



Pafos & the West

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Escape

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Why Go?

Pafos was nominated joint European Capital of Culture for 2017 in recognition of its extraordinary archaeological sights. Unsurprisingly, these have attracted tourists for decades – as have more hedonistic pursuits. If you find the beach strip at Kato Pafos (Lower Pafos) too developed, duck into the back streets or head up to Ktima (Upper Pafos) on the hillside, which has a more traditional feel. More beach resorts are strung out north along the coast towards Agios Georgios.

To seriously sidestep the crowds, consider renting a car and searching out traditional rural villages where some of the best tavernas are located. If you have sturdier wheels, check out the unspoilt Akamas Peninsula, where there are remote beaches and some of the best walks on the island. To the east, the vast Pafos Forest is equally enticing, melting almost imperceptibly into the sombre tracts of the Tyllirian wilderness.

When to Go

- ➔ Pafos is the island's top tourist destination and gets busy in summer, which is worth bearing in mind when planning your visit.
- ➔ The summer months of July and August are when you will find the most sunbeds on the sand, the most sunburned noses and the highest hotel prices.
- ➔ May, June, September and October are less crowded, with plenty of long sunny days.
- ➔ Spring and autumn are pleasantly warm, though evening temperatures cool down considerably.
- ➔ In winter some restaurants and hotels close down altogether; if you head to the Western Troödos, you may even see some snow.

PAFOS

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Linked by a traffic artery, Kato Pafos (Lower Pafos) and Ktima (Upper Pafos; 3km to the northeast) form a contrasting whole. Kato Pafos is geared towards tourists, with bars and souvenir shops lining the palm-fringed seafront. Dive into the backstreets to discover historic gems such as medieval baths, catacombs and a simple fishermen's church. But the grand-slam sight is one of the South's richest archaeological locales, the Pafos Archaeological Site, just one reason the city was awarded joint European Capital of Culture in 2017. Standing here, surrounded by acres of history and fields of wild flowers, feels a world away from the busy resort just beyond the entrance.

Ktima, the old centre of Pafos, is overall a calmer place, where locals go about their daily life as they have for decades. Its neighbourhoods are culturally rich, with handsome colonial buildings that house government institutions and many of the town's museums.

Sights

Kato Pafos

Pafos

Archaeological Site

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

(Map p103; ☎ 2630 6217; adult/child €4.50/free; ☀ 8.30am-7.30pm mid-Apr–mid-Sep, to 5pm mid-Sep–mid-Apr; 📍) Nea Pafos (New Pafos) is, ironically, the name given to the sprawling Pafos Archaeological Site, to the west of Kato Pafos. Nea Pafos was the ancient city of Pafos, founded in the late 4th century BC and originally encircled by massive walls. Despite being ceded to the Romans in 58 BC, it remained the centre of all political and administrative life in Cyprus. It is most famed today for its mesmerising collection of intricate and colourful mosaics based on ancient Greek myths.

Palea Pafos (Old Pafos) was in fact Kouklia, southeast of today's Pafos and the site of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite (p104). At the time of Nea Pafos, Cyprus was part of the kingdom of the Ptolemies, the Greco-Macedonian rulers of Egypt whose capital was Alexandria. The city became an important strategic outpost for the Ptolemies, and the settlement grew considerably over the next seven centuries.

The city originally occupied an area of about 950,000 sq metres and reached its zenith during the 2nd or 3rd century AD. It was during this time that the city's most opulent public buildings were constructed, including those that house the famous Pafos mosaics.

Nea Pafos went into decline following an earthquake in the 4th century that badly damaged the city. Subsequently, Salamis in the east became the new capital of Cyprus, and Nea Pafos was relegated to the status of a mere bishopric. Arab raids in the 7th century set the seal on the city's demise and neither Lusignan settlement (1192–1489) nor Venetian and Ottoman colonisation revived Nea Pafos' fortunes.

The archaeological site is still being excavated since it is widely believed that there are many treasures still to be discovered. The following sections detail the major sights.

➔ Pafos Mosaics

This superb collection of mosaics is located in the southern sector of the archaeological site, immediately to the south of the Agora. Discovered by accident in 1962 by a farmer ploughing his field, these exquisite mosaics decorated the extensive floor area of a large, wealthy residence from the Roman period. Subsequently named the **House of Dionysus** (because of the number of mosaics featuring Dionysus, the god of wine), this complex is the largest and best known of the mosaic houses.

The most wonderful thing about the mosaics is that, apart from their artistic and aesthetic merits, each tells a story, mostly based on ancient Greek myths.

The first thing you'll see upon entering is not a Roman mosaic at all but a Hellenistic monochrome pebble mosaic showing the monster **Scylla**. Based on a Greek myth, this mosaic was discovered in 1977, a metre underground in the southwestern corner of the atrium.

The famous tale of Narcissus is depicted in a mosaic in Room 2, while the Four Seasons mosaic (Room 3) depicts Spring crowned with flowers and holding a shepherd's stick; Summer holding a sickle and wearing ears of corn; Autumn crowned with leaves and wheat; and Winter as a bearded, grey-haired man.

Phaedra and Hippolytos (Room 6) is one of the most important mosaics in the house. It depicts the tragic tale of a stepmother's bizarre love for her stepson.