

SITES TO BEHOLD



Paphos, on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, lures visitors with its wealth of history. But, as one local reveals, ventures beyond tourist hotspots also offer rich rewards.

By Carole French



Coral Bay is one of the island's many beautiful beaches.

ipping a cocktail and gazing out over one of the most picturesque harbours in Cyprus, you could be forgiven for thinking life doesn't get much better than this. In view is a major Paphos (locally Pafos) landmark, a mediaeval castle that silhouettes against the blue sky. We are in Kato (lower) Paphos, a district full of art galleries, *tavernas* and archaeological treasures, which helped earn Paphos UNESCO World Heritage List status in its entirety.

KATO PAPHOS

Tourist To-Dos

The area's famous mosaics top the to-do lists of most holidaymakers in Paphos — with good reason. Dating from as early as AD 200 (give or take), the intricate and colourful floor mosaics are some of the oldest ever found. The House of Dionysus, the Roman-period villa of a nobleman, displays scenes from mythology (particularly featuring Dionysus, the god of wine) and everyday life, while the compositions in the House of Theseus and the House of Aion depict battles. Within the same complex, visitors can wander amongst the granite columns, standing archways and crumbling walls that remain from the once-imposing Saranta Kolones Fortress.

The mediaeval Paphos Castle on the harbour is a definite list-topper. Built in the 13th century during the island's Lusignan era, the maze of vaulted rooms and cells begs to be explored. A stone staircase leads to a rooftop courtyard. The view of the harbour and coastline is spectacular from here and well worth the climb.

Local Picks

Kato Paphos boasts a sandy stretch of municipal beach off Poseidonos Avenue where you can sunbathe, swim or take a break with a lunch of freshly cooked *sowlaki* (skewered pork or chicken) in a taverna. This is also a good starting point for a water tour of the coast. Choose from shiny luxury cruisers or glass-bottomed boats for viewing marine life and a shipwreck that lies off Paphos' shore. You may even catch sight of a loggerhead or green turtle on its way to the nesting site and turtle sanctuary at Lara Beach.

Once back on dry land, browse one of the area's many art galleries showcasing paintings, drawings

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and sculptures by local artists. Agia Kyriaki, a 12th-century stone church, is enchanting and just a few minutes' walk from the seafront.

PANO PAPHOS

Tourist To-Dos

Elegant and busy sums up Pano (upper) Paphos. Perched on a cliff top overlooking the sea, Pano Paphos is the commercial and governmental hub of the city. At its heart is the Bishop's Palace, an elaborate building that's home to the bishop of Paphos. It's also connected to the fascinating Byzantine Museum, which presents an array of attractive exhibits, including religious icons that depict saints, each with the head circled in gold. They are beautiful, and you can't help but admire the skill of the artists. One icon, the Agia Marina, dates back to the eighth or ninth century and is generally regarded as the oldest on the island. On display, too, are antique books, embroideries and other Byzantine art.

Pano Paphos is also home to the city's Ethnographical Museum, where you can get a glimpse of life in Paphos

through the ages. A mix of Chalcolithic tools, first century-BC coins, Venetian mirrors and outdoor bread ovens, as well as traditional costumes worn just a few decades ago, brings Paphos' history alive.

Local Picks

Paphos Town Hall, the city library and several schools are housed in neoclassical buildings that are typical of Pano Paphos. Built in 1955, the Town Hall stands on the edge of the municipal gardens, where locals congregate on Sunday mornings to chat.

A short stroll from here leads to Archiepiskopou Makariou III Avenue, which, together with Gladstonos, is where to head if upscale shopping is on your agenda. Here you'll find boutiques selling labels including Gucci and Prada. In contrast, visit the bustling Laiki Geitonia market for traditional crafts, such as basketry and embroidery from the villages, souvenirs and fresh produce. While exploring the market area, look out for the minaret of the Cami Kebir; this mosque, together with the Turkish baths (known as *loutra*) nearby, are reminders of when Paphos was home to a large Turkish population.

CORAL BAY & THE COAST ROAD

Tourist To-Dos

Tombs of the Kings Road, known locally as the Coast Road since it hugs the shore, heads north out of Paphos to the picturesque district of Coral Bay. Along here you'll find the Tombs of the Kings, a huge necropolis dating from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, which contains some 100 rock-cut tombs. (The name of the site refers to its magnificence — noblemen rather than royalty were actually buried here.) The tombs, some of which have Doric-style columns at the entrance, are well-preserved and key to Paphos' UNESCO World Heritage designation.

Farther along is Lempa. This unassuming village is home to one of the earliest-known settlements on the island of Cyprus, and is a popular excursion from Paphos' centre. Excavations reveal that a community lived here in circular houses in Neolithic times. Reconstructed homes give visitors a taste of life thousands of years ago.

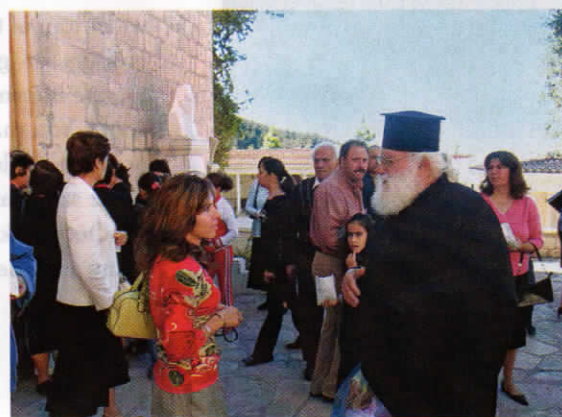
Continuing on for 8 kilometres (5 miles) or so, you'll come to Coral Bay. Scenic with turquoise sea lapping its

When touring Paphos Castle, don't neglect a climb to the rooftop courtyard; you'll be rewarded by stunning vistas.

After a day of exploring, grab an outdoor table and indulge in some amazing Cypriot fare.

CENTRE, BOTTOM: Monks still live at peaceful Agios Neofytos, which traces its roots back to the 12th century.

An ancient love of art is obvious in the House of Theseus, where floors were decorated with intricate mosaics depicting scenes from mythology.





The picturesque bay at Agios Georgios is a perfect spot for fishing. If your timing is right, you might score a fresh catch for dinner.

award-winning beaches, and five-star hotels dotting its coastline, in antiquity the area was home to Bronze Age man. The Maa-Palaeokastro settlement, which can be found just off the seafront, is an impressive archaeological site with some of the world's finest examples of Mycenaean Cyclopean architecture. A small museum is open daily.

Local Picks

Most visitors only follow the Coast Road as far as Coral Bay. But keep going, past the Pafos Bird and Animal Park — a secluded area of natural habitat that's home to a large collection of fascinating creatures and also worth a visit — and you will come to a headland overlooking the bay. A short descent brings you out to Agios Georgios, one of the Paphos region's quietest and prettiest harbours, and where, if you are lucky, you may see fishermen unloading their catches. You can stop awhile (there's a restaurant), or retrace your steps and continue on to the secluded and stunning Avakas Gorge — known locally for its challenging hiking trails.

PAPHOS VILLAGES

Tourist To-Dos

The charming villages that surround Paphos make lovely day-trip destinations, too. Palaipafos is an ancient site in the village of Kouklia, south-east of Paphos. In days of old, Palaipafos was an important city-kingdom and is said to be where Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, made her home, or at least spent a good amount of time. A sanctuary



Columns rise up from the courtyard of Agia Kyriaki, including St Paul's Pillar, where it's said the saint was lashed for preaching Christianity in Roman times.

dedicated to Aphrodite was built here, and it became a celebrated place of pilgrimage. An interesting museum tells the story of Palaipafos.

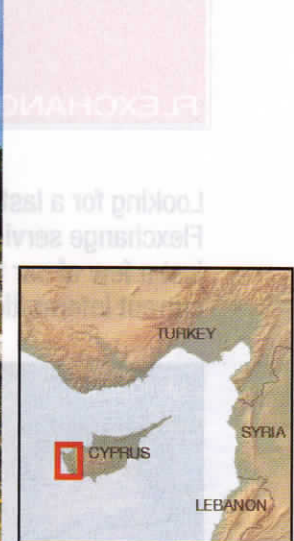
Local Picks

The Laona-Akamas wine region is growing in popularity amongst tourists. Stretching north from Paphos towards Polis Chrysochous, the marked Laona-Akamas Wine Route takes you on a journey through a number of quaint, unspoilt villages. It is a wonderful way to see idyllic countryside dotted with vineyards. Included in the numerous grape varieties grown here are the red *mavro* and the white *sémillon*.

Cedar Valley is one of the least known, but most beautiful areas of Cyprus, and can be found north-east of Paphos. If it's tranquillity you seek, you will surely find it here. Nearby, hidden amongst the cedars, are quiet villages and peaceful abbeys. Look out for signs to the 12th-century Chryssorogiatissa Monastery, which is famous for its rare icons and religious manuscripts.

When heading back to the city centre, stop off awhile at Agios Neofytos — it's well signposted. With its 12th-century rock-cut enclosure, said to have been hand-carved out of the mountain by the hermit Neofytos, this monastery where monks still reside is my favourite place on the island for its richly planted landscape and its sense of serenity. ■

Paphos-based Carole French is a travel and lifestyle writer for magazines such as *ABTA* and *Wanderlust*, and guidebooks, including *DK Eyewitness Travel Guide: Cyprus and Top 10 Cyprus*.



fastFACTS

RESORT DIRECTORY: IntervalWorld.com or page 268

CLIMATE: Sunny autumn days in this subtropical Mediterranean climate bring high temperatures ranging from 22°C to 29°C (72°F to 84°F); evenings are cooler with lows averaging 13°C to 18°C (55°F to 65°F).

DON'T MISS: A *meze*, or a selection of small dishes, in a village taverna is the best way to sample Cypriot cuisine.

CURRENCY: Euro

SALES TAX: VAT is 15%.

TIPPING: A 10% service charge is often applied automatically to restaurant bills; tipping taxi drivers and porters is welcomed, but not obligatory.

INTERVAL TRAVEL: IntervalWorld.com or 0844 701 1111

CAR HIRE: Recommended

VISITOR INFORMATION:

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