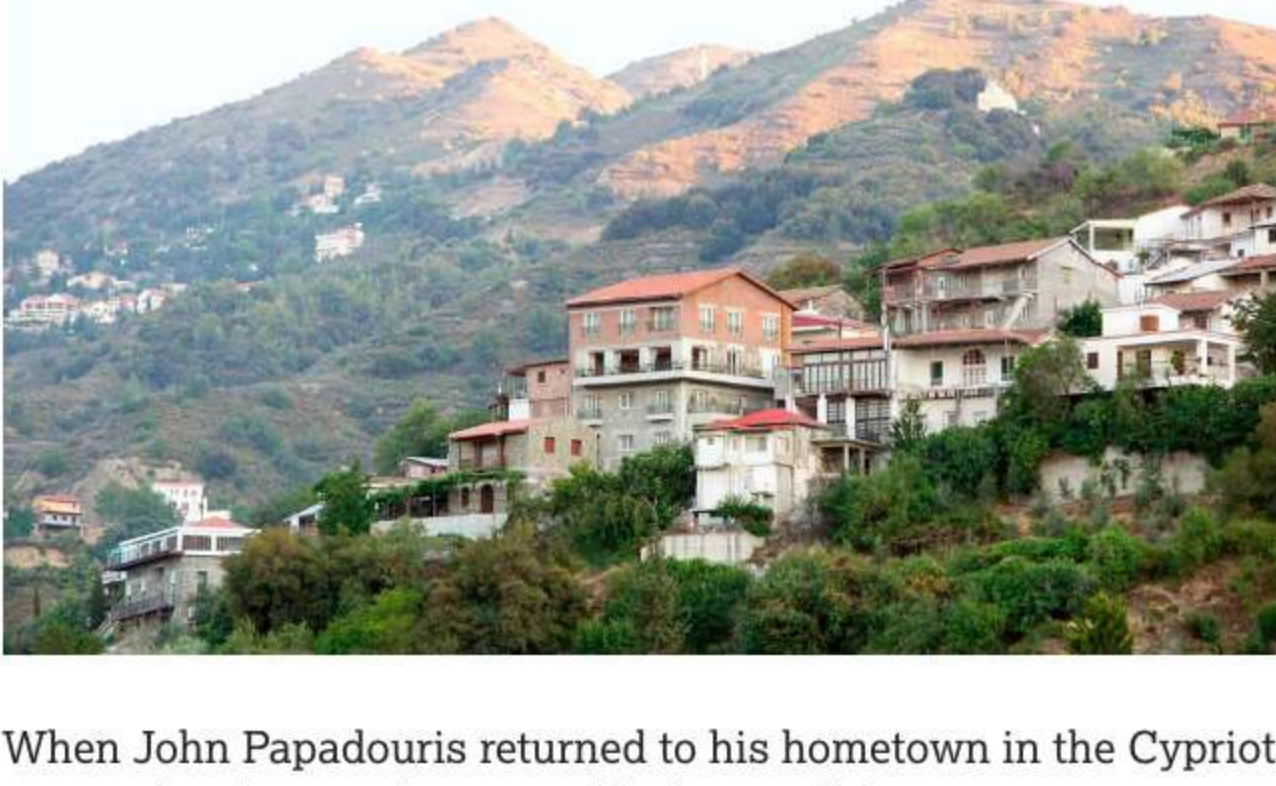


**Sandy Rashty**  
May 29, 2017

# Cyprus Green: Cyprus beyond the beach

Our writer heads into the mountains to discover a different side to this sunsoaked island, where agrotourism is helping to save Cypriot traditions



When John Papadouris returned to his hometown in the Cypriot mountains, he was devastated by its condition.

The scenic forests and rich scents of local fruit remained but he found the economy dwindling, the younger generation fleeing in search of jobs and the roads in a state of disrepair.

In short, the ancient mountain village of Kalopanayiotis — once a key stop for pilgrims — was at risk of becoming a lost one. But this story has a happy ending.

Determined to “revive” the village, the civil engineering magnate invested heavily in the area, and encouraged financial backers to do the same. Now, as Mayor of the village and owner of the local four-star hotel — the Casale Panayiotis — he has watched it bloom.

It is here, in the hotel’s bespoke library, that we are told the story. Like so many tourists, from both the UK and Israel, we have travelled up long winding mountain roads to stay at the boutique resort, located in the heart of the village.

“It is an amazing place for tourists, but it has also done so much for the local economy,” explains hotel manager Freda Yannitsas. “People in the village benefit from jobs at the resort, and they also use the lighting on the roads that has been put up by Mr Papadouris. It’s a real restoration project.”

Chefs use local produce to prepare traditional recipes, including dolma, baklava, haloumi cheese with fig jam and the heartwarming mougendra (a combination of lentils and rice, topped with sweet potato).

Guests can buy honey from local beekeepers, wine from nearby vineyards and traditional sweet-treats, made by elderly women whose recipes date back generations. And group tutorials are on offer. We are introduced to one lady, who sits down on a veranda, to prepare glyko koutaliou (orange peel preserve).

We watch as Mrs Aliko (also the village seamstress) expertly peels the fruit, and then twists the peel to prepare the jam. Luckily, she has dished out a pre-made batch, encouraging us to dip the peel in water to remove some of the syrup and enjoy the sweet-treat in the sun.

There can be few better places than this secluded mountain spot to escape the frenzy of the city. Hiking boots on, we take a nature walk around the area. From a black-cloaked bearded monk in an 11th century chapel, we learn about the culture and traditions that still influence the village and the effort that has gone into preserving the Unesco-listed St John Lampadistis monastery.

We walk along carefully marked footpaths past mineral springs, through the forest and greenery until we come across an old mill, once used to make bread but now a homage to what used to stand.

But for me, the highlight of the 43-bedroom wood-beamed and stone-walled resort was walking through an oasis by Mr Papadouris’ summer home. There, guests are given a chance to fish in a pond for the village’s famed trout and pick an array of fruits — from pomelos to oranges, kiwis, cherries and sweet lemons — to be turned into juice, or used by the chefs. Flowers decorating tables at the hotel’s two restaurants are grown here too.

For those looking for pure relaxation, there’s the Myrianthousa Spa too. Steam room, sauna and spectacular massage aside, the sealed “snow room”, layered with ice and fluffy snow, is popular with those brave enough to try the hot-to-cold experience, proven to boost circulation.



Once you’ve had your fill of seclusion, the beachfront Anassa Hotel lies a two-hour drive down the mountain — and a world away.

The five-star hotel is all about exclusivity with former guests including the King and Queen of Belgium, Leonardo DiCaprio and Rod Stewart, popular with everyone from Israeli guests to honeymooners and young families.

Here the emphasis is on luxury and pampering. The varied food at the eight restaurants and bars is superb; Cypriot yogurts, scented honey, fresh-squeezed juices, nuts and fruits served with a dollop of finesse at breakfast.

Buggies are on-call 24-hours a day to ferry guests across the well-lit and fountain-laden resort. Young parents arrive without worrying about packing nappies or baby bottles — everyday child amenities come with the hotel’s family-friendly ‘baby-light’ package. More than that, the child day care services encourage kids to pick fresh rosemary, olives and oranges — which they are later able to cook with.

The 166-rooms are heavenly too. Designed in light blue and white with light wood, most overlook the blue sea, some with their own private infinity pool. Given nothing is an inconvenience, it is no surprise 40 per cent of guests are repeat-bookers.

With nearby Paphos named this year’s European Capital of Culture, the special events taking place mean there are even more reasons to explore the city this year — if you can resist the temptation to stay put.

“No one really leaves — not even to go out. We can take them if they want, but there is so much to do here, why would they?” explains one member of staff. “Unless they want to take a walk on the beach or a boat out to the sea — that is wonderful.”

I have to agree. Given time-constraints, I regrettably can’t take advantage of any of the three scenic walking trails. Instead, I’m forced to spend my short stay at a five-course lunch following a series of pampering treatments in the child-free Thalassa spa, complete with a therapeutic jet pool.

Mountain, beach or city culture, the only difficulty is tearing yourself away.

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