

THE SPEAR'S 500

TRAVEL GUIDE 2018



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THE SOUND OF CYPRUS

Christopher Jackson finds culture and relaxation in abundance in a beautifully designed Paphos hotel

by Christopher Jackson – Deputy Editor of *Spear's*



I AM WALKING past one of the infinity pools at Almyra in Cyprus, scrutinising the island weather. This has been exhibiting a vexing changeability at odds with late March expectations in this heat-laden part of the world. Intent on the breakfast buffet with its embarrassments of cheese, fish and meat, I do not expect to find myself waylaid.

But waylaid I am — by the sight of interior designer Madame Joelle Pleot. She sits in creative bliss, taking in the lines of the pool, the colours of the day, and the sky shifting beyond us to rain. I will later realise why Karl Lagerfeld tapped her to design his own house, and why she did up a flat for Coco Chanel. As my days pass, I find myself continually thinking of Madame Pleot, and come to realise that I have been surrounded all along by the work of a true artist.

On our last night, during a vigorous wine-tasting, she will confide, with an air of quiet revelation, that after much thought, she has decided to introduce a fourth colour — burgundy — to the palette of the hotel. Hers is a ponderous, but soulful art.

Out beyond the quiet thoughtfulness of the hotel, Paphos is changing its image to something perhaps less soulful and more interconnected: along with Arhus in Denmark, it's one of two European capitals of culture for 2017. There's some fanfare around that — the government buildings have submitted to a tenuous makeover. The somewhat forced publicity will have been worth it if it makes more people visit this troubled, but beautiful land.

Spring is a good time to go. Out on the promontories, bright red poppies and sun-yellow marigolds dance under the blue sky. A mile or so from Almyra, the House of Dionysus sits in the archaeological park, deservedly celebrated: there you will find Hellenic mosaics, with decorative Islamic-looking touches, all testifying to Cyprus' history as a meeting-place of cultures.

Inland you will find another UNESCO World Heritage Site, in the shape of the Tomb of Kings, that damp necropolis dating back to the 4th century BC, in which so much hope of the afterlife is entombed. St Paul, in all his proselytising vigour, also came

here, receiving a doubtful welcome from the then governor: a half mile or so from the Almyra, Paul is meant to have been whipped by a tetchy Roman governor for bringing Christianity to Cyprus.

This is a place which cannot forget the intricacies of its past: caught between competing interests, it has always been the football for the latest ascendant power — whether that be Greek, Roman, or Ottoman, not to mention the present vexations caused today by Erdogan's Turkey. Cyprus, to an unusual extent, opens up onto profound questions of identity.

All of this means you might be torn between the culture beyond and the luxury within. But if you want a break from the huge questions, the hotel itself has much to offer. You can relax in the infinity pools, dig into the almost comical multifariousness of the buffets, or sample the wines of sommelier Georgios Kassianos — a figure of kingly importance in the world of Cyprus wine. During our tasting the great man was texted for advice by the Minister of Agriculture, and showed himself a man obliging to the requests of government.

Almyra then is a place where you unwind, but also feel enhanced. In Almyraspa, a début facial revealed to a shocked masseuse the criminal parchedness of my Londoner's skin. But her shock subsided: and I forgot the politics of the world, and for a few brief moments was as relaxed as Madame Jouelle. ☺

“ALMYRA IS A PLACE WHERE YOU UNWIND BUT ALSO FEEL ENHANCED”

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Room rate from £598 per night



A pool and one of the rooms at Almyra