

Cyprus breeze

A pair of rebranded resorts are the perfect base to explore Cyprus by land and water, finds Yolanda Zappaterra

They say travel broadens the mind – and nothing proves the point more joyously than watching the Eurovision Song Contest on a giant outdoor screen with a hundred or so strangers drawn from more than a dozen different nations. The resounding chorus of cheers for the competing countries gave me a distinctly warm feeling – as warm as the balmy Cypriot evening we were enjoying together.

Cocktail in hand, I watched the song-filled show from the wonderfully relaxing Ammos Pool Bar at Mare Ayia Napa. Formerly Atlantica Village Ayia Napa, the hotel reopened in spring along with a sister property in Paphos under the new 'elevated' brand Mare Resorts – and I was among the first to discover what these updated escapes have to offer.

CYPRUS BY SEA

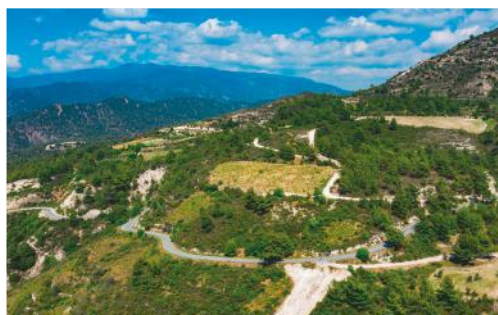
The 341-room Mare Ayia Napa is set on a sandy beach in the protected natural area of Cape Cavo Greco, a few miles outside the eponymous party centre. It's an otherworldly landscape characterised by a limestone coastline, perfect for nesting colonies of birds and for the popular local sport of cliff-jumping.

Watching people leap from cliffs is a highlight of an afternoon boat trip with stops for swimming, snorkelling and paddleboarding – plus a long Mediterranean lunch – leaving us so relaxed it feels like we've been in Cyprus far longer than just 24 hours.

The next day offers more marine action with an introductory scuba diving session at the Museum of Underwater Sculpture Ayia Napa. Those ➤

DESTINATIONS

GREECE & CYPRUS | AYIA NAPA/PAPHOS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Museum of Underwater Sculpture Ayia Napa; Troodos mountains; Mare Paphos

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Andriy Nekrasov, Sabina Berezina, irabantos, Wirestock Creators

who signed up for this undersea adventure came back giddy with pleasure, having spent more than an hour among 93 submerged stone artworks by British artist Jason deCaires Taylor. Over time, the surreal sculptures will be reclaimed by the sea, providing a safe habitat for marine life.

As a non-diver, I opt instead to explore the Mare Ayia Napa's spa, restaurants, bars and beach loungers. In contrast to the very family-oriented pools and water park, this sandy scene offers total tranquillity, making it a great option for couples and child-free groups.

Activities range from yoga and Pilates to craft classes and workshops in mixology, clay sculpting and DJ mixing.

The resort's 16 bars and restaurants feature Mediterranean flavours at Aroma, Cypriot cuisine at Estia, fine dining at Asian restaurant Kayo, a dry-aged steak selection at the Meat and Salt Steak

“The Troodos foothills are Cyprus at its most dramatic, with winding roads and dizzying turns

House and ever-popular Italian at Nico. It's here that we bid a fond farewell to Mare Ayia Napa with a pizza-making class, putting on our aprons alongside 30 or so young children. It was an absolute hoot and thanks to the army of chefs overseeing our creations, the results are surprisingly good.

PAPHOS PICK-ME-UP

A 90-minute drive away at Mare Paphos, the new brand's upscale-yet-unpretentious signature is visible, albeit with a different vibe from its sister property. With a smaller footprint, there's a more compact,

village-like feel to the Paphos resort, all centred around a large main pool and neighbouring activity pool. Facilities, eating and drinking options are as impressive as Mare Ayia Napa's, but a contrasting landscape awaits in the Troodos foothills nearby.

This is Cyprus at its most dramatic, with winding roads and dizzying switchbacks leading through acres of vineyards up to lush valleys bisected by waterfalls and dotted with Byzantine monasteries. Here we discover the small but growing wine industry, where visits to two wineries make clear the personality – and personalities – at the heart of it.

At Fikardos, one of the first privately owned wineries in the country, the son of founder Theodoros Fikardos has us sampling a few of the supremely sippable wines produced from some of the island's 12 indigenous grape varieties. And at the larger Kamantarena winery, founded in 1954 as part of a local ➤

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OF THE
BEST

AYIA NAPA ATTRACTIONS



Ayia Napa Monastery

This 15th-century monastery was built by the Venetians, with a peaceful courtyard providing calm and cool in the heart of Ayia Napa.

Makronissos Tombs

An atmospheric rock-cut tomb complex featuring 19 tombs from the ancient Greek and Roman periods, each with a sarcophagus stand hidden inside.

Saint Elias Church

Situated in nearby Protaras, clients clamber 150 steps to reach this little chapel, offering spectacular hilltop views.

Crow's Arch

For early risers, suggest a sunrise trip to Crow's Arch near Cape Cavo Greco, a picturesque limestone bridge that faces east over the Mediterranean.

WaterWorld

Families will love this ancient Greece-themed water park, with more than 30 rides and attractions ranging from Poseidon's wave pool to a 'chariot chase' racing slide.



ASK THE expert



Holly Wood, senior trade relations manager, Tui

"Mare Resorts are ideal for customers seeking a premium experience. These properties have great locations near cultural attractions and beaches,

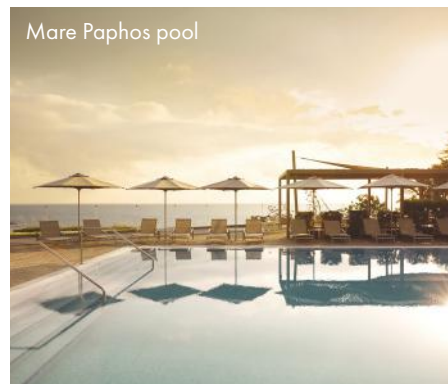
making them perfect for first-time Cyprus visitors. They have flexible appeal for families, through kids' clubs and splash parks, as well as for adults with dedicated quiet zones and sophisticated dining. There's great repeat booking potential. The village-like atmosphere and variety of experiences, such as food workshops and cultural activities, encourage connections with both staff and other guests, which helps to bring people back. Customers regularly highlight the spaciousness, quality dining options and attentive service in their feedback."

co-operative, we all fell for the country's most famous wine, commandaria – a dessert wine produced here since 1192.

A wine route can be traced through 14 commandaria-producing villages, but having had our fill – with the encouragement of our host Irena, who even persuades us to taste Cypriot gin – we are ready for lunch, and climb higher into the mountains to find it at the Spring of Life Forever Taverna, which doubles as a craft brewery making its own bitter and IPA. Plate after plate of simple but utterly delicious dishes, among them goat kleftiko, feta salad and beef stifado (stew), all accompanied by homemade bread, are brought to us, the quality and freshness of the ingredients evident in every mouthful.

After descending through the hills back to Mare Paphos, we reflect on the trip over sunset drinks at the resort beach. The differences between the two parts of the island are as striking as the two resorts we've visited, making a strong case for a twin-centre trip. But no matter which side of the island visitors opt for, it doesn't take long to fall under Cyprus's warm-hearted spell. **TW**

Mare Paphos pool



BOOK IT

Mercury Holidays sells a seven-night stay at Mare Ayia Napa from £1,152 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast, transfers and flights from Gatwick on August 30.

mercuryholidays.co.uk

Tui offers a seven-night all-inclusive holiday at Mare Paphos from £855 per person, based on two adults and two children sharing a Family Room with Sea View. Includes luggage, transfers and flights departing from Manchester on August 31.

tui.co.uk

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