptly stuffed it in my bag. I couldn't remember the last time I wasn't on the clock, constrained by a schedule. The slower pace gave me time to wander the tropical grounds and marvel at the riotous red ginger and lobster-claw-like heliconia, plants I would have otherwise rushed past en route to my next activity. I daydreamed by the pool, watching palm fronds sway in the wind, and admired a fiery sunset from my room's deep bathtub. I had no once-in-a-lifetime experiences to post. My days weren't action-packed or immersive. They were delightfully languorous, which was exactly what I needed. For the first time in a long time, I felt free. JEN MURPHY

**AN EXPERT SAYS**

"Personal wellness is connected to the wellness of places and fellow people too. Traveling for wellness will mean going deeper and for longer to reduce travelers' carbon footprints and negative eco-impact." **Frances Geoghegan, Healing Holidays**



it's about life phases

# Spas and resorts worldwide are helping women navigate menopause

**MELODIC MANTRAS** and warm oil repeatedly poured across the lower back are parts of Kati Vasti, an Ayurvedic therapy that Karina Steward, founder and chief wellness officer of Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary in Koh Samui, Thailand, swears would put anyone in a pleasure coma. "It's like when you rub oil on the back of a baby and they just pass out," she explains. But for women experiencing menopause, who are subject to nervous system overload, adrenal burnout, and sleeplessness, such treatments can feel especially powerful, Steward notes. It's one of many tools in Kamalaya's new Radiant Bliss program, a combination of Eastern and Western therapies. Stewart designed it to address women's health concerns at all points in the biological cycle, but the program particularly helps those enduring the mood swings, hot flashes, weight gain, and insomnia that are part of what was once referred to as "the change."

Cringey euphemisms for the midlife hormonal shift used to be commonplace. But today menopause and its harbinger, perimenopause (which can strike women as early as their 30s), have shed their Geritol-tinged stigma, thanks in part to the openness of stars who've gone through them: Oprah Winfrey and Drew Barrymore discussed hot flashes and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in their special program "The Menopause Talk," while Naomi Watts unveiled her meno-beauty brand Stripes at membership club The Swell's New Pause Symposium in New

PHOTOGRAPHS: KAMALAYA KOH SAMUI, SHA WELLNESS CLINIC

**From left:** A detox treatment to aid gut health at Thailand's Kamalaya; light bites at Sha Wellness Clinic in Spain

York and LA (tagline: "We're coming in hot!").

Now the same generation that once pushed for insurance coverage of IVF and breastfeeding pods at the office are flocking to spas and wellness retreats with programming that specifically addresses menopause. Spain's esteemed Sha Wellness Clinic recently opened a sexual health unit, prompted by "a shift in societal attitudes and a growing interest from our guests in addressing these issues," says Cinthya Molina, a clinical psychologist who heads the program. Guests are assigned therapies "based on balancing all hormonal axes" through nutrition, exercise, and supplementation, including plant-based "bioidentical" hormones. Some may also be candidates for a prescription of HRT.

In fact, with hormone replacement therapy still a fraught issue in the US—where the medical establishment has slowly re-embraced it after a faulty 2002 study connected it to elevated breast cancer and heart disease risk—many women are seeking guidance at wellness clinics. The seven-night program for menopausal women at Villa Stephanie in Baden-Baden, →

## new and next

**Tulah Clinical Wellness, India**
Named for the Sanskrit word for balance, this integrated health clinic in Kerala brings together sundry traditional and modern modalities, from Ayurveda to sports medicine. Stays can be as brief as three days for a diagnostic program or as extensive as three weeks for treatments focused on longevity and vitality. Aiming for net-zero impact, the property has embarked on an array of sustainability efforts, including solar-powered facilities and growing at least 60 percent of food on-site. *Opening July 2024*

**Clinique La Prairie Health Resort, Saudi Arabia**
The historic Swiss medical spa is coming to the Middle East as part of Amaala, an ultra-luxury resort community in development on the shores of the Red Sea. Health programs last a minimum of one week, with itineraries tailor-made for each guest. Amenities at the property, which has 79 suites and residences, include cryochambers and hyperbaric suites. Clinics range from physical therapy and radiology to dentistry and dermatology. *Opening mid-2024*

Rancho La Puerta grows much of its own food, including olives and citrus, on its 4,000-acre grounds in Baja

Germany, for instance, offers a cornucopia of protocols, including bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, mental health consultations, acupuncture, hiking, and a tailored dietary plan that targets glucose metabolism to regulate hormones. At 1 Hotel Hanalei Bay in Kauai, Hawaii, women work with experts to "unlock the power of biology" with a panoply of tailored therapies, including a comprehensive hormone assessment, nutrient therapy, and personalized bioidentical hormone replacement (with fun gizmos for symptom management, like an "ocean float room" to relieve muscle aches and compression leg cuffs to boost circulation).

Taking a less medicalized though no less immersive path, meno-focused group retreats are attracting adherents. Baja-based wellness pioneer Rancho La Puerta is hosting an Iyengar Yoga workshop for perimenopause, with a focus on asanas that address hot flashes, insomnia, and mood swings. And Amilla Maldives recently held a four-day Pause Retreat consisting of meditation, yoga, sound therapy, massage, and breath work that was so popular the resort plans to do it again. "Women loved that they had the time to learn about the changes taking place in their bodies," says general manager Narelle McDougall, "and ways to transition whilst enjoying their dream holiday."

Those who don't want a multiday commitment can opt for a quickie treatment at Chewton Glen, in South East England, called [Meno]pause and Restore, which aims to address emotional heaviness while decreasing inflammation in the body. Mii Amo in Sedona, Arizona, reopened its renovated spa with a workshop that addresses challenging life stages, while Miraval offers classes that address this transition, including a Pelvic Floor Wisdom offering. At Nayara Tented Camp in Costa Rica, the Rite of the Womb ritual, based on initiation traditions of Amazonian and Andean shamans, is offered to women who are pregnant, entering menopause, or have had hysterectomies.

Which may point to the most lasting antidote of all, and one that underscores why we travel. In places where traditional cultures still flourish, says Kamalaya's Stewart—like her homeland of Mexico, or her adopted one of Thailand—elders are revered and treated with kindness. "If we have a negative image of what menopause is, if we fight it, it will be a disaster. Yes, it's a closure, but I'm finding it is also the biggest rebirth. It's truly liberating. I hope that women can work with their health both internally and physically to experience menopause not as a decline, but a metamorphosis." ALEX POSTMAN

**AN EXPERT SAYS**

"Wellness travelers will keep exploring their connections to themselves—there are all sorts of new experiences that help do that, from laughter therapy to ice-bath ceremonies to psychedelic retreats." **Kristie Deane, The Escape Artist**

PHOTOGRAPH: RANCHO LA PUERTA

## it's a way to push yourself

# A plunge into the ocean at the end of the earth

**I'M WEARING A BARBIE-PINK** bathing suit, but there are no palm trees in sight. The snow has just stopped falling and I can see broken chunks of iceberg inching toward the ship I'm on. The ambient temperature is 29 Fahrenheit. As I step to the edge of the gangway of Atlas Ocean Voyages' *World Voyager,* panic sets in. The air whips against my bare skin. The water below is a dark azure, its depths unimaginable. It's my turn to jump, but I stand frozen in fear as a flurry of intrusive thoughts take over. Then I think about how bereft my Antarctica experience will be if I don't do the hard thing that I've come all this way for.

I turned to cold water immersion therapy during the pandemic as a way to cope with the stress of losing my job and the anxiety of

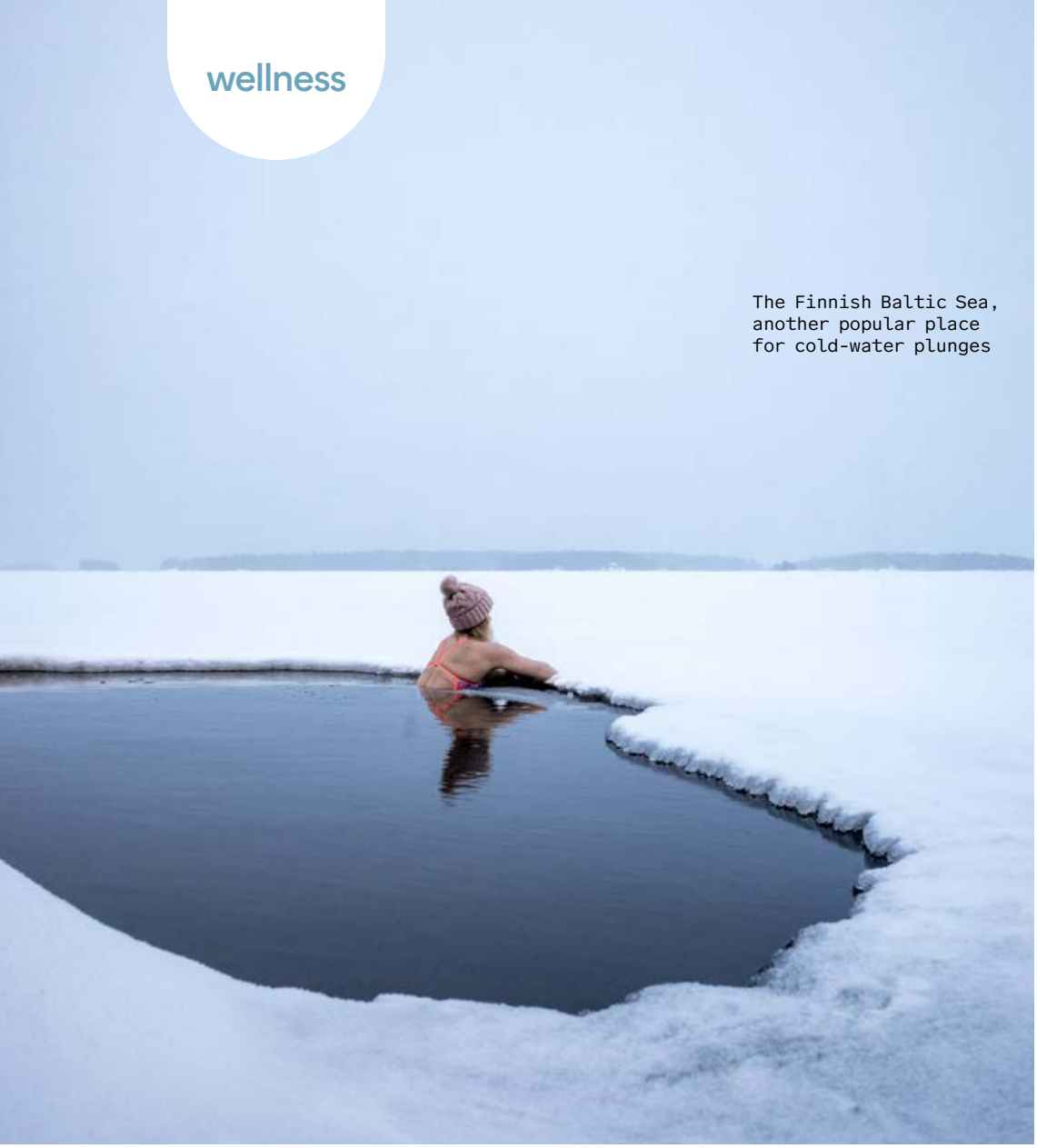
PHOTOGRAPH: BENJAMIN KAUFMANN/TRUNK ARCHIVE

The ocean around Antarctica is a numbing 32 degrees year-round

watching my two preteen kids sink into their own versions of despair as the weeks of virtual schooling turned into months and then a year. Some days I struggled just to get out of bed. I spent hours endlessly doomscrolling on my phone. That's where I discovered the very thing that would pull me out of my depressive funk: ice baths, the benefits of which are said to include lifting one's mood, improving memory and alertness, and relieving anxiety and stress.

At home, I started taking cold showers. At first I could last only five seconds, but in time I worked my way up to a minute. Initially I hated it, but in time it became euphoric. The more cold showers I took, the more I felt I could cope with my angst over things both big and small: being cut off in traffic, my son not setting the table despite being asked five times, going through yet another round of interviews only to not get the job in the end. The showers evolved into something larger. When travel restrictions lifted, I visited a spa in Whistler where, surrounded by an old-growth forest, I moved from the intense heat of a sauna to the frigid waters of a Nordic-style waterfall and pool. In Helsinki, I jumped into the Baltic Sea and treaded water for as long as I could stand it. I became determined to take a plunge in the coldest place on Earth.

That place is Antarctica. I chose to travel aboard the sleek 198-passenger *World Voyager* on its maiden voyage in November, because Atlas, known for its adventure-pushing expedition cruises to places like Svalbard, had billed a polar plunge as one of its experiences. I was also excited to try plenty of the other activities on offer, including paddleboarding, camping one night on the continent, and kayaking alongside whales and ice floes. But the weather was temperamental. For days I stared out the window of the onboard sauna glimpsing chalky white clouds crying out their little cloud hearts above the jagged landscape as waves pounded the ship. All of my activities, including my scheduled polar plunge, were canceled. I felt as moody as the weather, dogged with deep disappointment and frustration. So I did the thing I've been doing for the last few years: I took a shower and forced myself to stand under →



The Finnish Baltic Sea, another popular place for cold-water plunges

the cold water, surrendering to the discomfort for as long as possible. By dinnertime I was calm, at peace with what Antarctica was willing to let me experience during my short time here.

But on one of our last days, the ashen sky cracked open to reveal fragments of a cerulean canvas. Suddenly the blue took over and it was a glorious day, so brilliant and dazzling I couldn't quite believe it had ever been any other way. The captain announced over the loudspeaker that the polar plunge was finally happening. I swear I wasn't the only one at breakfast who gasped in delight. Of the 145 passengers onboard, 84 of us lined up to jump. I was last. I told the guide, almost in tears, that I didn't think I could do it. But he said yes, yes I could. All I had to do was jump.

I leapt and the glacial sensation rose swiftly from my toes to the crown of my head. It enveloped me in numbness. Everything was quiet except my heart beating loud and fast inside my chest. The Southern Ocean felt colder than ice. There was a burning sensation in my lungs, every breath a throbbing struggle. I thought of nothing. Not the camping or kayaking that never happened, not my life back home. Cold plunging forces you to be entirely in the moment.

I breathed it in, swam the few strokes back to the ladder, and climbed out of the water. Elation. I took one last look at the sea before toweling off and thought about my journey here, not just to Antarctica but to this moment of self-discovery, and how perhaps all the cold plunges I'd done thus far had taught me to slow down and take in the moment, to surrender to it instead of trying to control it. CELESTE MOURE

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*Atlas Ocean Voyages offers seven-day sailings to Antarctica starting from $7,199; atlasoceanvoyages.com*

## new and next

**Sha Wellness Clinic, Mexico**
After 15 years of promoting holistic health at its retreat in Spain near the sea, Sha has set up a new shop in Costa Mujeres, its first in the Americas. Here, custom-tailored health programs last from 4 to 21 days, led by specific goals—say, weight management and detox—or the root causes of guests' pain. A performance package aimed at corporate leaders focuses on stress management for execs.
*Open*

**Six Senses La Sagesse, Grenada**
For its debut in the Caribbean, the wellness-focused luxury brand arranged 71 pool suites and villas around a lagoon to resemble a fishing village—fitting for a resort that strives for self-sufficiency and harmony with the land. The resort is plastic-free, much of its food is grown on-site or responsibly sourced from nearby waters, and the spa works with local experts and herbalists to weave Indigenous healing modalities into rejuvenation treatments.
*Opening May 2024*

PHOTOGRAPH: MIKA RUUSUNEN/UNSPLASH

## it's learning to lead

# Visiting Greece to succeed at work in New York

**ON A BRIGHT** November afternoon at Euphoria Retreat on the Peloponnese peninsula, I find myself curled in the fetal position, my body supported by the cool wood floor. It's my first time trying somatic meditation, a practice that redirects one's attention away from the chatter of the mind and toward bodily sensations. Guiding me is Mary Vandourou, a spiritual instructor whose passionate demeanor belies her petite stature. She invites me to imagine the sensation of weightlessness. "We are born into water," she says. "This is the beginning of our journey."

I rise slowly, rolling my neck, stretching my arms and legs, wiggling my fingers and toes. Eyes closed, I focus on Vandourou's feathery voice as she enumerates the qualities of the water-leader archetype. "She's always in the flow and uses the flow to benefit her cause." But that's the challenge; going with the flow has never come easily to me.

This had become clear over the last year. After a recent promotion, I grappled with insecurities about my leadership style, questioning whether I was navigating the daily dichotomies of the workplace—offering support while fostering independence, maintaining structure while encouraging evolution—the "right" way. Factor in my chronic need for approval, and I can wind up in a spiral of

PHOTOGRAPHS: EUPHORIA RETREAT

Euphoria's immersive Sphere Pool

**Opposite:** The resort's Finnish sauna

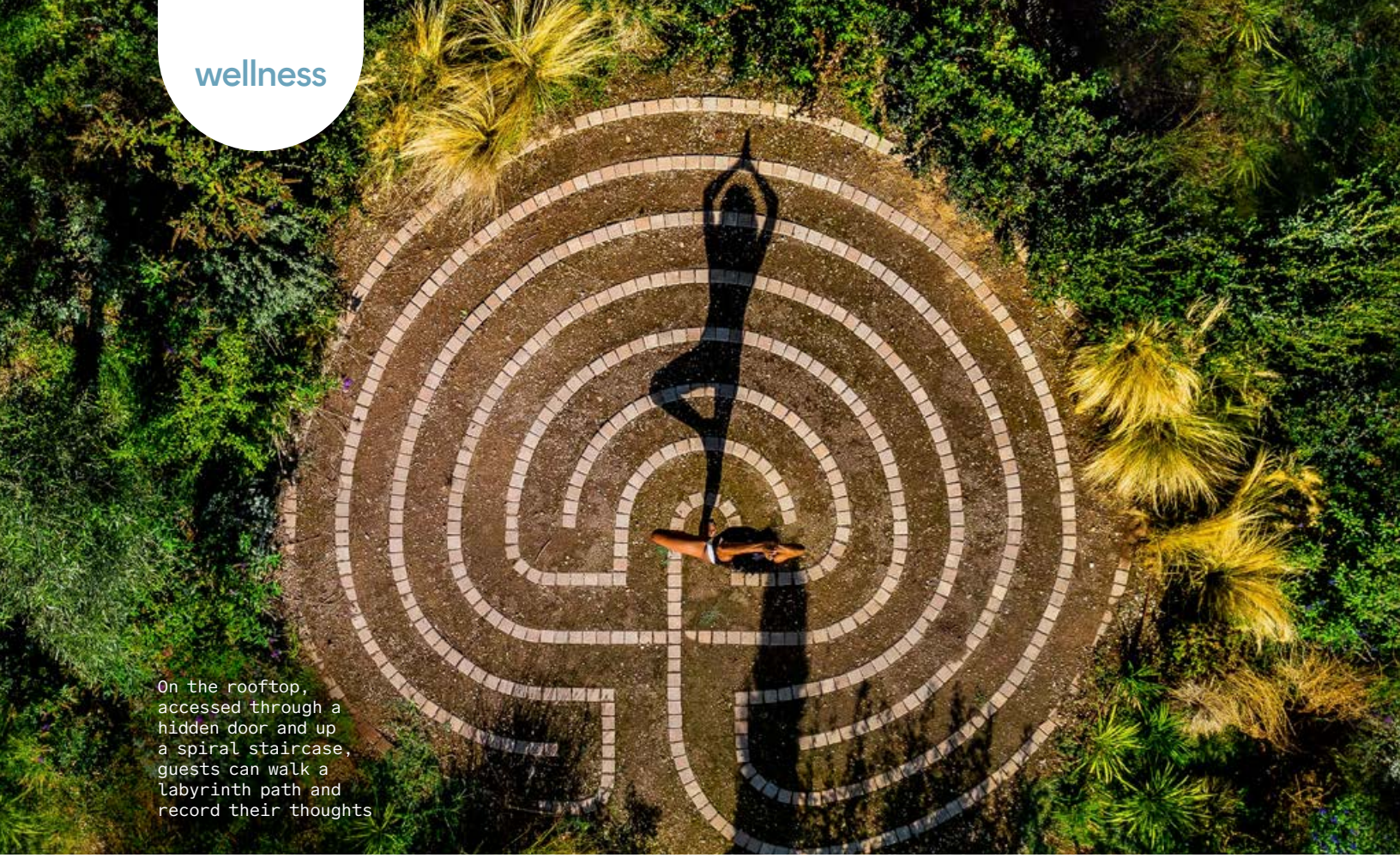
overthinking. Did I convey that gently enough? Was I also firm and direct?

Seeking the tools and space to recalibrate, I turned to Euphoria, a spa resort focused on holistic healing. Its location, tucked away in the ancient town of Mystras, was highly intentional, says founder Marina Effaimoglou, who, along with Vandourou, leads a retreat focused on women's leadership and empowerment. The forest surrounding Euphoria ascends toward the mythical Mount Taygetus. Once upon a time, women harnessed its energy for healing—an enchanting detail that captures the magic woven into the Euphoria experience.

The fragrance of a lush orange grove welcomes me upon arrival. I'm delighted to discover that my room, adorned with rich Byzantine-inspired tapestries, has a panoramic view overlooking Sparta. After settling in, I make my way to the restaurant, where I get to know the women—an environmentalist, a marketer, an NGO founder—I would be spending the next four days with. After a "drama therapy" icebreaker that involves improvising scenes from *Antigone,* we bond quickly.

Our time is spent largely within the resort, an architectural marvel with a spiral staircase, monastic arches, a hammam, and a pool with spherical stone walls. But the real work takes place in the yoga room on the third floor. It was there, nestled into plush floor cushions, that Effaimoglou introduces us to Euphoria's Methodos, an interpretation of the Five Elements theory. This centuries-old idea, found in both traditional Chinese medicine and ancient Greek philosophy, uses the fundamental elements of water, wood, fire, earth, and metal to better understand ourselves and how we move through the world. The elements correlate with the seasons, life phases, bodily organs, and, according to Methodos, leadership qualities: Water for patience, wood for drive, fire for spirit, earth for pragmatism, and metal for harmony and justice.

We use somatic meditation to physically experience the elements and identify our leadership archetype. My impatience quickly reveals that I'm not a water leader. But when the tranquil →



On the rooftop, accessed through a hidden door and up a spiral staircase, guests can walk a labyrinth path and record their thoughts

backdrop of soothing whale sounds shifts to a heartbeat-like drum, my posture straightens, and I confidently march to the beat with an innate sense of power and purpose. "After winter comes the life force of spring," says Vandourou. "It's the season of wood."

We cycle through the elements just like this. For fire, I shimmy my shoulders with the same abandon I did during my clubbing days. Our group dances together, twirling and dipping one another. Transitioning to metal, I sprawl on the floor like a starfish and channel the emotions (grief, impatience, fear) I most struggle to manage, envisioning them floating into the distance. It's fun—enlightening even.

Still, nothing feels as transcendent as embodying the wood archetype. Discovering that the emotion most closely linked with wood is anger was disheartening, but Effaimoglou, a fellow wood leader, reassures me that the element's strength lies in transforming anger into drive, kindness, and generosity. She likens wood types to seeds planted in winter, compelled to surface when the sun returns. This is wood in its most balanced state—overcoming obstacles with flexibility, outsmarting challenges with cleverness, and pushing through with sheer determination.

During a walk in the forest near the end of the retreat, I'm captivated by the towering trees, which appear to connect earth and sky. The head senior therapist tells us that, according to the ancient Greeks, cypresses symbolize resilience. My gaze travels down an elongated tree trunk, and I realize that my growth is defined by relishing change, not resisting it.

Little did I know how much change awaited me back in New York: Within days of touching down, I was given an opportunity to oversee an additional multimillion-dollar business with a growing team. But things feel different now; I am acutely aware that change is the only constant. Knowing I have the tools to weather it has brought me the calm and confidence I'd been searching for. With the optimism of a seedling preparing to sprout, I whisper a promise to myself: Keep growing. LEILA MILGRIM

*Euphoria offers programs from $4,110 and rooms from $285 per person; euphoriaretreat.com*

**AN EXPERT SAYS**

"Wellness enthusiasts will continue to seek unique service treatments, but the properties they visit must be sustainable. They're asking about green credentials and the impact a resort has on the local community." **Grace Cular Yee, Pineapple 7**

PHOTOGRAPH: EUPHORIA RETREAT

## it's for healing

# Thailand's storied retreats offer an emotional reset

**SUNSHINE WOULD HAVE** been too much after three years that felt like one long dark tunnel. I arrive, exhausted, on Koh Samui during a monsoon, the wet jungle swaying with the energy of renewal. That night, a lullaby of raindrops helps me drift off to sleep. The far-off storm flashing on the horizon expels my subliminal rage. I awaken, refreshed, to birdsong.

Rage is one of many emotions that have compacted inside me like coal. For years I have suppressed feeling, lived day to day, hour to hour firefighting, awaiting a break in the clouds. The pandemic had promised to be a productive time for redrafting my novel, but nothing could have prepared me for what was to come. It transpired that my octogenarian father, who suffered from Parkinson's, had been tricked out of his longtime home and wine estate in Piedmont by the very family he had bankrolled and employed all his life. Due to loopholes, destroyed documents, and the painfully slow Italian legal system, we were told the situation was hopeless.

I moved into my father's house to defend his rights. I taught myself Italian law, investigated, tracked down documents and witnesses. Weeks turned into months, then years. Both of my parents became fully dependent on me. There is no way to explain the trauma, isolation, and loss of identity that can come from

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS WISE, KAMALAYA KOH SAMUI, ABSOLUTE SANCTUARY

**From far left:** The spa at Kamalaya; an herbal compress used during traditional Thai massage at Kamalaya's spa; the pool at Kamalaya; guest rooms at Absolute Sanctuary

being a caregiver. Simple tasks become monumental feats. Complex logistics, emergency room visits, medications, incontinence, repetition, and aggression became my life. I mined every inch of my being for patience, annihilating myself and my needs until I was numb.

But my suppressed side, anesthetized every night by red wine, always woke me at 3 a.m. The next day I would jack myself up on caffeine and nicotine, ignoring my back problems, chronic allergies, and migraines. I buried my grief: over losing a father figure, my childhood home, my book, the baby I had planned (now impractical), and the brutal three-year-wide bite that had been taken out of life. While packing up my father's estate, I was overcome with an urgent desire to flush the poison of the previous three years from my cells.

My solution is the trip to Koh Samui, to visit Absolute Sanctuary, but I almost don't make it. My father has had a bad fall. By the time I reach the lotus pink buildings and palms encircling the infinity pool, the stress is affecting my short-term memory. I hate that my fatigued spirit feels out of sync with the benevolent staff and the happiness-inducing scents of Thailand. Weak and with nothing to organize for the first time in years, I hand myself over to wellness consultant Aurelie Gauthier for a seven-day semifasting detox, working on the gut to help switch off an excess of cortisol and encourage serotonin production. My daily regimen includes green shots, detox juices, broth, ginger tea, and two alkalizing gluten-free vegan meals. The resort has a strict no-smoking, no-alcohol policy to boot.

Propped up by nicotine and caffeine for so long, I'm hit by a tsunami of exhaustion as soon as I remove the stimulants. I go deaf in my right ear and fall into a kind of narcolepsy for days, setting my alarm for treatments to which I stagger in my pajamas. On the second day, a caffeine-withdrawal migraine leads to uncontrollable vomiting. "You've been silencing your body for so long," Aurelie explains. "This is the first time you've given it a chance to speak."

After a day, we restart the program. I sweat out negativity in the infrared sauna, coughing it from my chest and blowing it from my nose. I am massaged back into existence one limb at a time, supported by petite Thai women who stretch and pummel me with so much force and power while caring for me with such gentle compassion. By the end of the week, I've lost almost nine pounds, detoxed from caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, and regained my sense of vision and smell.

Kamalaya, in the island's south, is where I →

go for my second retreat. The word means "lotus realm" in Sanskrit, and that's what I find: a lotus-strewn wellness utopia and heavenly bubble cut off from the world. More upmarket ashram than spa, it is built around giant boulders and babbling streams, with ornamental pools and waterfalls that flow down to a sliver of beach. Prayer flags and devotional marigolds bless the teak pagodas hung with brass lanterns, the candlelit shrines of Buddha and Ganesh, and the clay-colored rooms.

Kamalaya is populated by more than a hundred masters of traditional Chinese and Thai medicine, Ayurveda, and functional medicine. Naturopath Kate Upton encourages me to continue the detox I started at Absolute Sanctuary in addition to the burnout program here, with extensive menus of kaleidoscopic dishes that promote healing rather than abstention. Sessions of Reiki the previous week have soothed my exhausted "giving" right side and primed my starved "receiving" left side, so I am ready for vitamin IVs, ozone therapy, acupuncture, Taoist abdominal massage, physiotherapy, and sessions with a life-enhancement mentor.

Treatment rooms are purposefully monastic, decked in Tibetan art and saffron textiles. In a traditional Chinese medicine session, my practitioner, Pitchaya Kitti, explains that I have an imbalance of elements. My pulse is too fast and my tongue is

**AN EXPERT SAYS**

"Wellness travelers will prioritize quality over quantity. Letting go of the counting-countries mentality and embracing more culturally engaging trips that emphasize human connection, not tech disconnection." **Karen Costa Hattaway, Life Beyond the Room**

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS WISE, KAMALAYA KOH SAMUI

**From far left:** At Kamalaya, an offering of flowers at a small shrine; the yoga pavilion at Kamalaya

purple, a sign of stagnated chi and long-term low mood. Pitchaya inserts needles into my forehead, sternum, stomach, thighs, and ankles, then uses a technique often practiced on stroke patients to reopen the body's nine sensory portals and combat depression, which shoots a sudden jolt of electricity up from my left ankle. At night I join other guests sipping virgin mojitos in Soma Restaurant. We eat silently at our own tables, each in a separate golden orb of candlelight and thought while staffers serve as charming go-betweens, serving fragrant pumpkin-okra curry, lentil dosa, and cauliflower rice.

Going to bed early and rising at dawn, I feel recalibrated to the natural order of the earth. Everywhere I go, I am struck by beauty and my own clarity of thought. A voice inside me says: "It's time to let go."

"You deserve a beautiful life," says Srinivas Bhat, a former monk from Chennai who is my life-enhancement mentor, with such conviction that I break down and cry. "You are very strong and powerful, but you are exhausted. You must stop resisting life, surrender yourself to the flow of the universe." Healing, he says, is embracing your pain so it can extinguish itself. During guided meditation, I cry and shake. Afterward, I curl up in a towel on my balcony, the sound of monsoon rain massaging my brain. I wake three hours later, somehow changed. That night, after dinner, glowing lanterns line my path like benevolent souls guiding me safely home. CHLOE BOTTERO

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*Healing Holidays can arrange a seven-night Relax & Renew program at Kamalaya from $3,579 per person based on double occupancy, including transfers and full board, as well as a seven-night Yoga program at Absolute Sanctuary from $2,119 per person, based on double occupancy, including transfers and full board. healingholidays.com/condenast*

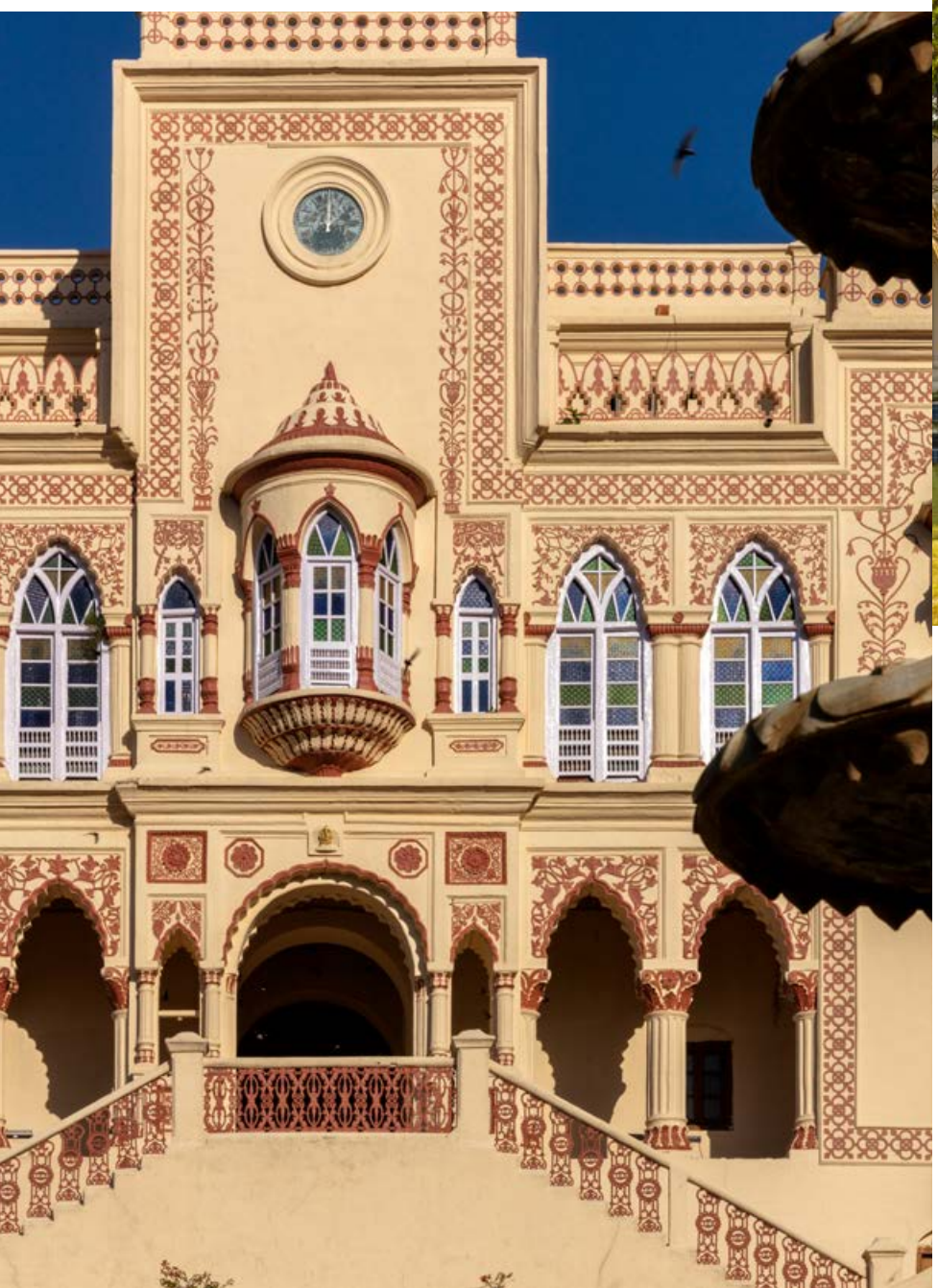
## new and next

**Engel Ayurpura, Italy**
High in the Dolomites of South Tyrol, this sleek glass-and-wood hotel embedded in the forested mountainside is all about the pursuit of harmony. The intimate scale of the retreat, which has just 15 rooms, means attention is well-tailored to each of the residents. Nutrition plans and bespoke therapies are designed by in-house Ayurveda specialists, ranging from a four-day beginner's program to a detoxifying 21-day Panchakarma intensive. Activities are minimal; rest is the goal. *Open*

**The Ranch Hudson Valley, New York**
This iconic Malibu retreat is debuting on the East Coast at a sprawling estate once owned by J.P. Morgan just 45 minutes outside Manhattan. Stays are based on guests' fitness needs and schedules, including shorter programs for midweek getaways and a four-day reset over a long weekend. Meals are plant-based, organic, and locally sourced; treatments range from cryotherapy and colonics to light hikes and sanctioned nap time. *Opening spring 2024*

it's for everyone

# Men are discovering the value of self-care too



**IT IS A SUNNY** winter morning, and I can see snowcapped peaks in the distance. The fragrance of pine fills the air. Birds chatter in the trees above. All is peaceful. And yet I feel as though I have just climbed a mountain—and I don't mean my recent four-mile uphill hike to the temple of Kunjapuri. I am on day seven of a weeklong stay at Ananda in the Himalayas, the lauded palatial destination spa near the spiritual hub of Rishikesh in northern India. I've come to work my way through a glut of issues, including work stress, niggling joint pain, anxiety, loss of libido, constant fatigue, and sleep disruption. The uncertainty that followed the COVID-19 pandemic had worsened all of them.

PHOTOGRAPHS: PANKAJ ANAND

**From left:** Vernacular architecture at Ananda in the Himalayas; sunrise yoga next to the music pavillion; a therapy room

As a middle-aged man, I am not the traditional inpatient at Ananda, which is known for its integrative approach to wellness using therapies from modalities like traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda. Women have historically made up 60 percent of all guests. Yet I do notice a handful of XYs in the treatment rooms and on the verdant grounds. Since 2019, Ananda's male clientele has grown by 14 percent, consisting mostly of men between 35 and 65. They come, Mahesh Natarajan, Ananda's COO, tells me, to treat cardiovascular issues, hypertension, and imbalances including digestive problems, sleep disorders, and reproductive health issues like sexual dysfunction. Many also seek to address suppressed emotions. "We see it start boiling to the surface from the mid-40s onward," he says.

This trend is playing out across the luxury wellness sector. Frances Geoghegan, a *Condé Nast Traveler* Travel Specialist and the founder of the expert wellness-retreat agency Healing Holidays, reports that men now make up 48 percent of her business, up from 20 percent a decade ago. "Men have been feeling the stresses and are now taking charge of their own wellness," she says.

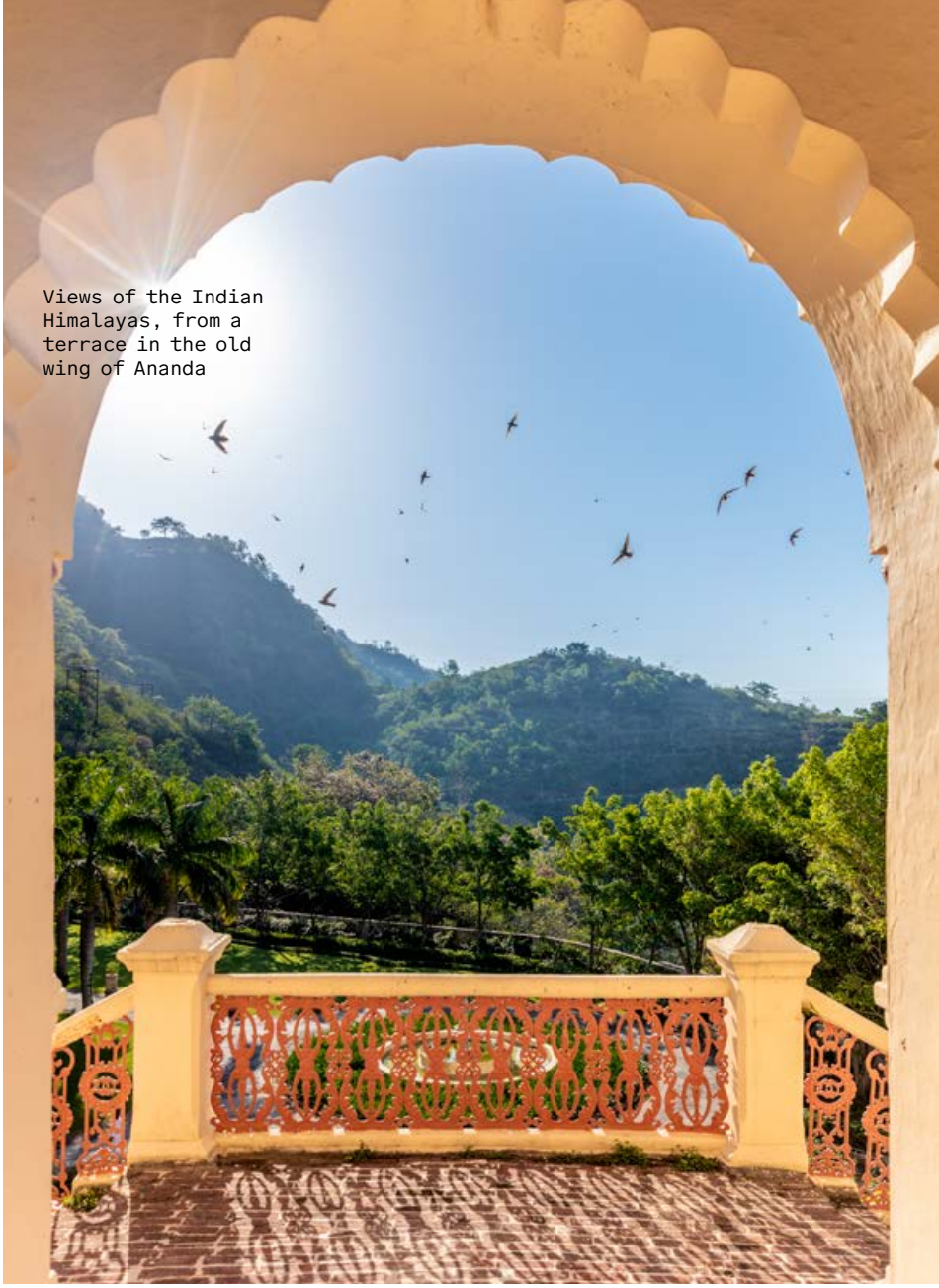
One reason for the shift is an increasing social acceptance of men being proactive about self-care. "For men, going to the gym or taking up sports was the norm," says Mini Chandran, who works in product development at Kerala's Ayurveda-centric CGH Earth. "But now they are looking at prevention over cure." Miraval, the luxury wellness resort with outposts in Arizona and the Berkshires, reports that male guests increased by 105 percent last year from the year before. Its locations have engineered specific programming including talks on mental health guided by →

former NFL players and experts, the result of a partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Of course, physical fitness remains hugely important to wellness programs, with European spas like Lanserhoff and Sha excelling on these fronts. But Geoghegan says that men are increasingly seeking treatment for major life events, including divorce, bereavement, and career setbacks.

My stint at Ananda begins with an extensive consultation, where I answer a range of queries about all aspects of my health, including my libido (or lack thereof) and the consistency of my stool. As awkward as the conversation is, I know that being honest will ultimately make for a more successful program. What I most want is to regain sound, healthy sleep. The moment that happens, Naresh Perumbudri, a doctor of Ayurvedic medicine and Ananda's resident expert on hormonal issues, tells me, "is when you truly start to heal." My answers, along with a check of my pulse, form the basis of my treatment itinerary, which includes daily four-hand oil massages, acupuncture, and sessions devoted to cupping, yogic posture, breath work, and meditation. Each treatment represents a step further on a journey in which detoxing is only the beginning and the ultimate goal is to nourish the soul.

Each day I check in with the healers. Each of their specialties—including Ayurveda, traditional Chinese medicine, and yoga—will help me achieve greater balance. The conversations also force me to examine my own behavior; I come to recognize that achieving long-term success will require me to make some lifestyle changes: more exercise, less coffee, even less alcohol. Every meal at Ananda is tailored to help me reach goals: a puffed rice dish for breakfast, a gluten-free laksa for lunch, a buckwheat and cabbage mille-feuille for dinner.

The turning point for me comes on the fourth day, when I walk out of a one-on-one emotional healing session after having sobbed my heart out. Roma Singh, a veteran clinical hypnotherapist and regressionist, had asked me to talk about the pain of my failed relationships, my guilt at not being a good brother, and my lingering grief over the deaths of my parents. I feel like a load has been lifted off me. And I don't mean the pounds I'd dropped. That night, for the first time in years, I sleep a still, dreamless sleep. Something, indeed, has shifted inside me. PRASAD RAMAMURTHY



Views of the Indian Himalayas, from a terrace in the old wing of Ananda

PHOTOGRAPH: PANKAJ ANAND

*The Hormonal Rebalance Program at Ananda in the Himalayas starts at $900 per night, based on single occupancy; anandaspa.com*

**AN EXPERT SAYS**

"Traveling for health can only do so much when life at home is stressful. More and more, wellness experiences will offer travelers sustainable practices they can keep and cultivate long after the trip is over." **Sara Aiko, Curated Kyoto**