

FREE FASHION TRAVEL PEOPLE IDEAS BEAUTY

STYLIST

ARABIA



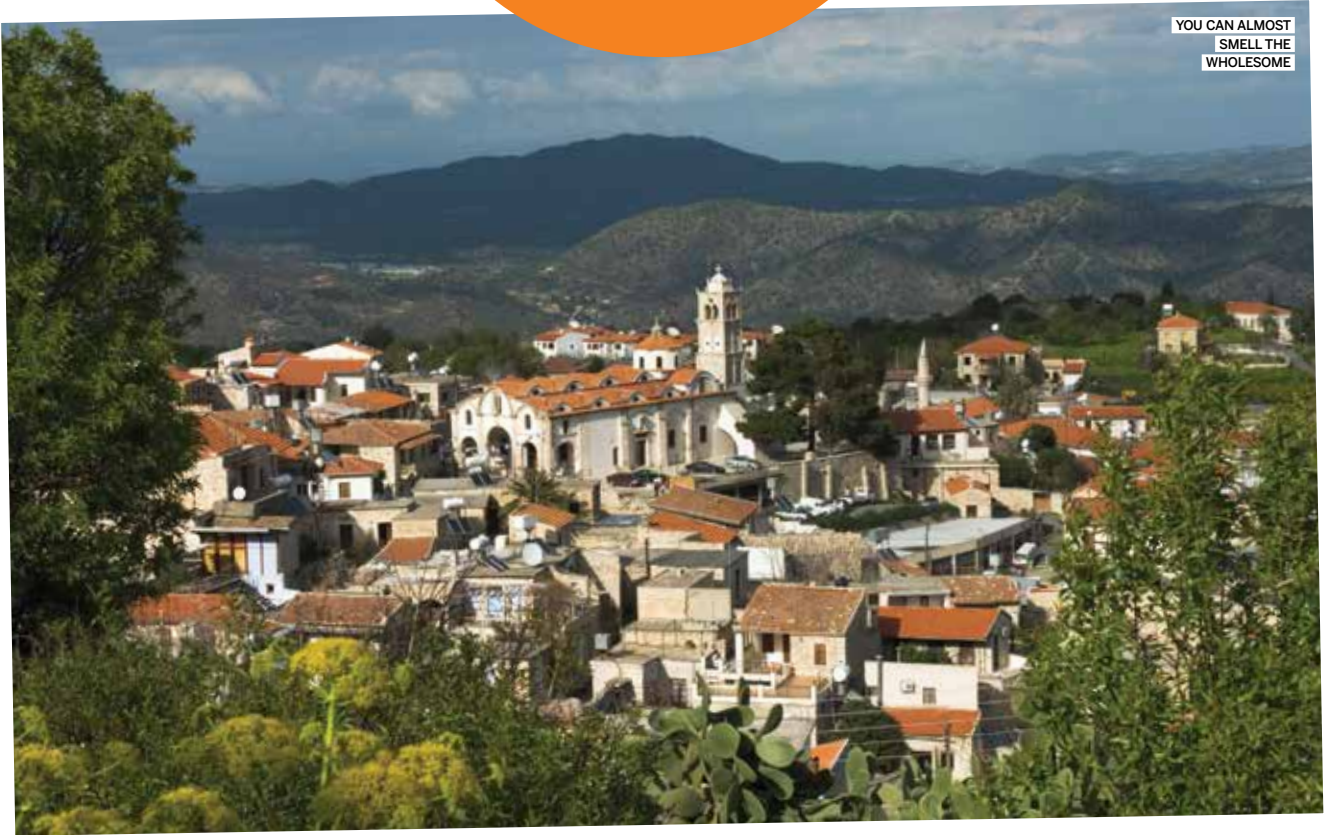
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TRAVEL

ESCAPE ROUTES

SUN, SAND, SEA...
AND SEWING

YOU CAN ALMOST
SMELL THE
WHOLESOME



GO WITH THE FLOW IN CYPRUS



Stylist's Michaela Williams hits the road and takes it easy exploring Cyprus's itty bitty villages and historical ruins

I've always had a thing for the underdog. Ibn Battuta instead of Mall of the Emirates. The moon pie instead of the cronut. The '88 Jamaican bobsled team. Bobsledding in general. So when faced with summer holiday choices, I wanted to jet off somewhere not as popular, but, you know, still brought the goods when it came to taking a break.

Enter Cyprus, Greece's less hyped cousin that's oft overlooked for its more prominent (and rather fiscally

reckless) relative, which promises a gorgeous coastline, endless halloumi, plus grassy hills dimpled with enough ancient ruins to keep my inner history buff happy.

Better still, Cyprus' villages are designed to be navigated by foot – the perfect antidote to Dubai's eco-system of freeways and freewheeling drivers – with pathways leading through hills and valleys, from town squares to sandy beaches. Not to mention that the entire island can be traversed in a single day, covering the city, suburbs, rolling hills, vineyards and the seaside in a matter of hours, making sightseeing a leisurely affair if you've got a week.

Deciding that I wanted to get

to know Cyprus' rustic side, I Googled 'cute villages' with my partner, settling on the teeny inland village of Lefkara as our base for a few days.

With a population of just over 1,000, Lefkara is dependent on tourist dollars, namely through their silver and lacemaking cottage industries. Hidden from the main freeway by clusters of fig trees and craggy limestone, the hillside village dates back to 1200, with most of the homes that are still standing first built in the 15th century. Free from hotel chains, we found the perfect old-meets-new stay in Red Blue Door (redbluedoor.com), a family-owned duo of villas just off the village's main drag. Complete with a petite

pool out the back and a Jacuzzi upstairs with a view of the surrounding hills, the two-bedroom pad comes with original slate floors and fireplace, and a modern kitchen despite the more rustic décor.

Outside our bright red door, Lefkara's slim streets – originally paved to handle herds of goats – now host busy weavers sitting kerbside on stools and stitching everything from delicate doilies and wedding lace to bedspreads to spruik to daytrippers.

While Lefkara houses a few taverns to choose from for lunch and dinner, we couldn't resist the sweet siren call of Tasties, a family-owned and run café that offers a rotating daily menu served in their converted cream



CATCHING SOME SUN FROM THE ANNABELLE'S BALCONIES

and azure-painted terrace house, complete with vine-shaded courtyard. The veggie lasagne loaded with gooey eggplant and chunks of local cheese all but guaranteed our return for dinner later that night, but it was the divine wedge of pie stuffed with juicy apple slices that sealed the deal for the next day's meals too.

After farewelling Lefkara, we journeyed further west to our next overnight stay in the bigger town of Paphos, home to the Tomb of Kings and other ancient Roman ruins. Sprawled just off the buzzing main seaside thoroughfare, our hotel, The Annabelle, was right in the mix of things without the hordes of holidaymakers becoming too overwhelming. Stepping inside, it's obvious the hotel has adopted a decidedly slower pace, with guests never rushed as they float from the spacious and beachy suites, to well-appointed shared spaces, like the gorgeous little library and reading lounge, topped with an ornate glass dome and flooded with natural light.

While the rows of seafood restaurants boasting market-fresh grilled octopus and Brit-style fish and chips will do in a pinch, craving a bit of fine dining, we book into Annabelle's Amorosa for French-inspired favourites like coq au vin, plus Cypriot seafood and a well-stocked selection of grape.

From the Annabelle, it's an easy ten-minute stroll down the promenade to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Kato Paphos Archaeological Park – 15 minutes if you stop for an oversized cone of gelato or to sift through baskets of sea sponges and dried starfish.

“MOSAIC THEMES RANGE FROM ‘ZEUS IS KIND OF A JERK’, ALL THE WAY TO ‘YEP, ZEUS IS DEFINITELY A JERK’”

Once at the park, we pay a token entry fee of €4.50 (Dhs19) and pick a pathway at random. Leading us past prehistoric etchings to the impressively preserved remains of Roman-made city walls and sunken marble pillars, we ended up at a curious little structure built to protect the 3,000-year-old collection of mosaic floors. The still-vibrant tiles portrayed Odyssey-era tales, with mosaic



LEARNING LACE BASICS IN LEFKARA

themes ranging from 'Zeus is kind of a jerk', all the way to 'Yep, Zeus is definitely a jerk.' Nearby, the tiered Odean theatre is in remarkable condition despite a millennium's worth of crowds scrambling up and down the smooth steps, with the very top row the ideal perch to take a well-deserved breather.

Back at the hotel, I head straight to the spa after our half-day slog, looking to nip any leg aches in the bud. Fronted by a sparkling infinity pool and beyond that, the Mediterranean's blue waters, the Almyraspa's location alone is breathtaking, and it takes some prodding from my therapist before I somewhat begrudgingly extract myself from the relaxation area to begin my Ila chakra wellbeing treatment. Based in holistic principles, my therapist alternates between manipulating pressure points and realigning my chakras, with the combo

putting me straight to sleep 20 minutes in. Zzzzzzen, indeed.

Despite my resolution to keep busy, I pop down to the hotel pool for just a second to test the waters, hitting the sun lounge jackpot as the elderly clientele shuffle off around 11.30am for an early lunch, leaving the prime positions around both the larger pool and grotto (complete with swim-up bar) up for grabs.

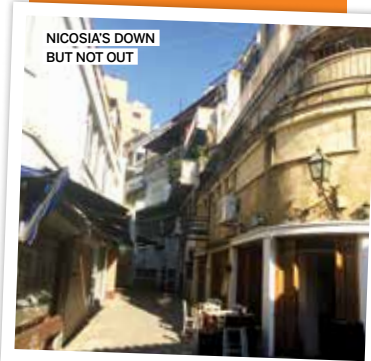
My good intentions to hike to a previously unexplored corner of Kato Paphos instantly melt away as I stretch out and soak up that gentle Mediterranean sun. It turns out you can take the girl out of the Dubai resorts, but...



The Annabelle is a member of the Preferred Hotels & Resorts Lifestyle Collection. Book rooms starting from €252 (Dhs1,054) per night at preferredhotels.com. Emirates flies direct to Larnaca, Cyprus from Dhs3,328 return.

CYPRUS' BEST PIT STOPS

Driving coast to coast? Here's the sights worth day-tripping to...



NICOSIA'S DOWN BUT NOT OUT

NICOSIA

Thanks to the recession, the island's capital has lost a lot of its lustre. But there are still some gems among the shuttered shops. Take to the city by foot to discover tiny antique stores, and quirky cafes, like the book-shelf-lined Weaving Mill (67-71 Lefkonos Street, Phaneromeni).

APHRODITE'S ROCK

Just outside Paphos, this stack of limestone is rumoured to be where the Greek goddess emerged from the sea foam, scallop shell and all. Legend says that those who bathe in the waters surrounding the rock will be blessed with long-lasting beauty.

ZYYI

Stop by this seaside strip for brilliant views of the bluest water you've ever seen and refreshing blood orange sherbet at the nearby Italian restaurant.