


Mighty Aphrodite

Aphrodite, the ancient goddess of love and beauty, is immortalised in Cypriot folklore and is now the subject of a fascinating cultural trail around **Paphos** and beyond.

By **Carole French**

Legend has it that the stunning Petra tou Romiou is Aphrodite's birthplace



With her legacy of beauty that characterises Cyprus, the awesome remains of temples and sanctuaries dedicated to her dotted about the sun-drenched countryside, and the sense of serenity at Petra tou Romiou, her birthplace, there is much to thank the ancient goddess Aphrodite for.

The Olympian goddess of love, beauty and fertility, who, according to Greek mythology, originated in the 8th century BC when Homer spoke of Golden Aphrodite and Kypris (Cyprus) in the same breath, was Sovereign of the island for over 2,000 years before Christ.

Sometimes referred to as 'Venus' or 'Astarte' – Roman and Phoenician respectively – and believed to have been worshipped by kingdoms outside Cyprus, such as Greece and Syria, Aphrodite was also the protector of cities, seafarers, harvests and the

copper that fuelled Cyprus's prosperity. As such her importance and power were immense, with great temples and sanctuaries built in her honour.

Today, the image of Aphrodite lives on as visitors and residents alike celebrate history, culture and mythology at sites associated with her, such as Aphrodite's Sanctuary at Palaipafos, Koukia, and her picturesque birthplace at Petra tou Romiou, both near Paphos, the Baths of Aphrodite near Polis, and the ancient city kingdoms of Amathous and Kition where she is said to have spent her days. These extraordinary sites, along with various museums, form part of a new cultural trail, the Aphrodite Cultural Route, an initiative by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation in conjunction with the Council of Europe, the island's Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of



Aphrodite in film and fiction

Telling stories

- Aphrodite has appeared in works of art such as the 'Venus de Milo' and Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus'. The latter was made into a film, 'The Adventures of Baron Munchausen', in which Uma Thurman played her
- Aphrodite has been portrayed by many other leading actresses, including Ursula Andress and Vanna White
- In 'God of War', Aphrodite is seen to give protagonist Kratos the ability to use Medusa's head as a magic spell to petrify his enemies
- Aphrodite has appeared in television productions. She was played by Alexandra Tydings in the 'Hercules' and 'Xena' series dressed in a pink negligee
- In the world of comic magazines Aphrodite is one of the main patrons of the Amazons, and she blessed Wonder Woman with her great beauty at DC Comics
- 'Aphrodite A', an animation film, sees her as a female mecha (robot), a partner of manga artist Go Nagai's Mazinger Z



On Paphos you can seek out ancient mosaics and artefacts that tell the story of Aphrodite

Education. Designed to introduce visitors to layers of history through information at strategic points that can be read and absorbed while looking at ancient remains of temples and cities, the route links up with museums where artefacts associated with her can be seen.

A good place to start the trail is Petra tou Romiou (pictured on previous page), meaning 'Rock of the Greek', not least because it is the site of many legends associated with her. Located 10km south of Paphos, it was here that Byzantine hero Digenis Akritas tossed a massive rock into the sea to stop marauding Saracens. Aphrodite, legend has it, later rose from the sea foam created around the rock and rode ashore on a shell towed by dolphins. The beautiful goddess immediately fell in love with Cyprus and declared it her own. ➤



The legend of Aphrodite uncovered

Myths of time

Aphrodite was first mentioned in the 8th century BC when Homer spoke of the Golden Aphrodite. According to Greek mythology there is reference to her around



the 3rd century BC and again in the 2nd and 1st when she was referred to as a goddess of love and desire – the Sovereign who protected nature and the production of the island's copper which bought it wealth and prosperity.

Various versions of her story exist, one being that she rose from the sea foam at Petra tou Romiou.

She was worshipped by the Romans as Venus, by the Syrians and Palestinians, and is referred to in history as the wife of Hephaestus, the lover of Ares and Andonis, and the mother of Eros, Anteros and Aeneas.

The stuff of legend

Key sites

Sanctuary of Aphrodite, Kouklia, Paphos.

☎ +357 26 32180. Open daily: 9am-4pm

Kition Archaeological Site, Larnaca.

Open: Monday to Friday 9am-2.30pm (plus Thursday 3pm-5pm). Closed Saturday and Sunday

Amathous Archaeological Site, Limassol.

Open: daily 9am-5pm November to March, April to May and September to October until 6pm, and August until 7.30pm



The Aphrodite Route takes in a wealth of ancient sites associated with the goddess

She was married to the ancient Greek, Hephaestus, but took lovers as befits a goddess of fertility, including Adonis and Ares, and bore many children, including Eros and Hermaphrodite. She would return to her birthplace to regain her virginity and freshness by bathing in the sea, time and again. Local folklore says that swimming around the large rocks at full moon make the swimmer look and feel a year younger for every lap – surely worth a try.

Following her birth it is said Aphrodite rested at Kouklia, at the site of the ancient Palaipafos, or the original kingdom of Pafos, where a great sanctuary and temple was built for her. One of Cyprus's most powerful city-kings, Palaipafos was visited by pilgrims who worshipped Aphrodite and remained a place of worship until the 3rd or 4th century AD.

Today Kouklia village, 14km west of Paphos, is a UNESCO World Heritage site due to the outstanding ruins of the old Palaipafos town and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite that dates from the 12th century BC. The impact of the mosaics' colour and design despite their age, and of the artefacts and the buildings' ruins, that are surprisingly well preserved, is quite wonderful. Excavations at the sanctuary site and around the ruins of the old town, which is believed to lie on the site of a much earlier Bronze Age community, continue to this day. From here, follow the route by heading north past Geroskipou village and Paphos town centre to Polis on the island's north-western peninsula, and the Baths of Aphrodite. The area, on the



edge of the Akamas, a natural wilderness that is home to rare species of flora and fauna, is famed for a small grotto with a pool that, legend says, was where Aphrodite bathed after swimming in the sea. It was here that Adonis first saw her and fell in love. The 'bath' is some way from Paphos, and while a tad commercialised, the views over Akamas and the bays of Latchi and Polis are outstanding.

The Aphrodite Cultural Route also features the ancient city-kings of Amathous, 50km from Paphos, and Kition, which was founded in the 13th century BC and lies further along the south coast close to the centre of Larnaca. Amathous was an important place of worship

in Aphrodite's time, and visitors today will encounter archaeology finds from the Archaic to the Roman and Christian periods. Meanwhile, at Kition, remains of a complex of temples and a port that was once an integral part of the ancient city-kingdom can be seen.

Luxuriating in Cyprus's beauty, especially with that special person in your life, would be just what Aphrodite would have wanted. ml

GB Airways operates British Airways flights to Paphos from Gatwick and Manchester. For more information see gbairways.com For information on booking flights and accommodation see cadoganholidays.com

Paphos accommodation fit for a goddess

Hotels

Almyra Luxurious hotel with a minimalist ambiance. ☎ +357 26 888700

📍 www.thanoshotels.com

Anassa Five-star hotel overlooking the bay at Neo Chorio, Polis. ☎ +357 26 888000

📍 www.thanoshotels.com

Annabelle Five-star seafront hotel at Paphos. ☎ +357 26 938333

📍 www.theannabellehotel.com

Alexander the Great Top-notch Paphos hotel designed to make you feel special.

☎ +357 26 965000

📍 www.kanikahotels.com

Aphrodite Hills The goddess's very own luxury accommodation! ☎ +357 26 828000



📍 www.aphroditehills.com

Columbia Beach Five-star luxury hotel overlooking Pissouri Bay. ☎ +357 25 833000

📍 www.columbia-hotels.com

Elysium Lavish hotel in Paphos that will make you feel like Aphrodite.

☎ +357 26 844444 📍 www.elysium.com.cy

Thalassa Modernist five-star hotel at Coral Bay, Paphos ☎ +357 26 881500

📍 www.thalassa.com.cy