

Aphrodite's Island

By Barbara Radcliffe Rogers

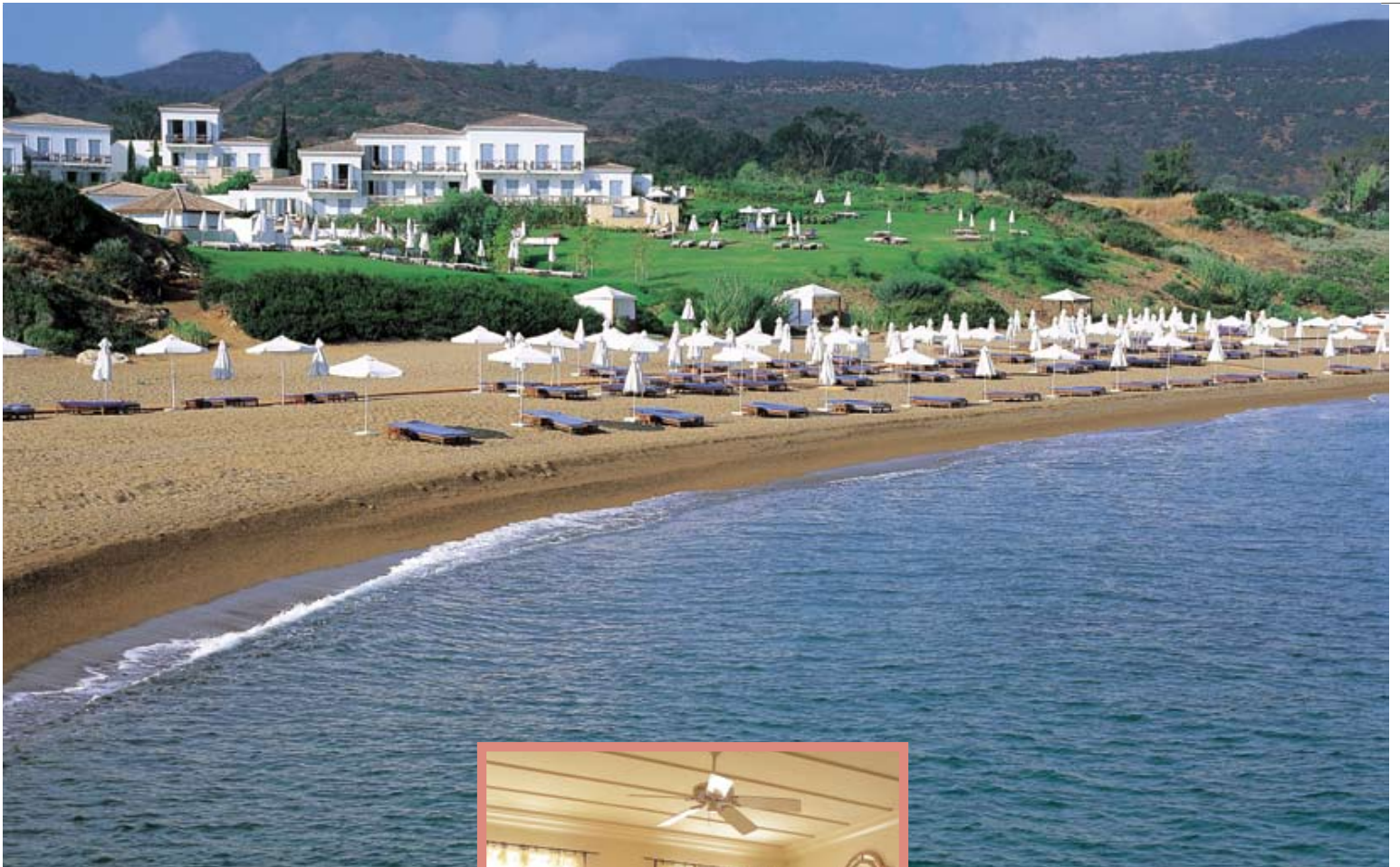
*M*ythology holds Cyprus to be the birthplace of Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of love, and travelers have loved the island since ancient times. It was so popular, in fact, that in the course of its history it has been ruled by everyone from the Egyptians and Alexander the Great to Richard the Lionheart, who stopped en route to a crusade in the Holy Land and was married there.

Twenty-first century travelers will love it, too, especially when they view it from the terrace of its premier luxury enclave: Anassa. Five stars aren't quite enough to describe the sweeping land and seascape, or the 177-room resort that overlooks it from a rocky perch above Chrysochou Bay.

The stunning white complex of guest rooms spilling over a hillside between the mountains and the Mediterranean Sea respects Cyprus's land and architecture. Planned to resemble a Cypriot village, the resort cascades down the sloping shore in a series of low whitewashed, tile-roofed buildings connected by walkways through gardens of native flora. The architects worked closely with Florida landscape designers, Ecoplan, to integrate the buildings into the natural landscape.

This sense of place continues as guests step inside the stylish entrance to find a spacious sitting area in the marble and mosaic lobby. Wide-arched passageways furnished in antiques lead to restaurants and guest rooms. Cyprus's own rich cultural heritage is everywhere, in the Roman mosaics, the arches, the Greek motifs and Venetian frescoes.





These classical touches play well with the cool and creamy modern Mediterranean style, a tantalizing taste of guest rooms decorated in pale tones of off-white, with touches of peach, aqua and coral. Large windows overlooking the sea and gardens combine with the color scheme, marble floors and unfussy furnishings of natural wood, rattan, stone and wrought iron for an air of serene luxury.

Designed by James Northcutt of Los Angeles, rooms are spacious. Even the smallest — the Garden View rooms and Studio Suites — have a sitting area, marble bathroom and private balcony or terrace with teak tables and chairs. Furnishings are handmade by local craftsmen.

Larger suites have terraces with private pools, and three Presidential Suites also have outdoor whirlpool tubs overlooking the sea. In addition to the comfortable sofa and overstuffed chairs, larger suites have a marble dining table for in-room entertaining.

The two-story Alexandros Residence features a full-sized swimming pool that is heated in the winter, and a study/library and kitchenette. The villa is furnished in antiques and original paintings, and each of the two bedrooms has its own balcony.

True to its concept as a Cypriot village, the resort sits around a town square, with a chapel, whose bell tower is the tallest structure on the property. Like the lodgings, these are built of native materials, in local architectural styles. In summer, weekly Cyprus evenings here include a



buffet of local foods, crafts sales, traditional dancing and music.

Fabulous Food

Dining, too, reflects Cyprus's traditions, offering the best of new Cyprus cuisine. Menus in all four restaurants are firmly based on seasonal produce from local farms and herb gardens and on locally caught seafood. All of the restaurants feature vegetarian dishes.

Basiliko, the most intimate, is often described as a vaulted monastery cellar, but that doesn't do justice to the sleek curves



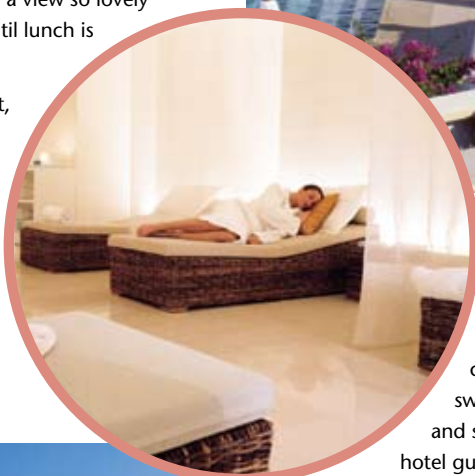


of its plastered arches, its minimalist upholstered chairs and linen-clad tables. The chef interprets Mediterranean styles with French and Asian influences, and serves a weekly nine-course degustation menu with wine pairing.

The formal Helios dining room specializes in Pan-Mediterranean cuisines, with handmade pasta, grilled seafood and stylish presentations. Look for specialties such as grilled ostrich medallions.

Casual Amphora's bamboo and wrought iron furniture is set among leafy plants. Local dishes — the lamb is outstanding — rule both the nightly buffet and lengthy a la carte menu. Breakfast is served on the terrace, and the morning light dazzles on a view so lovely that guests want to stay, gazing at the sea until lunch is served.

Pelagos, Anassa's seasonal poolside restaurant, features an open kitchen with a lava stone grill. The lighter Mediterranean menu offers a lot of fresh fish dishes such as grilled sea bass fillet with roasted tomato and a ragout of local olives. Sandwiches are available at three bars and lounges, one of which is the swim-up Meltemi Pool Bar at the infinity pool; an upper pool flows into it with a waterfall.



Roman-style surroundings is refreshing and rejuvenating.

The spa offers aromatherapy, reflexology, massage, scrubs, wraps and a variety of facials, hair treatments and beauty services. Its swimming pool, thalassotherapy pool, Jacuzzi and steam and sauna rooms are for the use of all hotel guests, as is the gym.

Activities and Indulgences

A heated seawater pool is a focal point of the Thalassa Spa, which offers a complete range of health and beauty experiences using Organic Pharmacy's 100% chemical-free products. Thalassotherapy (from the Greek 'Thalassa,' meaning sea, and 'therapeia,' meaning healing) combines seawater, algae, sea mud, salt, seaweed and even the moisture-rich coastal climate for health and beauty. Relaxing in the spa's



A children's pool, club and special menus follow Anassa's philosophy that the best vacations are family vacations. The Smiling Dolphin Kiddies Club, open from April through October and during the winter holidays, provides painting, water sports, cooking and other activities for 4- to 11-year-old children. Babysitting is available as well.

Watersports — parasailing, canoeing, windsurfing, kite surfing, jet skiing and sailing — are arranged through the water sports center at Asprokremnos Beach, one of the most beautiful beaches in Cyprus, which is located just beyond the resort. In the summer, the hotel provides beach chairs and umbrellas. Cyprus offers exceptional diving, and Anassa's diving center provides boats for rapid transport to the caves and reefs.

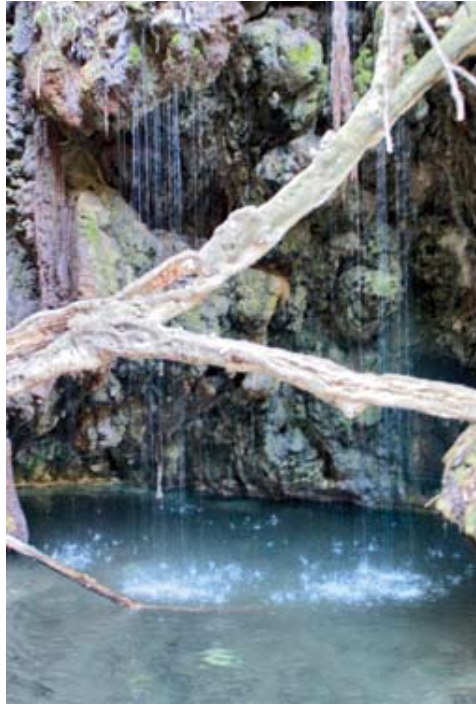
Island Intrigue

Within a few miles, Anassa's guests find much more to love about Aphrodite's hometown. The Akamas Peninsula, where the hotel is located, is largely protected as a nature reserve. Its pine forests, mountainsides and miles of dramatic coastal cliffs and coves are beautiful all year, but prettiest in the spring, when the pale chalky soil is painted with wildflowers. Endemic species — plants native only here — number 135, and native blooms bring the total to more than 1,000, including brilliant red splashes of poppies. Fluorescent pink bougainvillea cascades from balconies and Campari-colored geraniums run wild from doorstep pots. Olive trees dot the landscape, and glossy green orange groves grow row-on-row alongside the road.

At the cliffs of Petra Toy Romiou, locals point out the very spot where the goddess of love sprang from the sea and sailed in on her half-shell. The nearby Sanctuary of Aphrodite at Koulia was, until the third century, among the most celebrated pilgrimage sites in the ancient Greek world.

Like Aphrodite, the island was born from the sea, rising up during violent volcanic eruptions. The resulting shore varies from beach to sea cliff, some almost pure white, others riddled with caves that carve them into strange, convoluted shapes. Coastal walking trails hang above a green sea so clear you can see every rock on the bottom.

One such path leads along the cliff top to the Baths of Aphrodite, said to be her favorite bathing spot, an atmospheric spring overhung by trees, where legend claims the goddess first set eyes on Adonis. For



those who prefer the steep rock faces to be above rather than below them, another trail leads through Aradas Gorge, carved hundreds of feet deep by a river that now forms a mere trickle. Goats scamper along narrow shelves on its towering vertical walls, so far above they look like toys against rocks the color of Cyprus honey.

Cyprus's wonders are not all natural ones. Churches and monasteries are lined with mosaics, frescoes and intricate woodcarvings. St. Nicholas of the Roof is one of nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Troodos Mountains, with frescoes as alive as they were when they were painted a millennium ago. Fifteenth-century icons are framed by fine carving in gold, red and blue.

Mosaics at Pafos go back even further, to the third and fifth centuries, when villas of three Roman noblemen were floored in intricate inlaid stone designs. These are considered the finest ancient mosaics in the Eastern Mediterranean.

An even more impressive relic of ancient civilization is at Kourion, near Limassol. On a magnificent hilltop, overlooking cliffs that stretch long white fingers into the sea, are a Greek theater, Roman villa and an early Christian basilica whose columns, walls and mosaic floors remain preserved enough to show the layout of rooms.

Much of Cyprus's charm lies in the startling contrasts — side-by-side ancient and modern, mountains and sea, Greek temples and five-star hotels, chanting of monks and laughter at the infinity pool bar. Cyprus packages a heady blend of mythology, ancient history and modern luxury into one island.

If You Go:

Anassa's high-season rates for rooms begin at \$300 a night for two, and suites range from \$425 to \$2,225. Presidential Suites are \$2,800 to \$6,550.

Telephone: 800-323-7500, Fax: 357-235-1918

www.anassa.com.cy/anassa.aspx

Cyprus Airways and British Airways fly daily between London and Cyprus; British Airways connects daily from U.S. gateways to London.

www.cypriairways.com

www.britishairways.com

The Cyprus Tourism Organization provides details and maps.

Telephone: 212-683-5282

www.visitcyprus.com

