



Condé Nast Traveller

THE WORLD MADE LOCAL

MIDDLE EAST EDITION

Plus

SOLO TRAVEL IN THE
MIDDLE EAST

KAZAKHSTAN'S UNSUNG
FOOD SCENE

A RETURN TO CYPRUS,
THE ISLAND OF LOVE

Style it out

EMERGING DESIGNERS, RESURGENT CRAFTS AND
SURPRISING SHOPPING SPOTS AROUND THE WORLD

LOVE ISLAND

ON A JOURNEY ACROSS CYPRUS, FROM THE SHORES OF LEMESOS TO THE
SLOPES OF THE TROODOS MOUNTAINS, SELINA DENMAN RECONNECTS
WITH THE PLACE SHE ONCE CALLED HOME

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OWEN TOZER





The marble plaque is improbably specific. In Greek, the inscription from 2013 reads: “On this beach, on 9 January one thousand years ago, Aphrodite stepped onto the shores of Pafos.” A hulking rock formation marks the exact spot where the Greek goddess of love is said to have emerged off the coast of Cyprus in a flurry of sea spray and spume, carried naked, at least according to Boticelli’s 15th-century rendering, on a giant scallop shell. She has long demanded deference on this sun-hardened island at the far-eastern edge of the Mediterranean – the ancient temples at Palaepafos, Amathous and Kition where she was once worshipped downscaled over the ages into the bare-chested Aphrodite statuettes now sold in souvenir shops across the land. As the sun rises over distant hills (slow and unhurried, as is the Cypriot way), throwing her birthplace into relief against a grey-hazed horizon, I cast a silent challenge to the notoriously capricious deity: “Can you help me fall back in love with this place I once called home?”

THE GODDESS OF LOVE HAS LONG DEMANDED DEFERENCE ON THIS SUN-HARDENED ISLAND ON THE FAR-EASTERN EDGE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

I grew up not far from here, in Cyprus’s second largest city, Lemesos, or Limassol. My English father and Kenyan-Indian mother arrived in the late 70s and never left. A saucepan-shaped mass 225km long and 100km wide, Cyprus is the third largest island in the Med, after Sicily and Sardinia. But by my mid-20s, it had started to feel too small. Like I didn’t quite belong. Surrounded by sea on all sides, I grew restless, maybe even resentful. So I left for Dubai, an inconsequential footnote in a long history of outward and inward migration. Cyprus’s strategic location has attracted plenty of unwanted admirers over the ages: the Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Crusaders, Venetians, Ottomans and British all passed through; and then, in 1974, Turkey invaded, and continues to occupy 36 per cent of the north of the island,

rendering Lefkosia, or Nicosia, one of the last remaining divided capitals in the world, and forever altering the Cypriot psyche. The result is a knotty, fractured identity. Cyprus is a member of the EU, but not really European. It is Greek speaking and leaning, but not part of Greece. Though many will try to deny it, it feels undeniably Middle Eastern, closer geographically to Beirut or Amman than Athens or Thessaloniki.

It is pointless, perhaps, to try to untangle my own sense of identity in a place that so struggles with its own. I have returned regularly since I moved away 17 years ago, but this time, I set out to properly explore – and reconnect. My own mini Greek odyssey. I start in Lemesos’s historic heart, where breakfast in the square in front of the Old Port Hotel comes with an archetypal Cypriot view. In the shadow of the 16th-century Kebir Mosque, a remnant of those pre-invasion days when Greek and Turkish Cypriots used to live side by side, old men gather in an old-school coffee shop, or kafeneio, sipping silt-like coffee from diminutive cups, the clack of backgammon pieces echoed by the sound of prayer beads spun

rhythmically around idle fingers. We didn’t come to this part of town in my youth – too rough, too rundown – but a slew of regeneration projects co-funded by the EU has swept out the air of neglect, restored the pretty British colonial, neoclassical, Venetian and Ottoman-influenced buildings, and pedestrianised the streets around the University of Technology and the medieval castle, where shiny restaurants, breweries and cafés unfurl onto pavements like the city’s army of stray cats. Amid the concept stores and gelato joints, there’s enough of Lemesos’s former grit to keep things interesting – the odd building still boarded up or surrendering to decay, its mud-brick innards on show for all to see; or the snarl of street art imprinted on walls, including pro-Palestinian graffiti signed “Eiba” that appears almost nightly. ➤



is a surprise, but she was born in the UK and studied at the London College of Fashion, before returning to the motherland and launching her clothing and homeware label, Tradition Now, to reinvigorate Cyprus's forgotten crafts – reshaping earth-red terracotta jugs into glazed tableware and sculptural vases, or placing Lefkara lace on easy linen

separates and handy tote bags. The sturdy cane baskets traditionally used to transport potatoes that she has recast as lampshades hang in the restaurant at Agora, a boutique hotel in the centre of the village that is undoubtedly one of Cyprus's best.

TREES FLUTTER HOPEFULLY IN THE BARELY-THERE BREEZE, SHROUDING THE TERRACED STEPS OF LONG-FORGOTTEN VINEYARDS

Aphrodite might have been up to her old tricks the day Aleksander Eng happened across this historic building, wiped the dust from one of its windows, peered inside and instantly fell in love with its bare, long-abandoned bones. The now 36-year-old Dane, who made his fortune as an early investor in Joe & the Juice, and his wife Emilie Green Novél, set about converting the former village marketplace into a hotel where 18 rooms frame a central courtyard. Mid-century design pieces sit among vintage dial-up phones and family heirlooms such as a tiny pair of scuffed riding boots Eng used to wear as a child. It all feels highly personal, but also international-standard slick – a far cry from the soulless beach resorts that used to dominate in my day, when prawn cocktails and English breakfasts were deemed the height of sophistication. Reclining under an ivory umbrella on the red-and-white striped loungers around the pool, I meet two young Norwegian women who have travelled to Cyprus specifically to stay at the hotel, after seeing it online.

Lefkara to the Marathasa Valley. It takes closer to three – the winding

mountain road dipping, rising and looping amid endless forests of pine, cypress and cedar, through tiny villages whose names I've never heard and past Cyprus's highest point, 1,952-metre Mount Olympus. Travellers have come to Kalopanayiotis for centuries for the healing powers of its sulphur springs, although the trickle of water meandering from the rock face into the Setrachos river doesn't look like much. I take off my shoes and let it wash over my feet just in case – but more tangible results come from a morning spent in the Myrianthousa Spa at Casale Panayiotis, where after stints in the herbal steam room, snow cabin and tropical

rain showers, I loiter in the hydrotherapy pool and take in views of the valley. Cedar, eucalyptus, oak and poplar trees flutter hopefully in a barely-there breeze, shrouding the terraced steps of long-forgotten vineyards and the timber roof of the Unesco-listed St John Lampadistis Monastery, home to some of the best-preserved frescoes on the island. A James Bond-esque lair stands watch from the top of the mountain, an unapologetic slash of concrete and glass that's home to the new Marathasa Winery. Founded in the 11th century, Kalopanayiotis became a centre of agriculture and viniculture, and then thrived in the 19th century as Cyprus became a major exporter of copper extracted from mines near here. In the 1940s and 50s, people started leaving for larger urban centres, and then the Turkish invasion in 1974 dealt a final blow, cutting off access to the port at Morfou and bringing mining to a halt.

"It was a dying village," a local resident tells me. After decades spent working in the Middle East, John Papadouris returned to the place of his childhood and was shocked by its decline. He started buying up old homes and converting them into Casale Panayiotis, a rustic 41-room ➤




From left: fun in the water at Pissouri Beach; an installation at XeniArtSpace, Lemesos; village salad at Casale Panayiotis. Opposite: Cape Aspro



agrotourism hotel that treads lightly across the village, bringing jobs and opportunity and life (as well as a largely unnecessary funicular) to the valley – a story of decline and resurgence that's an emblem of the island's wider fortunes.

My own turning point comes in Pyrgos, a rapidly mushrooming village outside Lemesos where I lived for most of my teenage years. A trail of talcum-powder-white dust leads to visual artist Elina Ioannou's workshop, the residue of her years-long efforts to force stone to yield to her creative direction. Her sculptures are shaped from Cyprus itself, she says – her preferred material, calcarenite, was formed when the island emerged from the sea tens of millions of years ago. Ioannou's latest body of work celebrates what she calls "the heroes of resistance", uncelebrated species able to survive the harshest conditions – hardy prickly pear cactuses or humble land snails, which retreat into a dormant state when temperatures are too hot or dry, and can remain that way for up to three years. Days after wildfires have blackened the hills above Lemesos and years of drought are making water scarcity a problem across the island, Ioannou's pieces – a chiselled prickly pear fruit strung from a metal chain or empty snail shells crowding a block of white rock – present important questions about resilience, scarcity and survival that are as pertinent to Cyprus's climate and landscape as they are to its history and identity. But despite the implacable nature of her chosen material and the bracing truth of her message, there is tenderness here. Prickly pears sprout; snails emerge from their shells. Life persists.

Surrounded by these fragments of ancient rock, I'm reminded of Cyprus's ability to adapt and endure. A shapeshifter exploited by the whims of history, resurgent yet again. From the centre of Lemesos to the cobblestone streets of Lefkara and the hidden valleys of Troodos, new emerges from the old. I realise that we are not so different, she and I. Both the product of myriad cultural influences, both rooted in land and sea, both unsure where we really belong. But maybe I will return for good one day – and we can work it out together. 

like Lux Bar an art deco sheen. Cyprus's hottest new hotel, Agora, is located in postcard-pretty Lefkara, famed for its Unesco-listed lacemaking. In the village's former marketplace, 18 tasteful rooms overlook a courtyard where guests linger by the pool on red-and-white striped sunbeds. Cradled in the folds of the Troodos mountains, Casale

Marathasa Winery, which offers tours of its vineyards, and wine-tasting sessions paired with views of Mount Olympus, Morphou Bay in the Turkish occupied north and Cyprus's capital, Lefkosia – followed by sunsets that splash the sky in neon orange. @spaulhotel; @theagorahotel; @casalepanayiotis; @marathasawines

WHERE TO EAT

Tucked off pedestrianised Agios Andreou Street in Lemesos old town is Alley, a casual eatery where local, seasonal ingredients are finally being given the attention they deserve by Cypriot chef Christoforos Tofaridis. Stop for post-dinner cocktails around the corner, in the pared-back open-air courtyard of Library Bar, where frangipani trees scent the air and industrial lighting sets the tone; or head to nearby, bar-lined Saripolou Street for a rowdier vibe. @alleylimassol; @librarybar

WHAT TO DO

Impressive works by local and international artists, including Anish Kapoor, are on show at XeniArtSpace, a glossy gallery in Lemesos's soaring Trilogy West Tower. In the gallery's ground floor space, *Meadow*, a custom-made kinetic installation by Studio Drift, consists of giant silk flowers sweeping down from the ceiling, opening and closing in a fluid dance. For a more hands-on experience, Tradition Now holds workshops in Lefkara, where you can learn about Cypriot silkworm cocoon embroidery while creating your own bag embellished with this age-old craft. And in Foini village, the Dio Dio Handicraft Collective organises chair weaving workshops, part of efforts to document and revive the island's furniture-making heritage. @limassolartwalks; @xeniartspace; @tradition_now; @diodiohandmade

Contents

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

SPANISH STYLING p90

The dramatic landscape of Extremadura sets the scene for this season's take on equestrian dressing

CYPRUS p104

A nostalgic return to the self-proclaimed island of love

HONG KONG p116

The dynamic city is undergoing its latest round of reinvention

CUBA p124

In the midst of an emigration crisis, hoteliers, creators and artists are forging ahead with hopeful projects

PHOTOGRAPH: OWEN TOZER

The Troodos
mountain range
in Cyprus





Clockwise from above: a meal at Alley; afternoons at Dasoudi Beach; Malindi Beach Bar & Restaurant; Xynisteri grapes; Kebir Mosque in Lemesos. Opposite: Aphrodite's Rock. Previous pages: from left: Pissouri Beach; Kalopanayiotis village in the Troodos mountains





Clockwise from far left: diners at Alley; the restaurant's tuna crudo with red peppers and capers; bougainvillea in Lemesos old town; chef Christoforos Tofaridis, who co-founded Alley with partner Christos Yiallourous. Opposite: Lemesos seafront at sunrise

Through a narrow passageway off Agiou Andreou Street, where people have come to shop since the 1920s, Cypriot chef Christoforos Tofaridis and business partner Christos Yiallourous are preparing to serve their first guests of the night at Alley. Tofaridis cut his teeth in kitchens in London, at the Michelin-starred Sketch on Conduit Street, Ottolenghi's Nopi and Maltby Street Market, but moved back to Cyprus after Brexit, with absolutely no intention of opening his own restaurant. Yiallourous, and this venue – a former derelict kafeneio turned drug den with an outdoor space that “was just soil and cat litter”, now an unpretentious collection of white chairs and tables, greenery hugging a stone perimeter wall and fairy lights twinkling in the dusk – convinced him otherwise. Childhood visits to farmers' markets with his father shaped the chef's food philosophy: simple, honest fare that uses local and seasonal

life-sized Tetris pieces on the volcanic, slate-grey sands of Lemesos's Dasoudi Beach; further along the coast, Malindi Beach Bar & Restaurant attracts a lunchtime crowd that lingers until long after the sun has set; and swimmers wade listlessly in the glassy waters around the landmark Enaerios pier. I head to the pebbly beaches of Pissouri Bay and Cape Aspro in the west, where on 1 January each year, my dad and I used to go for a bracing swim to ring in the New Year. But Cypriots are as connected to the mountains as they are to the sea – and interesting things are happening up in the hills. Tucked primly into a valley 650 metres above sea level is Pano Lefkara, where matchstick-thin streets are lined with terracotta-roofed houses, their doors and shutters painted a specific shade of cornflower blue known in the Cypriot dialect as “loulladji”. In the 15th century, the wives of Venetian courtiers used to come here to

SERVING SIMPLE, HONEST, SEASONAL FARE, ALLEY FEELS AT ONCE FORWARD-THINKING AND LIKE A RETURN TO THE OLD WAYS

ingredients, a common enough premise in kitchens in other parts of the world, but a novelty on a smallish island that does not have the climactic or agricultural abundance of places such as Italy or Greece. As Tofaridis talks about the challenges of sourcing the ingredients he needs, I feast on roasted cauliflower doused in almond sauce, and charcoal-cooked sea bass with a salsa verde made from local capers, parsley, lemon juice and chilli. This is exactly the kind of food that appeals to me, primarily because I was brought up in this place and learned, early on, that most dishes can be infinitely enhanced with just a squeeze of lemon, a sprinkling of salt and a dash of olive oil. Alley's menu feels at once forward-thinking and like a return to the old ways.

Tourists have traditionally come to Cyprus for its beaches – the translucent-watered bays of Ayia Napa and Protaras in the east, or the wild coves of Pafos in the west. Sun beds and towels jostle for space like

escape the summer heat, and their influence remains in the delicate stitches of the Unesco-listed Lefkaritika embroidery for which the village is famous. Women still sit in the streets outside their homes and shops, stitching distinct geometric patterns such as potamos (the river) or Da Vinci onto soft linen tablecloths or napkins, as they have for centuries.

These are the kinds of crafts Christina Socratous has set out to preserve. As we eat perfectly pink watermelon and freshly picked figs under the shade of a sprawling mandarin tree in her late grandfather's Lefkara home, she talks about the potters, basket makers, weavers, embroiderers and other artisans from across the island that she commissions to create her designs. She is dressed in white, from her clogs to the headscarf holding back her waist-length hair – an ethereal antithesis to the clad-in-black widows more often associated with traditional Cypriot village scenes. The strong Liverpudlian accent ➤



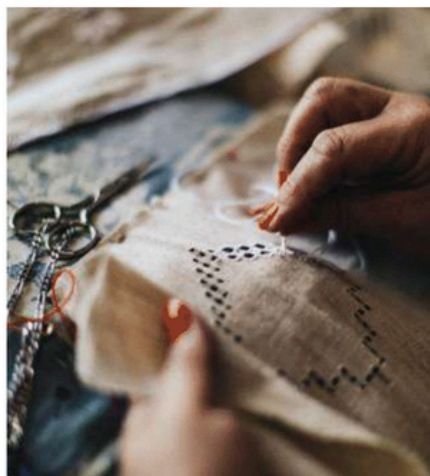
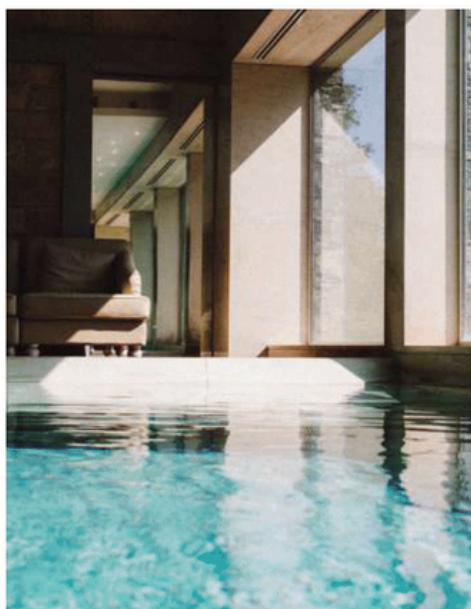
THE WINDING MOUNTAIN ROAD DIPS, RISES AND LOOPS

Sunset in the Troodos
mountains

AMID ENDLESS FORESTS OF PINE, CYPRESS AND CEDAR



Clockwise from left: Marathasa Winery; Casale Panayiotis; Christina Socratous of Tradition Now; Lefkara lace; hydrotherapy pool at Myrianthousa Spa. Opposite, from left: doorway in Lefkara; Agora Hotel





is a surprise, but she was born in the UK and studied at the London College of Fashion, before returning to the motherland and launching her clothing and homeware label, Tradition Now, to reinvigorate Cyprus's forgotten crafts – reshaping earth-red terracotta jugs into glazed separates and handy tote bags. The sturdy cane baskets traditionally used to transport potatoes that she has recast as lampshades hang in the restaurant at Agora, a boutique hotel in the centre of the village that is undoubtedly one of Cyprus's best.

mountain road dipping, rising and looping amid endless forests of pine, cypress and cedar, through tiny villages whose names I've never heard and past Cyprus's highest point, 1,952-metre Mount Olympus. Travellers have come to Kalopanayiotis for centuries for the healing powers of its springs, although the trickle of water meandering from the rock Petrachos river doesn't look like much. I take off my shoes and walk over my feet just in case – but more tangible results come from the time spent in the Myrianthoussa Spa at Casale Panayiotis, from the tints in the herbal steam room, snow cabin and tropical

TREES FLUTTER HOPEFULLY IN THE BARELY-THERE BREEZE, SHROUDING THE TERRACED STEPS OF LONG-FORGOTTEN VINEYARDS

Aphrodite might have been up to her old tricks the day Aleksander Eng happened across this historic building, wiped the dust from one of its windows, peered inside and instantly fell in love with its bare, long-abandoned bones. The now 36-year-old Dane, who made his fortune as an early investor in Joe & the Juice, and his wife Emilie Green Novél, set about converting the former village marketplace into a hotel where 18 rooms frame a central courtyard. Mid-century design pieces sit among vintage dial-up phones and family heirlooms such as a tiny pair of scuffed riding boots Eng used to wear as a child. It all feels highly personal, but also international-standard slick – a far cry from the soulless beach resorts that used to dominate in my day, when prawn cocktails and English breakfasts were deemed the height of sophistication. Reclining under an ivory umbrella on the red-and-white striped loungers around the pool, I meet two young Norwegian women who have travelled to Cyprus specifically to stay at the hotel, after seeing it online.

the hydrotherapy pool and take in views of the hills, oak and poplar trees flutter hopefully in a breeze, shrouding the terraced steps of long-forgotten vineyards. The roof of the Unesco-listed St John Lampadistis church, one of the best-preserved frescoes on the island, still stands watch from the top of the mountain, a mix of concrete and glass that's home to the new hotel. Founded in the 11th century, Kalopanayiotis became a hub for viticulture, and then thrived in the 19th century as a major exporter of copper extracted from the hills. In the 1940s and 50s, people started leaving for larger cities, but the Turkish invasion in 1974 dealt a final blow, halting the port at Morfou and bringing mining to a halt. "It was a local resident tells me. After decades spent in the East, John Papadouris returned to the place of his birth, shocked by its decline. He started buying up old buildings and turned them into Casale Panayiotis, a rustic 41-room ➤

