



Ancient columns at the Tombs of the Kings (Getty)

There's more to Paphos than sunbathing and getting sloshed

The Cypriot city is a destination for holidaymakers seeking comfort and culture

FEATURES Emily Hill 19 Apr 2017



Paphos was once best known by Brits who wanted to boil themselves lobster red while getting on the ouzo, but that is all set to change thanks to its selection as the 2017 European Capital of Culture and a chic makeover at its leading boutique hotel, **Almyra**.

Madame Joelle Pleot is the mastermind behind the peaceful interior of the Kyma seafront suite where I stayed for three nights. In her native Paris, she has previously worked on a house for Karl Lagerfeld and the apartment of Coco Chanel, and has brought to Almyra a modernist style and simplicity rarely seen in even the most luxurious hotels.

Hints of serious luxury come in the form of Acqua di Parma toiletries in the bathrooms, a hotel shop stuffed full of Gucci and Jimmy Choo and a full five star experience at the hotel spa, Almyraspa. Dedicated to innovative holistic treatments, with ILA products and herbs from the Almyraspa's garden, I opted for the 'ILA Vitality Prana' massage which totally rejuvenated its life source – undoing all the kinks introduced by EasyJet earlier in the day.



The Infinity pool at the Almyraspa

Almyra's newest addition is a 33m by 7m infinity pool and I would have been quite happy to swim in its pristine waters while contemplating the sparkling Mediterranean. But the hotel's hospitality team were out to prove that Paphos has far more to offer than 300 days of sun a year – plus plenty of sea and sand.

We experienced wine tasting with Cyprus's foremost oenologist Georgios Kassianos (who also happens to be the hotel's head sommelier – and top marks went to the island's violently coloured rosé) and an introduction to Cypriot tapas at Koutourou, a vintage cafe in the Old Town. Tours were laid on to show exactly why Paphos earned the right to be the European Capital of Culture.

Its many historical monuments include the Roman mosaics illustrating the terrible love lives of the Greek gods at the House of Dionysus in Paphos Archaeological Park and an underground necropolis hacked out of rock – known as the Tomb of Kings – which dates back to the 4th century BC. The town is also home to the remnants of a column where St Paul was whipped for bringing Christianity to Cyprus and a catacomb with 12th century frescos where Christians once hid, which is now marked by a tree hung with handkerchiefs tied as offerings for the healing of the sick.

But Paphos also boasts more contemporary attractions – in the form of an gallery celebrating Cyprus's most famous artist, the late Stass Paraskos. Born to a peasant farmer in a village near Larnaca in 1933, Stass moved to Britain aged 20 and worked as a pot washer before enrolling at Leeds College of Art.

In 1966, he was tried under the Vagrancy Act for displaying paintings that were 'lewd and obscene' – the last in a series of challenges to the freedom of the arts that began with the Lady Chatterley trial in 1960. He lost his case and was fined £5. Today, his nudes don't seem in the slightest bit shocking, but the brightness of his paintings seems to capture the vibrant colours of his homeland. Spring is the best time to experience this in all its glory – wild poppies and marigolds paint whole fields red and yellow, while a tour of the beautiful Akamas peninsula is worth taking not just to hear about the endangered turtles, which come to lay eggs on the shore, but all the flora and fauna now in bloom.

All this is a mere four hour flight from Gatwick. Plus, of course, since the Almyra team caters to each and every whim of its guests... you can still get extremely sunburnt and drink too much ouzo, if you want to.

Kirker Holidays (020 7593 2283, www.kirkerholidays.com) offers short breaks and tailor-made holidays throughout Europe and beyond. A three night holiday staying at the 4 deluxe Hotel Almyra starts from £598 per person including flights, private transfers, accommodation with breakfast and the services of the Kirker Concierge to restaurant reservations or arrange excursions with an expert local guide.*

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