

## CYPRUS

# Pause & Play

Rachel Roberts finds plenty to enchant on the island of love

**T**hey might have to introduce a ticketing system at Petra tou Romiou, or Aphrodite's Rock, a small geological formation that peeks above the ocean off the southwestern coast of Cyprus.

Legend has it that if you swim around the landmark three times, the water will heal heartbreak, increase your chance of conceiving and bless you with eternal youth.

It was an overcast day when we visited, so the swimmers weren't out in force, but the tale certainly added a sense of romance to proceedings.

Cyprus is believed to be the birthplace of the Greek goddess of love, and British tourists continue to enjoy their own love affair with the destination.

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According to recent figures from the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, UK visitors account for nearly 35% of the island's tourism trade.

That popularity comes down to three key factors: Cyprus boasts one of the mildest climates in the Mediterranean, with 326 days of sunshine pretty much guaranteed every year; it's a short-haul

destination with an average flight time of four to five hours from the UK; and the British Forces have had a presence there since 1960, further strengthening ties.

Away from the main resorts, the island still boasts areas of unspoilt, wild beauty. But with a recent change in building regulations, Limassol is set for an influx of Chinese investment, though rumours of plans to transform it into a 'Mini Dubai' are no doubt a tad overstated.

For now, the charms of Pissouri Bay, a gorgeous stretch of coastline 24 miles southeast of Paphos and its airport, are safe to explore in peace, as *Travel Weekly* discovered on a recent visit to this small but perfectly formed island.

## ▶ PLAY

**Pedal power:** Head to cycling centre BikeCyprus, at the Columbia Beach Resort in Pissouri Bay, to meet two-time former Swiss cycling champion Thomas Wegmüller.

Serious cyclists come here to train for serious events: away from the beaches, heading inland, the island is surprisingly mountainous, with options including the Dora-Maglia Tour, a 45 to 55-mile workout past wind turbines and mountain villages.

For those less inclined to get sweaty, Thomas is just as happy to share his extensive local knowledge on a gentle pedal through the nearby and equally picturesque countryside. Children can be catered for too.





**RIGHT:**  
Eléa golf course

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Greek Orthodox cathedral, Limassol

**BELOW:**  
Hébe Spa, Columbia Beach Resort



## HOW TO SELL

### Eléa Estate

offers a world-class golfing experience, and its proximity to Paphos airport (around 30 minutes) makes it a viable option for a weekend of golf action. Nearly three-quarters of its clientele are Brits. Flights are frequent, with Cypriot carrier **Cobalt Air** serving Larnaca and Paphos airports direct from Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Manchester. Cobalt operates more than 35 flights to Cyprus from the UK on a weekly basis.

➔ **Tee off:** Described as 'Nick Faldo's masterpiece', the Eléa Estate near Paphos offers an 18-hole, par-71 course, designed by the former champion golfer. Despite the serious skills and sartorial swag of the regular clientele, beginners are equally welcome and can attempt to perfect their swing with an ever-patient instructor on the landscaped driving range. Fortification is available at the Halfway House on the ninth hole. The Estate works in partnership with Columbia Beach Resort, with regular shuttles between the two.

**Shopping:** Limassol offers many options for a retail therapy fix. Join the throngs of bargain hunters at the flea market, held every Sunday in summer between 7am and 7pm. Set on the pretty seafront under the watchful eye of the magnificent 19th-century Agia Napa Church, stalls groan under the weight of clothes, perfumes and food



## Cyprus's flavoursome food ranges from grilled halloumi and meat-stuffed vine leaves to meaty sheftalia sausages

products from the island and from more exotic locales such as Sri Lanka and India.

For a spot of surreptitious people watching and amazing local produce, Limassol's Farmers' Market is a good bet. Open for business between 3am and 3pm every Saturday, you'll queue up beside Cypriots doing their weekly shop and selecting from the plentiful bounty of fruit, vegetables, bread and, of course, the best olives.

## PAUSE

**Beach beauty:** Pissouri Bay has a shingle and fine, sandy beach, perfect for an early-morning dip in the Mediterranean waters. Guests at Columbia Beach Resort can treat themselves to a massage in the award-winning Hébe Spa, then make like a mermaid (or merman) – an easy glide takes you from the indoor to the outdoor infinity pool. After that 'exertion', a cocktail might be in order at the swim-up bar. But no more than one – the chilled-out atmosphere is sacrosanct and families are encouraged to use the other pool.

**Say cheers with the locals:** Take a taxi up to the old Pissouri village as the sun starts to slip away and join the locals for an evening drink. Elderly men sit in the cobbled square, sharing the day's proceedings. Family is everything in Cypriot culture; fall into conversation in one of the bars and you're likely ➔







**Cyplon** offers a week's B&B at the five-star Columbia Beach Resort from £1,390 per person, based on two sharing a Junior Suite with Garden View, with easyJet flights from Gatwick departing September 10. [cyplon.co.uk](http://cyplon.co.uk)

→ to be introduced to passing aunts, uncles, third cousins and favourite pets. Then take the winding road back down through untamed natural landscapes, past oleander bushes studded with pink, and towards the vast sea glittering on the horizon. **Learn something new:** You can't spend time in Cyprus without falling in love with its fresh, flavoursome food, from crowd-pleasers such as grilled halloumi and meat-stuffed vine leaves, to meaty sheftalia sausages or lemon-spiked souvlaki. If you fancy taking home a few recipes, sign up for a cookery class to learn the secrets of Cypriot cuisine.

There are even complimentary classes at Columbia Beach Resort, where executive chef Ioannis Giakoumidis – whose training took him from one Michelin-starred restaurant to another by way of London,

Salzburg, Athens, Berlin and even on a Silversea ship – teaches guests a few tricks of the trade.

You'll join him in the immaculate kitchen of the Apollo Tavern restaurant and watch as he rustles up mouthwatering yet

simple dishes such as Cypriot kleftiko, made with lamb shank. Deep-fried halloumi coated in carob – a herb used since ancient times for its taste and antioxidant properties – is another take-home recipe. **TW**

**ABOVE:** Pissouri Bay



## ✓ Tried & Tested

### COLUMBIA BEACH RESORT, PISSOURI BAY

The five-star Columbia Beach Resort in Pissouri Bay is still basking in the glory of a recent €20 million refurbishment. Extensive renovations have transformed the east wing from a fairly standard hotel offering into stylish suite accommodation. Now, guests can take their pick from 169 suites across the resort, and, come dinner, there are four exemplary restaurants, all featuring à la carte menus. Our

favourite? Bacchus Gourmet Italian Restaurant.

In fact, the resort's biggest issue is probably trying to convince guests angling to upgrade to the Eagle's Nest Executive Suites (*pictured*) that the complex is full. Even at maximum occupancy, this spacious resort retains an air of serenity and calm. And there's never any need for an early-morning dash to claim a space by one of the two immaculate pools.



PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK; NIKOLAS MICHAEL PHOTOGRAPHY; GEORGIADIS PHOTOGRAPHY