

THE SPEAR'S 500

TRAVEL GUIDE 2017

INCLUDING AVIATION AND YACHTS



IN THE HOUSE OF THE LAST CONQUISTADOR

Hugh Thomson discovers a new
hotel in a Peruvian palace

VIVA VELA!

Elizabeth Hurley's love letter to her
favourite private island and her take
on nearby Cheval Blanc Bandheli

QUEEN OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

William Cash takes a spring break
at Cyprus's Anassa resort

JANINE DI GIOVANNI • JASON COWLEY • RORY ROSS

HAPPY AND GLORIOUS

It's no wonder the Anassa is known as the 'Queen of the Mediterranean' — its majesty is plain for all to see



WILLIAM CASH
IS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF SPEAR'S

When you want a spring tan from a sun-kissed Mediterranean beach holiday in Europe during May, options are limited. About twenty years ago, I once tried Crete in May with a girlfriend. It rained every day, the sea was like a Russian plunge pool, most of the hotels were shuttered, and the relationship never recovered. I swore never to go to Europe again until at least late June.

But my wife was determined to get away from freezing Shropshire in May. So when my travel adviser said, 'It's either Cyprus or Turkey,' I decided to experience the former British island, if only because I knew I could get a reliable recommendation for the best hotel from my accountant (a *Spear's* 500 member), who is from Cyprus.

'You want to go to my motherland, William, the Land of Aphrodite and the Goddess of Love? And you want the best hotel? No-brainer, my friend. Call Thanos at the Anassa — it's so elegant that you won't even know you are in Cyprus. And tell him Adonis recommended it.'

My Dulwich accountant never gets anything wrong. He predicted Brexit and even got the margin of votes right to one percentage point. He was right about the Anassa as well. It is one of the best beach resort hotels in Europe. To holiday in Anassa is not really to fly out to Cyprus. To understand why Anassa has been placed on the *Condé Nast Traveller* Gold List, you need to have had a drink with the owners, Thanos Michaelides and his sister Natasha, on the roof terrace of their towering, temple-like bar, to hear what their dream was when

TOP: THE ANASSA AFFORDS SOME TREMENDOUS SEA VIEWS: RIGHT: THE HOTEL AS SEEN FROM GROUND LEVEL

they and their late father built Anassa from scratch in the 1990s.

'The thinking was, it was such an amazing location,' says Thanos. 'Before the hotel was built, there was nothing here except the eucalyptus trees — no cypress trees, pine trees or olive trees, or the tropical garden — we just had barren land. And a nice beach. But you sit here now and you look out towards the sea and it is just so wonderful. You could be anywhere in the Mediterranean. It is such a special place and as a family we just set out to do it justice.'

Anassa is the family's flagship hotel. In Paphos they also have the Almyra and the Annabelle — a more traditional Cypriot hotel popular with the British blazer-and-flannel G&T brigade. The Annabelle is just across the road from where their father started the family's first hotel, then called the Paphos Beach Hotel, now Almyra, after the church leased it to him.

'My father was an entrepreneur,' says Natasha. 'Nobody was thinking about tourism or Cyprus as a holiday destination after the war. But he saw an opportunity in renting rooms off the church.'

Cyprus had been left in economic ruin after the war. But what was even worse for the Michaelides family was the invasion of Northern Cyprus by the Turkish army in July 1974. The family — who lived in Famagusta, on the east coast — had to flee. The family hotel dynasty really began when Thanos's late father, Alecos Michaelides, opened a hotel in Famagusta in the early 1970s, when it was a jet-set Mediterranean resort with miles of clear turquoise sea and sandy beaches that made it the Costa Smeralda of the island. In a way, the family passion that has been invested into Anassa has been the family's recreation of Cyprus's lost glamour coast.

The family philosophy has driven every move since: 'We run each hotel as an exclusive operation, driven by quality, with a welcoming, individual and distinctive personality. We invest heavily in a loyal and local team working together in unity for one goal. We cater to distinctive demographics and enjoy a track record of very high repeat business.'

The family have an obsession about every detail of design, landscaping and menu creation — down to the eight different types of freshly made local bread and local cheeses at breakfast; chefs who know how to 'lightly poach' an octopus or make the perfect *basiliko* salad. Almost every European cooking style and taste is catered for, from Brittany lobster to grilled wagyu beef cannelloni.

It's hardly any surprise that the hotel is known widely as the 'Queen of the Mediterranean', and it sits aloft like a giant Greek temple with its own village on a stretch of dazzling beach along from the small town of Polis and Latchi, an old fishing hamlet.

Anassa has a European 'family-run' hotel feel while offering the facilities and standards of a modern five-star California resort... with much warmer and more beautiful sea. Thanos's two sisters are involved in every aspect of the hotel — including running the



elegant boutique shops that sell the world's most chic beachwear, including 'Elizabeth Hurley Beach'.

The family get their entrepreneurial flair from their father, who made the family breakthrough by travelling to Germany (he used to work as a senior executive for Carlsberg in Cyprus) and persuading the travel rep for Kuoni to include his hotel as one of its featured package holiday hotels.

'Back then, there were no websites, and only charter flights,' says Natasha. 'Getting into the Kuoni catalogue was a major deal as we had no direct bookings then. After we got into Kuoni, it became a big success, but we had to be bold.'

Today, Anassa is one of the 'Leading Hotels of the World' and has set new standards in the ultimate family holiday hotel — popular with the British Chelsea set at half-term and in September and October. Because there was a billionaire's Indian wedding taking place, we were given a spectacular three-bedroom, 225-square-metre villa — the Villa Andromeda, with its own infinity pool — on the grounds that there might be too much noise if we were in a regular suite.

But this wasn't the case. While we were expecting a 'Big Fat Greek Wedding' on steroids, apart from a spectacular fireworks display, the hotel absorbed the billionaire's wedding in its stride. The whole village is so well designed and spread out that despite having its own little church and village *piazza*, three restaurants and three bars — including the wonderful swimming pool bar, which you can swim up to and sit on a submerged bar stool — you never feel as if you are staying anywhere other than a chic boutique hotel.

The mix is international, but somehow Anassa >>

GRANDE
DAME

166 ROOMS



» seemed to get the type of wealthy Europeans who weren't going on holiday in the hope of finding themselves sunbathing next to a Russian oligarch and overhearing his pregnant wife calling up five private London day schools in succession to pay £250 a head to 'put down' their as yet unborn son. This happened to me the last time I was at a grand-palace hotel in the South of France. At Anassa, the social crowd was much more chic and low-key.

One reason is that Anassa offers very good value for a true five-star luxury hotel that rivals any of the more famous Côte d'Azur palace hotels. Don't be fooled by the reasonable prices — by St Tropez or Sardinia standards, at least. 'We have the advantage of having built the hotel in the late 1990s, whereas most of the grand hotels of Europe are 50 or 60 years old — with much smaller rooms. We offer size of rooms that you can only find in the very best US resorts — so we take the comfort of US expectations with a truly Mediterranean feel. You could be in Sardinia but at much less cost. There is a lot of snob value in certain great hotels. People who come to Anassa don't care so much about the

snob value.'

Instead, they care for the fact that you can get up at 6.30am and be trekking at sunrise in the Akamas peninsula, visiting the Aphrodite Baths of classical legend and trekking in the national park — or by 7.30am you can be snorkelling in the Blue Lagoon. I went there by boat and it was truly dazzling — as clear and beautiful as any lagoon in the Caribbean.

We took our infant daughter and found that the main residential nanny was English, which helped. There's a Kids' Club, which is affordable, making Anassa a true family hotel.

There are also activities that include pro tennis lessons, bicycling, squash (the spa offers a court), table tennis, billiards, quad biking, beach volleyball, self-drive boat hire (we went for the skippered option), and even an opportunity to learn how to crew a boat. The 'Crew' activity programme is for children aged eleven and above.

This is a water sports club for pre-teenagers to eighteen-year-olds, where they learn wakeboarding, water skiing, windsurfing and snorkelling, hang out with new friends on boat trips and kayak adventures into crystalline Akamas waters. If that doesn't exhaust them, your teenagers can then play beach volleyball. The six-day programme costs only €440 per child per week. Pure bliss for the parents, I should think.

In short, we loved it because the whole place felt like a Mediterranean holiday fantasy — every HNW Global Citizen's idea of what the ultimate Mediterranean village should look like, even if the effect is to feel that you have spent a week on a film set.

Would I go back? Most certainly, yes. Especially in May, June, September or October. It's the most romantic of holidays I've been on for a long time — with the proof being that exactly nine months after our May stay, we are adding to our own family. So Anassa can truly be described as a uniquely memorable, 'family-friendly', super-luxury resort hotel. /

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BELOW: A POOL AT THE HOTEL; ABOVE: THE VIEW FROM ONE OF THE BALCONIES

