

TIPS ON TRIPS

Cyprus At The Cultural Crossroads Of The Mediterranean

by Anthony Grant

(NAPSA)—The history of Cyprus has been by turns turbulent and tranquil—making it a fascinating and rewarding place to visit.

Anchored only a short distance away from the Greek Islands, Asia Minor and Egypt, this eastern Mediterranean island has known many foreign influences since it was first settled 10,000 years ago. Each empire left its mark and added a layer of charm.

Visitors can explore Neolithic ruins from early settlements and enjoy the vistas that myths are made of. Cyprus was the first Christian-ruled land in the world but it was also the birthplace of Aphrodite the Greek goddess of love. Many of the pine-clad hills, rocky coves and dazzling beaches Aphrodite would have called home are little changed today. People from all over the ancient world came to places such as Kouklia, Amathus and Kition to pay homage to the goddess and today these important archeological sites are part of the Aphrodite cultural tour.

Considered by some to be the world's oldest wine, a sweet dessert wine named Commandaria, has its origins in Cyprus. It has kept its present name since the 11th century crusades of Richard the Lionheart, who once ruled the island.

Wine is central to the island's culture. Major wineries and some 20 registered regional wineries on Cyprus create an appealing and surprisingly diverse array of fine reds and whites.

Visitors can follow one or more wine routes proposed in the free brochure, "The Cyprus Wine Story," offered by the Cyprus



The magnificent Greko-Roman theater of Kourion, near Limassol.

Tourism Organization.

Cypriot cuisine is a reflection of the island itself: relatively small but surprisingly varied. Traditional cuisine revolves around *meze*, little plates of savory preparations of everything from *halloumi*, a toothsome, briny cheese to tasty *loukanika* and *sheftalia* meat dishes. One meal can include as many as 30 distinct meze dishes.

If you're tired of highways and faceless suburbs, a sojourn in a real Cypriot village might be just the balm you need.

Omodos, for example, is a charming oasis of whitewashed buildings with brightly painted doors. There, life revolves around leisurely coffee breaks and perusing handmade jewelry and glassware in family-run shops.

Thanks to companies such as Cyprus Villages (www.cyprusvillages.com), you can make a stay in a traditional Cyprus villa part of your vacation experience.

For more information, call the Cyprus Tourism Organization at (212) 683-5280 or visit their Web site at www.visitcyprus.org.cy or e-mail gencyprus@aol.com.