



## NEW RETREATS LEFKADA, GREECE

**IN BRIEF** Peace and enlightenment with unspoilt views

**THE LOWDOWN** From the deserts of Morocco to the northern lights of Lapland, this new-wave company is leading the way when it comes to escapes dedicated to mental cleansing. If you are a lover of sun, sand and sea you will fall for Greek island Lefkada. The endless panorama of blue dotted with distant sleepy isles is mesmerising. With its wise old oak and olive trees, the environment lends itself perfectly to the week-long stays run by warm and impassioned couple Brian Hilliard (he's been teaching mindfulness for more than 35 years) and Shannon van Staden, who acts as host. There are group jogs at dawn and Tibetan Lujong yoga exercises. Meditation takes place twice a day in the sala, where the enchanting panorama and bird chatter are the only distractions around. Each session begins with spontaneous instruction from Brian on subjects such as developing an equanimous mind by neither accepting or rejecting our experiences, followed by intermittent sitting and walking meditation. The sitting may seem interminable in the beginning, but glimpses into a joyful state of being will soon make you want to stay cross-legged forever, or as long as your knees can take. Caterpillars dropping down from neighbouring trees, crawling curiously over meditating limbs, serve as inspiration for change and what flowering of consciousness may occur (especially when black butterflies flutter in too). Aside from the teachings during the day, your time is free to do as you like – you can even go off and explore the surrounding area in one of the Jeeps. The island has beaches that rival the Caribbean. Katsiki is a stunning cove, or tackle the 300 steps down to neighbouring Egremni for endless wide-angle views. Staying in the villas has its own appeal too: set into the side of the mountain, the sandstone buildings have huge beds from which to watch the sun rise over the mountain peaks and sailing boats etch lines across the horizon. Food is fresh and nourishing: brunch may consist of thick yogurt, honey, fruit and local eggs. For supper, expect feasts of locally sourced fish or pork souvlaki and tzatziki with wine, if you wish. There is an air of celebration rather than restraint here; this is confirmed on the final night when aspirations are written on a paper lantern and launched into the brilliantly starry sky, prompting everyone to wish big.

**INSIDER TIP** Don't miss a hike down to the private beach. It may be a good 40 minutes each way, but the sense of accomplishment plus the opportunity to see dolphins in the stunning nature reserve without another being in sight, makes it worth the scramble.

**BOOK IT** A seven-day stay starts from about £1,040 per person full board, including daily Tibetan yoga, meditation talks and practice, and evening events (+33 638 027 303; retreats.pro).

