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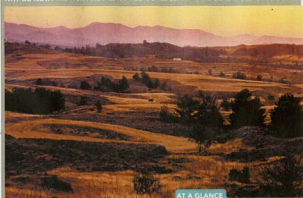
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CYPRUS

WHY GO NOW? THE PART AROUND PAPHOS IS STILL SUNNY—AND BEAUTIFULLY CROWD-FREE



What do you want first—the good news or the bad news? The bad news? OK, on first impressions, the coast of Paphos is like a more serene version of the home countries—full of British resorts enjoying theme parks and stretches of beach and seaside leisure. That's not altogether surprising, considering by direct flights from the UK, it has to be persuaded 18,000 of us to forsake grey skies for a new home here. The good news is that, with a few car and even the fastest series of airplanes, you've got a real island-mooded respite to explore in the sun-drenched countryside. The word "sunshine?" This ancient corner of the island has sunshine—340 days of sun-soaked rays a year, to be precise. And that's really only the need, apart from your towel and bottle of sunscreen, to reach the coast of the deserted

beaches and glittering Mediterranean a little further up the coast. If you're not a beach bunny, point the car to the hills beyond Paphos. Halpin leads you up roads and up to remote villages, where daily scenes are cinema-ready classics—you'll swear the Tourist Board pays those retired old men to sit playing dominoes in the shade of the fig trees. Eating can be a terrific, no-nonsense affair, particularly in the many rural tavernas—just-poured attiki is rich beef steaks when the order of the day. Accommodation, by contrast, is increasingly fabulous, as new spa resorts feel a glorious draw to the sea. And the evening's just 20 euros, starting with ancient New Paphos, its ruins strewn around the modern town. Ask any wonderer or one wants to leave?

Josephine Davies

AT A GLANCE

➔ **WEDDED BLISS:** Cyprus is the second-most popular place for Brits to get married abroad, after Bahamas.

➔ **SAY CHEESE:** Cypriots love their halloumi—a mild, rubbery cheese. Officially recognized by the EU as a traditional Cypriot product, it is made only on the island. Try it with watermelon, or grilled with salad. Asari is another local treat—wild and creamy like ricotta cheese. It's delicious with a drizzle of honey.

➔ **IN-THE-KNOW:** Greece's answer to Malibu, European veteran Anna Masi, is actually from Cyprus.

➔ **HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS:** If you're asked to dinner, bring a bottle of local wine, and say, "This wine is better than that rubbish they make in Greece."

➔ **HANDY PHRASE:** "Opos lekion only lekion ager na xerofati," which means, "Where there are lots of cypresses growing, the sun heat delays." Useful when everyone's talking at once (but uncertain how).

SUGGESTED WEEKEND

Day 1 Get out at a spot after your flight, then explore the ancient ruins at Paphos.

Day 2 Take the scenic coast from Paphos to Polis, stopping to visit the spectacular views, and to explore the villages of the Akamas Heights on-site.

Day 3 Take the Akamas Gorge, or take a trail on the Akamas Peninsula. Then head to Lara Beach for an afternoon flopping in the sun.

Day 4 Soak up some hot rays, then squeeze in a few more luxury spa treatments before taking your flight home.



FOR BODY

• Cyprus has some of the **Mediterranean's** most coveted spas—look some "real" time at one of these thoroughly modern sanctuaries. New on the scene is the **Aphrodite spa** at the Aria Hotel (spa, 00 357 26 845100, www.ariaresort.com)—small but intimate, with lots of dark wood, low lighting and Zen pebbles. Ono-scented incense sticks smoulder while Elenis treatments are performed. The **Thalassa spa** (below) at the Anassa (00 357 26 888000, www.thanahotels.com) is a complex of candlelit treatment

rooms, with terracotta umbrellas trickling water, a colonnaded pool, and products from the Organic Pharmacy. The Cypriot scrub—based on olive oil and sea salt—will leave you smooth as a baby's proverbial. For more escapism, the **Anagallis spa**, subtly hidden away beneath the Thalassa (00 357 26 881500, www.thalassa.com.cy), has plenty of bamboo, glass and splashing fountains. Try a smooth-inducing facial using Sodehi and Daylin products. • The best bronzing spot on the island is down a long dirt track to isolated **Lara Beach**,



...AND FOR MIND

• Unearthed in 1961 by a farmer ploughing his field, the Roman mosaics at the **Paphos Archaeological site** (spa, 00 357 2494 0217) are corkers. At the House of Dionysus, prepare to be stopped in your tracks by the intricate patterns below wooden walkways. Each tells a story—look out for Narcissus gazing longingly at his reflection, and the tragic tale of Pyramus and Thisbe (an early Romeo and Juliet). • From Paphos, the scenic 13701/ΕΥΡΩ road winds its way to Polis, with some stupendous

views on route. Stop off for a snapshot of traditional life at the tiny villages of the **Akamas Heights**—Dionysos, Kitiona, Tera, Kallitias, Pano Akamasitis and Kato Akamasitis. Pigeon-peddle stone houses seem to be slumped in the sunbake, and old ladies in black shawls down narrow lanes. • The **Tombs of the Kings**, near Paphos merit an afternoon's exploration. Carved from sun-scorched rocks in the 3rd century BC, they are reached by steep steps into cool, dark chambers—long since robbed of any treasures. •



Azia, Paphos (00 357 26 845100, www.aziaresort.com)

The Azia has bougainvillea-filled gardens sloping down to the sea. Most guests choose to laze on chiffon-draped day beds, or around the palm-ringed pool, which comes with a swim-up bar. Go for a room with a whirlpool tub on the balcony – a corny-but-memorable way to watch the sun set. Doubles with whirlpool tub from £62, B&B.

the hills outside the village of Kathikas.'

- 'You may see what look like rather unappetising long, beige sausages sold at street stalls – they are *siousioukos*, a traditional (and delicious) sweet made from grape must, almonds and flour.'
- 'Margarita's ice-cream shop in Polis has delicious flavours – my favourite is rose.'
- 'Try *commandaria*