

# Temptation Island

Belle Jackson soaks up some winter sun in Cyprus.



It's the birthplace of Aphrodite and an infatuated Anthony's gift to the world's greatest enchantress. Cleopatra - so how could you not fall in love with Cyprus?

Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, was said to have emerged, stark naked, from the foaming waves at Petra tou Romiou, just near Pafos on the island's south coast. And just 30 miles away, hidden amongst soft ferns and cool rocks, she would bathe after her amorous adventures to become a born-again virgin.

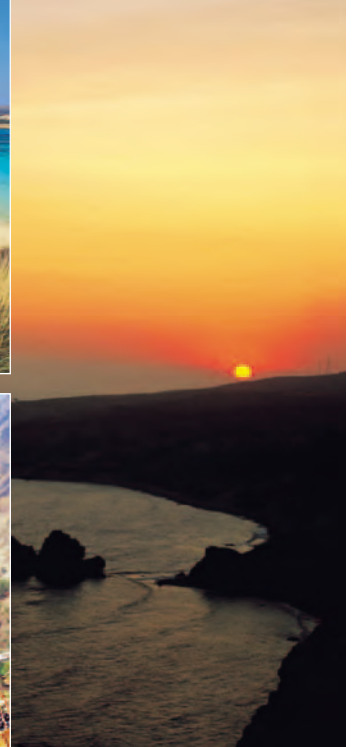
At the other extreme is the Stavrouvouni monastery, 25 miles from Larnaka. Founded by a woman of a far different caliber, St Helen was mother to Constantine the Great as well as a saint, and she forbade women from entering the building, a ban that is enforced still today.

If you were to tick the list on every must-do in Cyprus, you'd be trotting alongside the mad dogs and Englishmen to see the ruins left by time and war from the great

civilizations, a seemingly inexhaustible list that includes the Persians, Egyptians, Romans, Crusaders, and Turks. In one of the hottest spots in Europe, it's time to slow down, relax, and let your imagination take over.

The key is to watch how the locals live. Med style. Wake to taste the crisp morning air before ambling slowly down to your nearest café - preferably one hewn from rustic stone, with a few empty chairs out in the sun. Order coffee - strong, short and black. And pull up the backgammon table as old Cypriot men shuffle past, craggy characters with traditional flat black fishing caps and suit coats over dusty trousers. There is nothing past this moment.

Lunchtime brings another languid adventure - if you're in the neighborhood, consider braving the road up to Viklari, also known as The Last Castle, a restaurant in the hills overlooking Pafos. Here, time is used wisely to create the divine kleftiko - lamb, which has feasted on the island's sweet herbs, before being cooked so slowly and lovingly, the



tender meat, falls from the bones.

And waste your afternoon - that's right, waste it - slipping in and out of the Mediterranean Sea, or sheltering in the cool, damp calm of a Byzantine church, perched high up in the Troodos Mountains.

The capital of Nicosia, or Lefkosia, depending on whom you speak to, is the world's last divided city, split in an ongoing territorial feud between the Greeks and Turks. A haphazard wall divides the city between the two, and it's interesting to cross into peaceful Turkish Cyprus for a day.

A quick flash of your passport when you cross the 'Green Line' to the Turkish side will take you to a forgotten slice of land studded with fortifications of past wars.

In a one-day visit, you could see Famagusta, where Shakespeare reputedly set his tragic romance, Othello, or take a taxi up to beautiful Bellapais Abbey, high in the hills

above Kyrenia, which locals will tell you was the setting for the original Name of the Rose, not Umberto Eco's allegedly pirated version.

Believe the claim or not, the restaurants around the abbey serve spectacular meze, an island speciality not dictated to by the Green Line, where plate after tiny plate of delicacies - tart olives, crisp fried haloumi cheese, sweet seafood and cured meats - find their way onto your table and into your mouth.

Then sit back and sip on wine from the Troodos Mountains or a grape liqueur and think of star-crossed lovers, and raise your glass to the crossroads of Europe.

## Info

**VISAS:** Cyprus is in the EU, so Irish citizens don't need a visa. When crossing into North Cyprus, ask the guards to stamp a piece of paper and not your passport, which may cause problems back in the Greek-controlled areas.

**WHEN TO GO:** Cyprus is a winter sun dream - it will hit mid-teens in the depths of winter (Jan-Dec), but quickly rises to balmy 20s on either side.

**MONEY:** Cyprus isn't in the euro zone, so it still uses Cyprus pounds. £1=57cents.

**GETTING THERE:** Budget Travel has a winter '04/'05 brochure appropriately titled "Aphrodite's 'Island of Love' - a holiday destination fit for the Gods!"

tel 01 6311111 or visit [www.budgettravel.ie](http://www.budgettravel.ie) for more information. Budget operates day flights weekly from Dublin to Paphos airport, which is located near to Limassol and Aya Napa. Prices start at €399.

**GETTING AROUND:** Cypriots drive on the left, a legacy of British rule, and road signs are often in English.

**GREAT READS:** The Bitter Lemons of Cyprus by Lawrence Durrell is a sympathetic account of the recent division of the island.

