

60p

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Weekend

SATURDAY 4
& SUNDAY 5
MARCH 2017
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48 HOURS IN...

Paphos

With ancient ruins, a medieval castle and colonial houses, this seaside Cypriot town has plenty to explore as 2017's European Capital of Culture, writes **Martin Symington**

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Why go now?

Paphos is 2017's joint European Capital of Culture (alongside Denmark's Aarhus). The ancient port, soaked in Greek mythology and legendary birthplace of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, is set around one of the most dazzling harbours in the Med.

In a sense, Paphos has already been a city of culture for more than two millennia. Now it will draw on its classical and mythological heritage for a year-long "open-air factory of culture" comprising dance, musical and theatrical performances in parks, beaches and on the streets.

Getting there

Ryanair (from Stansted), easyJet (Luton), Monarch (Birmingham) and British Airways (Glasgow) fly direct to Paphos. The airport is 8km south-west of town. Shuttle bus 612 runs to Paphos harbour, 613 to Ktima (both €1.50/£1.30). Taxis cost roughly €30.

Get your bearings

Paphos is in the far west of Cyprus, where the mountains meet the sea. There are two distinct sectors: Ktima, the stately old town, uphill and inland, where there are elegant colonial houses and museums; and Kato Paphos, the main tourist area of restaurants, souvenir shops, low-rise apartments and a few British pubs scattered around the harbour.

The resident population is only 60,000, but numbers are swollen year-round by tourists. Winters are mild and generally sunny. Summer – peak beach season – is hot, while spring and autumn are cool enough for sightseeing while warm enough to swim.

Staying there

The quieter, smarter end of Kato Paphos is east of the harbour, where there is a string of stylish five-star hotels. It is hard to beat the marble splendour of the Annabelle, set in lush gardens right by a stony beach. Doubles from €205, including breakfast.

There are plenty of mid-range options around the busier (yes, noisier) harbour area. Three-star Dionysos Central Hotel is moments from the castle and beach, and good value. Doubles from €89, including breakfast.



Paphos harbour, with the castle in the background; below, the grounds of the Annabelle hotel

Family-run Axiothea Hotel, at 2 Ivis Malioti Street, is a traditional no-frills place in the old town. It makes up for the lack of pool and its distance from the sea with the warmest of welcomes, and a commanding position (see Take a hike, below). Doubles from €50, including breakfast.

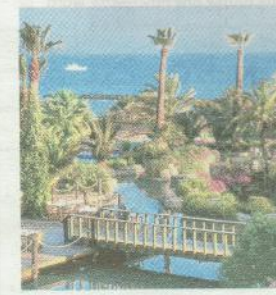
DAY ONE

Take a hike

Stroll along the Kato Paphos waterfront towards the harbour and castle, keeping the sea to your left. The east-to-west direction is important, because it leads to the Paphos Archaeological Park. It will take the rest of the morning to hike round the vast, Med-side ruins of Neo Pafos, an ancient city founded in the 4th century BC and the capital of Cyprus for nearly a millennium.

Stop at the House of Dionysos and prepare to be mesmerised by glittering mosaic floors depicting stories from Greek mythology. It is worth taking the time to follow some of these, such as the tragic tale of Phaedra and her bizarre love for her stepson Hippolytus.

More amazing mosaics can be found at the Villa of Theseus, where the depiction of Theseus fighting the Minotaur in the labyrinth is astonishingly well-preserved. Then pass by the Agora (forum) and semi-circular Odeon theatre, on your way to the arches and columns that are all that remain of the Saranta Kolones fortress, a Byzantine castle from the latter days of the Neo Pafos era.



Lunch on the run

The park exit is right next to the harbour. Bag a table at The Pelican on Apostolou Pavlou Ave 102 by the waterside for a seafood mezze of soft-shell crabs, grilled cuttlefish and swordfish. It is on the pricey side, but the setting, looking across to the medieval castle, is unimprovable.

Window shopping

Duck into the winding Kato Paphos backstreets behind the rows of tat-peddling tourist shops along the harbourside main drag. You'll find a bewildering amalgam of boutiques selling local jewellery, ceramics and hand-made lace, all cheek by jowl with familiar-sounding department stores such as M&S and Debenhams. The latter is just behind the stone pillar where St Paul was tied up and whipped for spreading the news about Jesus Christ.

The best bargains in Cyprus, however, are for spectacles. Bring your prescription, choose your frames and get a new pair in 24 hours, all for around €50 at numerous opticians.

Some shops are closed on Sundays and on Wednesday afternoons. In summer, some close from 1pm-4pm for a long lunch, but stay open till 8pm.

Take a view

The Axiothea Hotel, set into a hillside above Ktima and 10 minutes by taxi from the harbour, has the stand-out panorama. You don't have to be staying here (see above) to sip a sundowner cocktail while soaking up views over the town, coastline and sea.

Dine with the locals

Ktima is the place to dilute tourists with Cypriots. Fetta's, at Ioanni Agroti 33, is as traditional a taverna as you'll find in Paphos, specialising in classic local dishes such as stifado, a rich stew of beef with onions and red wine, and koupepia (meaty or veggie, stuffed in young vine leaves).

There is no attempt at anything fancy or fussy. If you go the whole

mezze hog, you'll find it less fishy than at harbourside eateries. When booking, you can choose a table indoors or outside.

DAY TWO

Sunday morning: out to brunch

Omikron Brunch, at 25 Martio, will keep you away from the "Full English Served All Day" cafés found round the harbour. Inhale aromas of freshly ground coffee and sip home-made lemonade before poached eggs on muffins served with local twists, such as crumbled feta. It's very chic and perhaps the only place in Paphos specialising in brunch.

A walk in the park

Return to the harbour and follow the coastal path westwards. The scenery becomes increasingly wild with jagged rocks and crashing waves as you swing north round the headland. Make for the lighthouse beach bar about 2km on, before retracing your footsteps. Or stop at one of the coves for a dip.

Cultural afternoon

The Unesco World Heritage Site of the Tombs of the Kings is another unmissable expanse of ancient wonders. Slightly confusingly, it forms part of the Paphos Archaeological Park, though it is separate, about 2km west of the harbour. Scores of excavated tombs and burial chambers in sandstone caves and pits dug into the ground make up this astonishing necropolis, dating from the 3rd century BC. Rather than royalty, as the name suggests, they served as final resting places for local bigwigs.

An aperitif

As the sun sets, Cypriots sip Commandaria, the tawny coloured "wine of kings and king of wines" grown in the foothills of the Troodos mountains. It is sweet, so often described as a dessert wine, but to go native try it with nibbles before dinner at Mare Mare bar on Poseidon Avenue, while watching evening colours dancing on the water. THE INDEPENDENT

SPRING SKIING FESTIVALS

Many ski resorts in Savoie Mont Blanc open until late April, with Tignes and Val Thorens staying open until early May. Spring is still a great time for skiing, because the snow is good, the days are longer and usually sunnier, and it is quite often cheaper than in winter. Plus, many resorts organise music events, food festivals and special entertainment.

At **Rock the Pistes**, concerts take place on the slopes all over the **Portes du Soleil**. The seventh festival will take place from 19-25 March. rockthepistes.com

Les Arcs is organising a new event, **The Great British Celebration**, with a week full of skiing, parties and offers from 27-30 March. lesarcs.com

Flaine in the Grand Massif hosts two music festivals: **After Mix** from 25-31 March for groove and electro fans, and **Pop Rock Live**, with 15 free concerts from 1-7 April. flaine.com

Arêches-Beaufort organises a foodie week with special **tasting menus** in restaurants and on the slopes, as well as cooking classes. Open from 1-7 April. arèches-beaufort.com

Aussois in the Maurienne Valley runs a food festival from 1-7 April. **Goût et Terroir** offers visitors local wine, cheese and charcuterie, as well as organic beer from local microbrewery Oé. aussois.com

Les Francofolies, a music festival in **La Rochelle**, premiered in Tignes last year, with performances from rock and jazz bands. The "Francos" are back this year from 3-6 April, with 15 acts. tignes.net

Chamonix Unlimited Festival is an urban alpine event with musicians coming from all over the world to play at exceptional sites such as Mer de Glace, Les Grands Montets ski area and the Aiguille du Midi. The event takes place from 6-9 April. chamonix-unlimited.com

Apotheose Days in Val Thorens has become an unmissable event for many skiing enthusiasts. Everyone gathers at 2,300m to share a week of skiing, celebration, entertainment and shows. From 23 April-1 May. valthorens.com

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