

# Climb out of your comfort zone

*Do you know your limits? Kay Burley puts herself (and Telegraph Travel's Claire Irvin) to the test on a Norwegian adventure*

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## ANASSA HOTEL, CYPRUS

# I'm in hotel heaven – and so is my inner goddess!

*Deities and celebrities have long loved this peninsula of paradise.*

*Sarah Conway sees why*

**Y**ou could never accuse the Greek gods of not having an excellent sense of location. Zeus, so the dusty annals of mythology say, was born somewhere in the middle of Crete, coming to life among the olive trees and rosemary fragrance of that enormous Aegean island (before basing his office on the summit of Mount Olympus, on the mainland). His daughter Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, slipped into existence on the tiny Cycladic outcrop of Delos, a short boat hop from Mykonos. And Poseidon, according to time-faded lore, spent his adolescence in the sunlight of Rhodes before he became ruler of the waves.

But the deity who really knew how to make an entrance was Aphrodite. Legend has it that the goddess of love and beauty rose, fully formed and dazzlingly gorgeous, from the sea just off Paphos on the south-west coast of Cyprus – an ancient equivalent, if you will, of Ursula Andress stepping on to Laughing Waters beach midway through *Dr No*. Nor did she confine herself to what is now a small city and a holiday hotspot. The story continues that she picked a secluded spot on the nearby Akamas Peninsula – a cave where water pours from the rock amid the shadows of ceratonia trees – as her favourite place to bathe.

Three millennia on, and two miles (3.2km) down the road from what is now marketed, inevitably, as the Baths of Aphrodite, I find myself fully in agreement with her choice of local neighbourhood – even if the bathroom on the left side of my suite at the Anassa hotel feels rather more



**MODERN AMBROSIA**  
Cocktails at dusk at the Anassa, above; Yasmin Le Bon, right

luxurious (and certainly more practical) than a leafy pool at the end of a rocky trail. Wouldn't – I think to myself – an Aphrodite stepping out of Mediterranean shallows on a baking Cypriot morning in 2019 prefer its large bath and its instantly hot shower to the cold shock of a rushing torrent on a craggy hillside? And wouldn't she prefer a dip in the private plunge pool on the veranda outside – where the fiercest moods of the midday sun can be escaped on a lounger underneath a parasol, and the broad curve of Chrysochou Bay can be admired as it arches away to the north-east in a sheen of heat haze? After all, it's not as if gods and goddesses of the modern celebrity kind have not found refuge at this oasis of a property, near the town of Polis Chrysochous. Paul McCartney has checked in here in the past. So have the likes of Emma Thompson, Rod Stewart, Yasmin and Simon Le Bon – and Gordon Ramsay. Aphrodite would slot right in.

One reason for the influx of famous guests since the Anassa was founded 20 years ago is its fabulously out-of-the-way position. Cyprus can hardly be described as an unknown destination – every year, thousands of British holidaymakers flock to the

beach hotels of Limassol, the popular resorts of Paphos and the gaudy bars and up-all-night clubs of Ayia Napa.

The Anassa is different – not least because it is a rare example of a five-star hotel pinned to the upper shoreline. Cyprus has been divided since 1974 – when the top half of the landmass was annexed as the Republic of Northern Cyprus (although only Turkey recognises it as a state). The border across the torso of the country has no effect on tourists or the quality of their holidays. But it does mean that 80 per cent of the lovely 150-mile (240km) north coast is tucked beyond the frontier fences – and is both short on high-end hotels and trickier to visit than the beaches in the east, south and west. The exception is the 30-mile (48km) stretch of seafront west of Kato Pyrgos, where the Akamas Peninsula jabs a sharpened, forested finger into the tide – and the Anassa, pitched almost at the point where the road finally runs out, enjoys the silence.

There are no members of the Beatles or Duran Duran on the mornings I wander down to breakfast, although such is the laid-back atmosphere at the Anassa, with every guest left to do as much or as little as they want, that John Lennon, never mind Paul McCartney, could be sitting at the next table, and nobody would bother him. It is a haven where you can drift happily through the day without once noticing the passing of time; the hours dripping into the ether like one of Salvador Dali's surreal melting clocks – 9am coffee and croissants in the Amphora restaurant blurring into a light lunch of seafood and salad at Pelagos, an al fresco taverna with tables on the terrace. An afternoon splash in the pool, with the built-in temptation of its swim-up bar, will quickly become dusk cocktails at Armonia – where the sounds of popping corks and amber nectars fizzing into long glasses help to salute the daylight at the end of its shift.

Then, at the clink of the ice at the bottom of your own drink, you might stroll across to Basiliko, a gourmet paradise hidden within a candle-lit

John Lennon could be sitting at the next table and nobody would bother him



cavern – where the expertise in the preparation of the sushi selections makes you think of downtown Tokyo, but the tuna, crab and prawn morsels, wrapped in their rice and seaweed cases, have just been plucked from the decks of Cypriot fishing vessels.

There are attractions beyond the hotel if you can summon the energy. The Baths of Aphrodite are a 15-minute drive away; Paphos Archaeological Park – a remarkable site on the edge of the city where exquisite second-century mosaics of Apollo, Dionysos, Theseus and other figures of Greek mythology are remarkably preserved – is a 30-mile transfer to the south. There are opportunities for exercise, too – whether you want to hike or ride along the bumpy tracks that criss-cross Akamas Peninsula National Park (the hotel offers state-of-the-art mountain bikes if you fancy the latter pursuit), or take to the bay by jet-ski, wake-board, sail-boat or kayak (again, the Anassa can assist). But seduced by the splendour of my surroundings –

## ISLAND IDYLL

The five-star Anassa hotel is ideally tucked away on the upper shore of the north-west coast of Cyprus

pink-flowered bougainvillea swarming up walls and around rooftop cornices; cedar trees sighing and whispering in the breeze; the little Byzantine chapel at the heart of the property – I opt for nothing more fast-paced than a couple of morning yoga sessions, stretching away the last vestiges of work weariness with a group of similarly becalmed guests.

When one afternoon proves a touch too sun-scorched, I escape into the cool sanctuary of the Thalassa Spa – where a massage with hot lemons is a balm for the soul as well as the body, and the collagen and oxygen facial is, well, heavenly – particularly when the masseuse swaddles my feet in warm cloths while the mask is still on. Yes, Aphrodite would approve of this as well, I decide – as I float back to my room, feeling so light that I start to wonder if my sandals are even touching the ground.

Goddesses need holidays too.