



Olympians and sporting icons making fitness fun on Turkey's west coast

PICTURE: Wellness Worldwide

Wellness wow factor

Work out with Olympic athletes and learn to dance with *Strictly* stars during a sporty resort stay in Turkey, writes **Kirsten Henton**

Push with your legs!" Paula Radcliffe shouts encouragingly as she powers past, while I wrestle with my oars. Despite having had personal tuition from Olympic rower Victoria Thornley, I'm still stationary on my RowSUP, an adapted paddleboard for newbie rowers. Thankfully, however, I am not alone – I can see Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill entangled in the rope demarcating our play area in the Aegean Sea. "Excellent," I think. "She has no idea what she's doing either."

This moment, studded with Olympians who are both experts and novices in this particular field, encapsulates the magic of what's happening here. I'm attending the second Wellness Week with Olympic Medallists and World Champions, a five-day sport and fitness fest at the sleek Anda Barut Collection resort, close to Didim on Turkey's west coast.

The annual event, organised by Wellness Worldwide (which offers resort-based events featuring some of the world's best-known sporting stars), offers an eclectic schedule built on fun. Sessions are designed to give guests the chance to try something new or practise a skill they're keen to improve, under the expert instruction of Olympians and other big names in sport, dance and more, all at no extra cost compared with a regular stay.

The action-packed timetable includes activities such as swimming with Rebecca Adlington, doing circuits with Daley Thompson and Colin Jackson, and learning to

dance with *Strictly* stars Ola and James Jordan (with their adorable daughter in tow). Clients can pick and choose the activities that appeal, while enjoying near-unfettered access to the very best in their business who are, entertainingly, all sampling each other's sessions too.

A GROWING TREND

The week speaks to a growing trend of wellness tourism. According to the Global Wellness Institute's Global Wellness Economy Monitor 2024, wellness-related trips accounted for 7.8% of all tourism and 17.9% of all tourism expenditure in 2023, reaching a record value of \$830.2 billion worldwide.

“This isn't a dedicated wellness resort, but its lush grounds, variety of swimming pools and workout spaces provide the ideal surroundings

Although Anda Barut Collection is not a dedicated wellness resort, its lush grounds, variety of swimming pools and workout spaces provide the ideal surroundings. Opened in 2024, the 'ultra all-inclusive' resort is a delectable escape from reality with its warm Turkish hospitality, whitewashed walls, muted tones and natural stone and wood trimmings. ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Writer Kirsten with British Olympic rower Victoria Thornley; Anda Barut Collection's upper lobby; Penthouse Suite with a private pool and sea view; the on-site Cutara Madventure Park PICTURE: @ozanphoto

“It’s intimidating at first to launch into a new activity with strangers, but the welcoming environment soon sees to that

Its 547 rooms range from Sea View and Swim-Up Deluxe to Suites and Penthouses, spread across three zones: adult, community and family. There are also 13 villas, varying in size to accommodate between two and six people. These generous spaces feature bedrooms, a living area and kitchen as well as a utility room. While many services are included, there are optional paid-for extras such as a private butler.

On arrival, guests are invited to join a WhatsApp chat with Guest Relations and download the resort’s app to see the day’s schedule of events and book any of the seven inclusive à la carte restaurants. It proves tricky to secure a booking during this busy week, but I nab a reservation through Guest Relations and discover it’s worth the effort for the seat at Tiger, where plates loaded with sushi are a chance to restore some of the energy I’ve expended during the day.

Families are well looked after with kids’ pools, clubs and a buffet, not to mention the on-site Cutara Madventure Park, a water park with some serious slides and flumes that elicit shrieks from all ages. There’s plenty to entertain adults too, whether kid-free or taking a break, be it in the Tuva Spa with its hammam (with mixed and women-only options) or classes including yoga, Pilates and Zumba.

GETTING STUCK IN

Wellness Week ratchets these up and it’s intimidating at first to launch into a new activity with a group of strangers, but the welcoming environment soon sees to that. Even more reassuring, there’s a real mix of participants ranging from the chic Lycra set, the avid runners and the fitness fanatics to those with injuries and ailments to factor in, those feeling the stiffness from previous classes and a few with sore heads from the night before.

Every activity is an opportunity for people to move without judgement or expectation. Fellow guest Harvey Ockrim, a long-time follower of similar athlete-led events at The BodyHoliday in Saint Lucia, who has journeyed to Turkey with his wife and friends for Wellness Week, says it “challenges people’s perceptions of exercise, much like ParkRun has done for running”. ➤



HISTORICAL SITES

Whether lunging or lounging, a visit to Turkey’s ancient ruins offers a taste of culture alongside the Wellness Week activities. The following can be reached by taxi or a private transfer arranged by the hotel.

Temple of Apollo: Inside the archaeological site of Didyma, the Temple of Apollo is considered one of antiquity’s best-preserved odes to the god. The site is closed for restoration, but can be seen from the surrounding path (15 minutes by car).

Miletus: Once joined with Didyma by the 10-mile Sacred Way, Miletus became a major trading port under the Greeks and Romans from the 11th century BC. A big archaeological site, its well-preserved theatre is the star attraction (30 minutes by car).

Ephesus: The Unesco-listed site was founded in the 10th century BC and flourished as a centre of trade and culture. Abandoned by the 15th century, it is famed for its Roman-era Library of Celsus, impressive theatres and preserved streets (an hour and 20 minutes by car).



Didyma, Turkey

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Selcuk Oner

DESTINATIONS

HOTELS, RESORTS & SPAS | TURKEY



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Olivae Patisserie; serving up healthy snacks; Max Whitlock leads a run; enjoying push-ups; guests are put through their paces in an aquafit class **PICTURES:** Red90; Wellness Worldwide; Sezengul Keles



Although some guests have come here especially for the week's activities, others were unaware of them but are now delighting in classes and impromptu gatherings such as 'friendly' (read: competitive) volleyball, all of which foster a sense of community and team spirit.

“A lot of people think fitness spaces are intimidating, but group classes build momentum and camaraderie

I'm loitering at the side of the swimming pool ahead of aquafit, something I've never done but feel compelled to try, having watched it the day before and felt inspired by the energy from the dynamic duo of Jordan Florenville and Ellie Wraight. The pair are co-founders of JE Thrive, which was founded in Saint Lucia and offers bootcamp and other activities during events hosted at The BodyHoliday – so they are already familiar faces for many of the Wellness Week attendees. Jordan says: “Sadly, a lot of people think fitness spaces are intimidating, but group classes put people on a level

playing field. They build momentum and camaraderie.”

And it's not just the guests who are trying new things. Max Whitlock, a multi-medal-winning Olympic gymnast who only recently retired, leads some morning circuits and runs. He tells me: “The atmosphere is amazing; everyone is enthusiastic and I'm meeting people from all different backgrounds. I've also tried a yoga class for the first time and aquafit, plus running every day isn't a regular thing for me either.”

HIGH ENERGY, LOW COMMITMENT

Thankfully, I'm on more familiar ground with the daily yoga class, though it's a new experience to follow the guidance of Olympic diver turned yoga teacher Leon Taylor. He says: “We want to speak to those who like to move but don't want to commit to a bootcamp where they might have to drink sparkling water and eat lettuce leaves. Here, you can have your cake and eat it too.”

And guests certainly are able to do just that at Anda Barut Collection's Olivae Patisserie, which teases, judgement-free, with a rotating selection of pastries, desserts and homemade chocolate late into the evening, ensuring just enough caloric motivation to attend the next morning's expert-led circuits. **TW**

BOOK IT

Anda Barut Collection will hold its next Wellness Week in May 2026, with a line-up of sports stars, fitness experts and activities that are yet to be revealed. barutanda.com

Jet2holidays offers a seven-night stay for two adults from £1,194 per person, based on two sharing in May 2026. The price includes return flights with 22kg baggage from Stansted and an all-inclusive stay in a Deluxe room. jet2holidays.com