

Aphrodite's choice

It is quite clear to see why the Greek goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite chose Paphos as the place to rise up from the sea from where she was created. Clear turquoise shades of sea, rugged cliffs and dramatic hinterland hill slopes dotted with indigenous aromatic plants make it a stunning year-round destination.

The mythology of Cyprus is fascinatingly complex. Evidence of its ancient heroes and heroines lies everywhere, some painstakingly embedded by 5th century artists into mosaics such as those on the floors of the House of Dionysos at Kato Paphos.

Legends such as that of Aphrodite's origin – she was supposedly created by the mixing of the sea's foam with the severed genitals of the Greek god of the sky Uranus (which had been thrown into the ocean by an irate son) – abound, and are irrevocably interwoven into Cypriot culture.

A real estate development known as Aphrodite Hills, a 15-minute drive from the famous rock of Petra tou Romiou, Aphrodite's birthplace, subtly embraces this mythology too. Lying 17 km east of the town of Paphos, the resort consist of villas, apartments and town houses, the five-star Intercontinental Aphrodite Hills Resort Hotel, an 18-hole international championship golf course, tennis courts as well as a tennis academy, an award-winning spa, plus an equestrian centre, a chapel and a village housing essential shops and casual restaurants.

The owner and developer of the resort is Lanitis Development. The resort is set on two plateaux on either side of a valley known as Rantidi Gorge (now housing nature trails for

guests) and surrounded by the forests of Rantidi.

The forests are where, according to mythology, Adonis, the lover of Aphrodite, used to hunt.

Its entire 578 acres still play host to ancient olive, cypress and carob trees which are accompanied by many different types of highly perfumed herbs and shrubs including indigenous rosemary, lavender, cistus and anemone, said to have sprung up as the goddess walked upon the rolling hills. Of this land, only eight per cent is being developed.

The Aphrodite Hills real estate development consists of 650 villas, junior villas and apartments, all of which are low density and many overlook the Mediterranean Sea. They lie within a series of villages aptly named after mythological heroes such as Orpheus, Helios Heights, Zephyros and Theseus villages. Each accommodation has its own identity although all are designed to the same exacting standards.

The latest development to be released for sale is Theseus Village, offering 121 villas, junior villas and apartments, of which only 35 remain to be sold. (A junior villa is a semi-detached one- to two-bedroom unit of around 190 sq m in size with an en-suite bathroom in all master bedrooms, plus a private pool and gardens.)

Here too history seeps from the modern walls with names such as Aethra, Aegeus and Ropollo being given to some of its villas. Theseus was in fact the greatest of all the Greek heroes as he killed the Minotaur that had terrorised the population for so many years.

Prices start at €400,000 (\$532,000) for a one-bedroom apartment. What may be particularly



Aphrodite Hills consists of 650 villas, junior villas and apartments, many of which overlook the Mediterranean Sea.

appealing to buyers is the fact that Lanitis Development has an agreement with all the local banks whereby purchasers can apply for a mortgage to finance the purchase of up to 80 per cent of the value. As a prerequisite, the banks will require payment by the purchaser of 20 per cent of the value of the property being bought, and the assignment of the sales agreement by Lanitis Development together with a letter to the relative bank guaranteeing repayment.

So what other terms have been agreed by Lanitis and the local banks?

Andronicos Antoniou, head of sales and marketing real estate, says that besides the 20 per cent contribution from the buyer, a 40-year low-interest mortgage is available in euros or Swiss francs, plus there is a grace period for both capital and interest up to the delivery of the property for a maximum of two years.

"A minimum five per cent return is guaranteed per year on any investment for a two-year period,"

he added. And after this, the idea is to participate in a rental pool for three years. The owner also gets free use of the property for six weeks of each year, and landscaping, property management, utilities and insurance expenses are all included in the price.

All accommodation comes complete with furnishings and materials, with an interior design service available from experts, including Bo Concept and Armani Casa. There is air-conditioning included, plus linen, cutlery and crockery provided making the dwelling ready for immediate use. Other benefits to ownership include golf club membership, free spa membership for two years for the health club facilities and pool, use of the tennis courts (again for two years) and discounts of offerings from the hotel.

Despite the economic downturn and subsequent interest from the UK second-home buyer market waning, Antoniou is not downcast. "Sixty per cent of our buyers here take a house as a second





Theseus village is designed to complement the natural landscape and existing surrounding ecosystems.

home," he says. "Buyers from the Gulf also fall into this category, but also many view it as an ideal investment opportunity. Coupled with the five per cent return guarantee per annum on investment for a two-year period, it is still an attractive option."

Most of the current owners keep their properties for their own private use, but a few are available for rent. Aphrodite Hills Rental would market and rent the property while the owner is elsewhere.

"We will continue to maintain our original prices," he says. "We are not planning to reduce this as we feel if we did it would undermine the general feel and the quality of the resort."

Another reason for not reducing prices in the economic downturn was to keep their existing clients happy. Besides, according to Mahi Solomou,

Head of Resort PR, the company found that "prices are sustained by satisfactory demand".

Theseus Village is designed around three terraces commanding sea views. As with all the apartment complexes, part of the design includes perimeter sidewalks accessed by curb ramps on each corner of street intersections, perfectly suitable for wheelchair users.

The village has been designed to complement rather than compete with the natural landscape and existing surrounding ecosystems, from the use of colour on buildings to using natural building materials like local stone in cladding as well as for constructing retaining walls.

All buildings have solar panels for heating water and energy efficient lighting is used.

Outdoors, any landscape beyond the construction line is not disturbed, planting is predominately indigenous for both ecological and water-saving reasons and while on the water issue, 100 per cent of the grey water is recycled and used for both landscape and golf course irrigation.

The golf course, in tranquil surroundings overlooking the Mediterranean, is a huge bonus to residents and guests, its 7th hole being quite awe inspiring or daunting, depending upon which way one looks at it. At this par 3 hole a golfer has to make a seriously accurate shot across the 130-metre ravine to the precariously placed tiered green on the opposite side. Interestingly, it was designed by Cabell B Robinson of the US, who has been working and living in Spain for about 40 years. Before setting up his own practice, he was senior designer for Robert Trent Jones. There is a Club House too, offering sumptuous buffets to a fine view as well as a pro shop on site.

Another selling point is the resort's Retreat Spa at Aphrodite Hills, which has won numerous awards including most recently the European Spa of the Year award for 2008. It offers signature thermae and hammam treatments plus the latest massages including the LI'TYA Kodo Melody concept, a rhythmic body massage inspired by traditional Australian Aboriginal techniques. An outside massage in the fragrant garden is also a must-do experience.

The InterContinental Aphrodite Hills Resort Hotel itself has also won several awards including the Conde Nast Traveller 2006 in the category The Very Best New Hotels in the World. It offers many dining options, the international flavours of the Leander Restaurant being created by demi-chef Constantinos Demosthenous being particularly inspiring.



The Retreat Spa has won numerous awards including most recently the European Spa of the Year award for 2008.

The Village Square is the focal point of daily life at the Aphrodite Hills resort, offering a real community ambience with a choice of shops including a pharmacy, bank, mini-market, flower shop, travel agency, boutiques, restaurants and bars.

Of course, anyone moving or holidaying in Cyprus ought to sample authentic Cypriot fare too, found aplenty in the gregarious, welcoming taverns of nearby Phapos, Pissouri and other villages.

What is also attractive to Middle Eastern visitors is that all over Cyprus there are restaurants offering Arabic cuisine and Arabian mini markets. "There is a resident Arab and Muslim community, which is why every city has at least one mosque," says Solomou, adding that the main and most famous mosque is the Hala Sultan Tekke in Larnaca.

The third largest island in the Mediterranean and the 'island of love', Cyprus been a crossroad of civilisations, attracting travellers to its shores over the centuries. And with developments such as Aphrodite Hills, it will continue to do so for many years to come. ■

