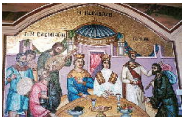


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Cyprus



Cyprus & History, Mythology, Antiquities and Now a Luxury Boutique Hotel

Cyprus, rich in history spanning 10,000 years, and surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, now has its first luxury boutique hotel. **Thalassa**, www.thalassa.com.cyprus, an exquisite 58-room



and suite luxury boutique hotel, a member of **Small Luxury Hotels of the World**www.slh.com and **Great Hotels of the World**www.ghotw.com, opened in early July 2004. My husband, Ed, and I made a pre-opening reservation for late May 2004 in order to provide Luxury Experience magazine readers with the latest news on luxury hotels.

We flew **Virgin Atlantic Airways**www.virgin.com Upper Class from New York to London, where the pampering begins in their airport lounge and only gets better from there. The lounge at JFK airport is like a hip, trendy bar where you can sample a variety of cocktails or champagne, check the Internet and enjoy a lovely meal. On board, we relaxed and put our feet up on the ottomans. Virgin has the largest fully flat beds in business class, and just 4 seats across the cabin, so that all Upper Class passengers have aisle access, a dream for anyone who has had to try to wake or climb over sleeping passengers to get out of their seat. The flight attendant asked if I would like an in-flight massage sometime during the course of the flight, and of course I answered yes! I was then offered a glass of champagne, which I accepted, and a sleep suit to change into to keep my clothes looking fresh upon arrival, they even had a small; must have been my lucky day. I love being pampered! After take-off, I flipped my leather seat into a bed, added the mattress pad and sheet, and made myself comfortable with a red satin pillow, and fluffy white duvet. I settled in for the night flight with my Virgin "Good Night Book", miniature hot water bottle, eyeshade and dreamt of having my massage. Just before landing, Fay, the massage therapist came to get me for my massage. Refreshed from my massage, I changed out of my sleep suit into my business suit, had breakfast at the Upper Class Bar, where a charming male passenger poured my coffee, and I was ready to start my day!

We arrived in London, and then flew **Cyprus Airways**www.cyprusairways.com from London to Larnaca airport in Cyprus. Costas Kapitanis of the **Cyprus Tour Office**www.cytanet.com.cy welcomed us at the Larnaca airport, and provided us with Cyprus tour information. It was his birthday, and he offered us some of his birthday treats, including a delicious Haloumi cheese pastry with sesame seeds from his father's bakery. What a delectable way to welcome us to Cyprus.

After retrieving our luggage and passing through Customs, Michelle Gabb, our personal Butler from **Thalassa** met us, took our luggage and settled us into the limo, and then offered us cool, lemon scented cloths to refresh our travel weary skin, and provided us with slippers and a cooling spray to refresh our tired

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feet. She offered us a glass of champagne, fresh squeezed orange juice or mineral water, all served in sparkling crystal. At first we blinked in the strong Mediterranean sunlight thinking we must be imaging this, but it was indeed real, and we relaxed with our champagne, with Donovan, our driver, another Thalassa Butler, and Michelle to take care of all our needs. What impressed us most, besides the professional, courteous Butler service, was the intense Mediterranean color palate of magnificent blues, and the varying shades of greens, light sands, the yellows of the round hay bundles, and bursts of vivid colors of the bougainvillea and oleander in fuchsia, violet, purple and white.

Finally, we arrived at in Paphos. **Thalassa** exceptionally located on a bluff overlooking the sea, was not yet open, so we stayed at their next-door property, **Coral Beach Hotel & Resort**, but experienced all of the Thalassa services, beginning with their personal Butler service. Thalassa has the first all-Butler concept in the Mediterranean, where one Butler is assigned to each guest room to take care of all of the guest's needs throughout their stay. Michelle took us to our suite where she had arranged a wonderful surprise for us outside. Under a bougainvillea-covered loggia, a table was set with crisp white linen, adorned with a fiery-orange canal in a white vase, and lit votive candles arranged with seashells. There was a tempting assortment of delicious canapés, as well as champagne, bottled mineral water and freshly squeezed orange juice. We partook of our feast listening to the music of the waves lapping against the shore, and watched a boat lazily passing by, as the sun slowly lingered before setting, as if to welcome us.

We began our next day with an al fresco breakfast on a pretty terrace under a magnificent Mediterranean clear blue sky, before we embarked on a tour of some of the historical sites. Since we were picking up our rental car the next day, Frederick Broodryk, Service Manager for Thalassa, drove Ed and I, along with Michelle, and our tour guide, Katerina Papaefstathiou to experience some of the archeological treasures that Cyprus is noted for. We began at the **Tombs of the Kings**, a misnomer, since kings were not buried there, but wealthy aristocrats and Roman officers, dating back to the 4th century BC. After touring the tombs, we stopped at the **Kato Pafos Archaeological Park**. Fans of Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*, will be entranced at the mosaic floors rich in symbols, in the 4 villas dating back to Roman times. I toured the **House of Dionysus**, and was enraptured with the remarkably well-preserved mosaics. Katerina explained each of the mosaics to us – Dionysus and Akme, Leda and the Swan, Neptune and Amymore, and others. As we passed the amphitheater, which is still used for ancient Greek dramas, comedies and music, Katerina asked that we climb to the top and have a seat, and sang to us from Medea. At the hotel, Marc Aeberhard, General Manager and Irene Papazoglou, Back Office Manager surprised us with a light lunch of salad with an anchovy lemon raspberry dressing and chicken on a bed of mixed julienne vegetables, in the garden overlooking the sea. After our luscious lunch we returned to our patio and dozed in our lounge chairs, luxuriating in the moment.

Rested, and showered, we returned to the garden in the early evening for a Sparkling Wine Degustation with Marc and Hunter Reynolds, Executive Chef at Thalassa. Marc had asked us to join him in helping to select a sparkling wine for the hotel. Honored,



we eagerly lent our taste buds to the occasion sampling a selection of six sparkling wines, paired with canapés that Hunter had prepared, before agreeing that we all liked the Oak Thane 2002 from Greece the best. Marc and Hunter told us about their edible landscape design for Thalassa. The hotel has herb and vegetable gardens, as well as orange, olive, date and fig trees. Almost every plant will be either used in the kitchen or in the holistic Spa. We also discussed the hotel's restaurants and bars – the Seafood Grill, the main restaurant offering New Cypriot Cuisine, their Tea Lounge, the Main Bar, and their Cliff Bar, all designed with pampering in mind.

For dinner, Michelle had arranged for us to have a romantic dinner for two in the dining room. Candles

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glowed along the floor leading us to our table, which was set with fresh flowers.

We began with a fresh salad that Michelle prepared for us tableside, followed by a silky mushroom cappuccino, and herbed beef fillet rolled in fresh cut herbs of parsley, rosemary, thyme and sage with a duo of mustard sauces. For dessert, the chef had prepared a delectable pistachio Bavarian cream and Blanc manger served with cinnamon cake and raspberry coulis. We sampled the local Cyprus wines, and selected Ayios Andronikos, a dry white from the **Chryssorrogiatissa Monastery**, and Heritage, a red wine from rare varieties still growing at the **KEO winery**.



Thalassa tailors special programs for its guests, based on their desires. We had mentioned that we enjoy diving and snorkelling, so Michelle arranged for us to go snorkelling the next day. After breakfast, **Captain Jon Peach** met us at the hotel's pier in his brand-new Leisure Cat 9000 Profisher 32' boat, Wildcat. Designed to hold 15 passengers, we were only a small group, 2 charming couples from the UK, Kathy and Pete, and Jenny and Paul, as well as Michelle, Ed and I. After a smooth ride, we arrived at the Blue Lagoon, where Captain Jon handed us fresh out-of-bag snorkelling equipment. Since the water was still a bit cool, Ed and I were the only ones willing to go in. Refreshed, we climbed back in the boat, and headed to Latchi, to the **Faro Restaurant**, where Frederick joined us for a delicious lunch of red snapper and French fries. On the way back to Thalassa, a pod of dolphins joined us and jumped and played in the waves alongside the boat. Captain Jon, originally from the UK, has lived in Cyprus for the past two years told us that it was the first time he had seen dolphins in Cyprus. Michelle, who grew up in Cyprus, called her mom in the UK to report the sightings. Pete and Kathy, cameras in hand, tried to capture the dolphins on film, running from side to side of the boat. Eventually Pete climbed on top of the boat as we excitedly called out sightings to him, 7 o'clock, 4 o'clock, etc, until it was finally, "just keeping shooting Pete, and don't fall in!" We continued on to Thalassa, under an enormous rainbow that spanned across the sky, trailed by 5 dolphins, a most amazing day!

The next day our rental car arrived, which was arranged with the **Cyprus Tourism Office**, www.visitcyprus.org.cy. We went with Michelle to **Troodos** in the mountains,



to visit the **Kykkos Monastery**, the richest and most famous monastery in Cyprus, founded in 1,100 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It is spectacular with Byzantine arches covered with geometric designs, murals of saints on the ceilings and walls, many elaborate chandeliers, an intricate gold alter with carved flowers, ribbons, birds, angels, thistles, in red and green, and one of the three surviving icons ascribed to Saint Luke. Since we had a few hours before we were due at the Chryssorrogiatissa Monastery for a wine tasting, we drove around the villages and did some shopping. It was in one of the villages that I was introduced to Commandaria – the oldest wine in the world, made of cherries, where at one shop, every time I found something that I wanted, the owner insisted that I drink a little Commandaria. I ended up

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buying so many things from him that he gave me a bottle of Commandaria as a gift!



We arrived at the **Chryssorriogiatissa Monastery**, originally founded in the 12th century and dedicated to “Our Lady of the Golden Pomegranate”, which produces some of the best vintage wines on the island. After meeting the Abbot, Frederick led us to the very old wine cellar for the tasting, where we joined by and Kai and Owen also guests at the hotel. Marc, in addition to being the General Manager of Thalassa, is also a very knowledgeable oenophile. He told us not to eat bread before a wine tasting as the bread breaks down into sugar, coats your palate and makes everything sweet. It is best to only drink still water between tasting each wine. He instructed us on the look, smell and taste. Color is an important aspect of wine. If the color of white wine is yellow-green it may be too early to drink, or it may have impurities in it. With sparkling wine or champagne, it is important to look at the size of the bubbles, and if they hold their fizz. If there are bubbles clinging to the side of the glass they indicate added sugar. With red wine, tip the glass to the side to determine the color of the wine. If it looks red-red it is ripe to drink, orange-red it may be too ripe, and a brownish color indicates that the wine is bad. Why do people swirl their wine glass? Although people swirl their wine glasses to age the wine, it also allows us to look at the “legs” of the wine, as the longer the “legs” the higher the alcohol level. However, “legs will not appear on glasses washed in the dishwasher. Remember old wines require great care, do not swirl the glass – treat it very carefully, never decant it, and use the smallest glass possible in order to expose it to the least amount of oxygen. As for the quality of the wine, you can judge the quality by the initial sensation when you swallow the wine. The better quality the wine, the lower the sensation will be, in your neck to chest region. We then began some serious and very enjoyable wine tasting. We left the monastery just as the sun was setting, a most dramatic sight from the mountains. Afterwards, we went for meze at **Dionysos Tavern**. Meze is to Cyprus, what tapas are to Spain, and we were anxious to sample all the delicious plates.

Determined that we see the entire island, Marc had arranged for us to go to **Nicosia**. We visited the **Ledra Museum – Observatory** that provided amazing views of the old as well as the modern city. We walked around the city full of quaint little shops, and well-known designer shops. After a very nice lunch at **Luigi**, an Italian restaurant, we went to the **Cyprus Museum**, filled with archaeological treasures and antiquities from the Neolithic Age to the Early Byzantine period. On our way back, we stopped at the **Kolossi Castle** in the **Limassol** area. Constructed between the 13th and 15th centuries, it once served as the Grand Commandery of the Knights of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, and in the 14th century, it was under the domain of the Knights Templar for a few years.

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Our last day, we experienced Thalassa Spa treatments. Barry Warrington, Spa Director, gave Ed a massage and his assistant, gave me a facial. Both treatments left us feeling energized with a profound feeling of contentment. Marc and Frederick had organized yet another surprise for us. Frederick drove us up into the hills of Kathikas, to a vineyard. Imagine our surprise to see Chef Socrates in full chef regalia standing among the grape plants, cooking on a hibachi grill! We had an elegant 3-course lunch, served by Michelle and Tanya, 2 of the Thalassa Butlers, under the shade of an almond tree on a white linen draped table with white linen covered chairs, with Frederick, Kai and Owen.



High up in the hills, with panoramic views of Cyprus, it was a perfect and very memorable afternoon. We returned to the hotel, and then went out to do some shopping, and also stopped at **Saint Salomoni Catacomb** to see the incredible remaining 12th century frescos.

We returned to the hotel, and had a tour of Thalassa, although not quite finished at the time, but almost ready to open. Thalassa starts guest pampering upon the guest's arrival at the airport, where guest check-in is done in the car en route to the hotel. Most of the spectacular suites have 270-degree sea views, terraces have steamed beech wood furniture and pots of herbs, and even the standard double bedroom consists of 1 bedroom and a living room. Bathrooms are Carrera marble, with special Crabtree & Evelyn amenities including a rubber duck wearing a tie in the "his" bathroom, and a sea sponge in the "her" bathroom. The rooms are trimmed in lilac, considered to be a lucky color, and guests are lucky indeed to have espresso machines which can be used for coffee or tea in their rooms, as well as a large CD collection to borrow from, television and DVD. Every room is named for a Greek Goddess or God. There is also a Cigar Smoker Room complete with humidior, mini-bar with malt whiskey, and cigar coffee table books. In addition to the many restaurants and bars, there are many secluded spots where guests may have an intimate lunch or dinner. For outdoor enthusiasts, there is also a fish shaped outdoor swimming pool or you can walk down the cliff path to the sandy stretch of beach. Fitness and Spa aficionados will appreciate the Health Club with cardio equipment and weights, as well as a private studio for exercise or

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yoga classes.



There are also steam rooms, a Jacuzzi, and an indoor swimming pool. The Holistic Spa will pre-blend bath salts, oils and aromatherapy especially for the client's needs, and have a wide variety of available treatments. There is also a juice bar, as well as a relaxation room. Treatment rooms are designed with privacy and comfort in mind. There is a Hairdresser, and you may also have a manicure or pedicure at the Spa. We returned to our suite and changed into our clothes to experience an outside yoga class on a cliff overlooking the sea. Barry put us through various stretches and relaxation techniques, followed by an ice-tea celebration, made with herbs grown in Thalassa's gardens, as we watched the sun turn the sky into a brilliant orange before slowly descending.

We had a romantic candlelit dinner for two, prepared by Chef Maria and Pastry Chef Nicoterias, with Michelle and Donovan in attendance. When we returned to our room, Michelle had left a beautiful surprise on our bed. She had written, "Have a safe journey" in Greek using pink rose petals, a most marvellous surprise! Our trip to the airport the next morning was bittersweet; we were thrilled with our visit, but also sad to be leaving. We are definitely looking forward to returning to Thalassa to see the finished product. Until next time ...

We flew **Cyprus Airways** back to London, and then with time to spare, we went to the **Virgin** lounge at Heathrow where Paula, the massage therapist worked magic on my travel weary back. We had a few snacks, and then took their new Virgin Airbus A340-600 "Queen of the Skies" back to New York. This new plane is a 3-abreast seat configuration offering even more privacy. Since it was an early evening flight, I made myself comfortable in my flat bed and watched back-to-back movies. I did take a break though when Lorraine, the in-flight therapist came to get me to have a hydrating hand and arm treatment, a perfect ending to a perfect trip.

Please read our other articles on **Thalassa** and **Cyprus**, in **TravelNews**, **Chefs' Recipes**, **Music Scene**, and **Arts & Antiques** sections. For Cyprus information, please contact the **Cyprus Tourism Office**, www.visitcyprus.org.cy.

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