



**Baths of Aphrodite**

CYPRUS TOURISM ORGANISATION

The Baths of Aphrodite are an exceptional spot, an enchanting spring on the eastern slope of Akamas, by the sea, right at the point where the mouth of the narrow Chrysochous valley meets the sheer rocks of the Akamas peninsula. This spot combines legend with natural beauty and fills the visitor's soul with a sense of soothing calmness and tranquility. According to the legend and local tradition, this was where Aphrodite, goddess of beauty and love, enjoyed her bath. It was also the spot where Adonis saw her for the first time and they instantly became lovers.

A paved road leads from Polis Chrysochous up to the modern tourist pavilion near the spring. Since 2006, the Department of Forest has created a park covering one hectare, with trails, benches where visitors can rest their heels, and a bird watching station. The flora was enriched with local shrubs and wildflowers, all labelled, making the visit educational as well. Here you will find Cyprus's national wildflower, the endemic Cyprus cyclamen. Going through part of the park over the flagstone path, we reach the foot of a sheer limestone rock. Water flows from its crevices and falls like misty rain into a pond. That pond is around five meters across and one meter at its deepest point. Its water is crystal clear and cool. A ditch carries the overflow from the pond to the sea. The vegetation in this area is so luxuriant, that the spring and the pond are permanently in the shade. All around, there are plane trees, wild fig trees, wild olives (olea), carobs, lentisks, thyme and other plants. If you happen to be here in the spring, you will see numerous wildflowers, including cyclamens, gladioli, anemones, rock roses and flowering callicotome villosas (spiny broom). The rock from which the water flows is hollow, forming a small grotto.

Many travellers have described the beauty of the landscape and the wild majesty of Akamas which make the area a point of attraction, a spot where the goddess of love had her realm. Already in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Greco-Roman poet Claudian made a splendid description of that realm, a description that fits Akamas, despite the changes that may have occurred through the centuries. Claudian mentions two springs, one whose water is mingled with honey and a second one in which the water is mingled with poison. Eros dips

his arrows in those two springs, hence his shots are sometimes sweet and at other times bitter.

Greek philosopher and rhetorician Athenaeus (170–230 A.D.) was the first to mention the name Baths of Aphrodite in connection with *lychnis* (*silene*), a plant which according to him grows around the baths of the goddess of love in Cyprus and Limnos. He adds that Aphrodite bathed there after sleeping with her husband, Hephaestus. Claudian says that Aphrodite's realm is in the place he describes in Cyprus (i.e., Akamas), and that Hephaestus expertly built a fence around it. Claudian's reference to the fence depicts the relative isolation of Akamas, even nowadays, and brings to mind a local tradition according to which there is a spot in Akamas where an invisible force keeps people away.

Let us now take an all-around taste of the Akamas Peninsula. It covers an area of 17,910 hectares, at the western extremity of Cyprus, in the district of Paphos. It is bordered by the Peyia and Akoursos villages to the south and by the Kathikas, Prodromi and Latchi villages to the east.

The peninsula is supposedly named after the Trojan War hero Akamas, son of Theseus and Phaedra, who upon landing at Cyprus founded a colony in that area with Akamantis as its capital. Many areas in the peninsula have been named after elements and events of the ancient Greek and Cypriot mythologies and traditions, such as the "Baths of Aphrodite", "Smigies" (where Digenis "esmige", i.e., came together in love with Rigaina, a medieval queen), "Rigaina's Tower" and "Fontana Amorosa" (The Fountain of Love). According to Greek mythology, Aphrodite was married to Hephaestus, blacksmith of the gods. This myth is all likelihood stems from Cyprus's association with metallurgy, and in particular with coppersmithing. The legend has it that Hephaestus built Aphrodite a splendid palace of gold and precious stones at an idyllic spot somewhere on the island, perhaps in Akamas.

Conifers and evergreens prevail on the highest points of the peninsula, whilst on the lower-lying lands and at sea level Mediterranean ecosystems are dominant: "phrygana", i.e., brushwood (thorny burnet, thyme, cistus, agave, etc.), garrigue, i.e., shrubs (*callicotome villosas* or spiny broom, *Pistacia*

lentiscus or lentisk, etc.) and maquis, i.e., scrub vegetation (Phoenician juniper, wild olive, carob, lentisk, quercus coccifera, Mediterranean hawthorn, Greek strawberry tree, etc.). The rarity of endemic plants, the great variety of orchids, the diversity of maquis and the clusters of Calabrian pine (*pinus brutia*) make the Akamas forest a unique and rare biotope of great ecological and scientific value.

The peninsula features a wide variety of geomorphological characteristics, such as plateaus, small planes and ravines, narrow deep valleys, caves, gorges, sandy and rocky beaches, sea grottos and little islands.

The area's great diversity of ecosystems attracts many different bird groups, which visit it during their migration or breed there. A total of 77 bird species has been recorded in Akamas. The following are among the significant endemic species:

Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraateus fasciatus*)

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

European Roller (*Coracias garrulous*)

Cyprus warbler (*Sylvia melanothorax*)

(European) Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)

Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*)

Cretzschmar's Bunting (*Emberiza caesia*)

Until 1990, the area was also home to the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*).

The Department of Forests, in cooperation with the Cyprus Tourism Organization, has created in the Akamas forest five (5) nature trails totalling approximately 25 kilometres. The idea behind their creation was to acquaint the public with the flora, the fauna and, in general, the environment of the area. Moreover, in "Smigies" there is a picnic site with a capacity of 600 persons.

It should be noted that the five nature trails are part of the extension of the E4 Long-Distance European Trail which begins in Gibraltar, goes through eight European countries, ends up in Crete and from there extends to our island. All five trails of the Akamas peninsula are circular. Two begin at the Baths of Aphrodite, two at the Smigies picnic area and one at the Kathikas village. The two trails starting at the Baths are called Aphrodite and Adonis are Category 2 and 3, respectively, because of the many uphill and downhill changes in gradient. However, they feature points that offer unique vistas towards Polis Chrysochous, the Paphos forest and Akamas. Both have a length of 7.5 kilometres and are part of the Aphrodite Cultural Route, which connects places and portable finds across Cyprus.

Many bushes and flowers are associated with Kyprida Aphrodite, such as her favourite rose! According to the legend, when her beloved Adonis was killed by the wild boar, Aphrodite shed as many tears as the drops of blood that fell from Adonis's body. From his blood sprang blood-red anemones (*anemone coronaria*) and from the goddess's tears sprang white roses (*rosa canina*). Rose petals are rich in vitamin C and are steeped to make a tea, mainly in the Middle East and China. In the past, their pulp was used in poultices to treat wounds, since they have anti-bacterial properties. The ethereal oil from roses is considered aphrodisiac and is used in massages and aromatherapy. Rose oil contains 300 different chemical components. According to traditional Indian medicine, rose perfume and rose tea are potent brain stimulants.

Cyprus has always played a central role in perfumery and ethereal oils from Cypriot flowers have permeated the industry worldwide.

The French call their 6<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary "*noce de Chypre*" (*noce* = wedding). This has to do with the "perfume" of Cyprus. They have also named many of the other wedding anniversaries after flowers.

Cypriot perfumes have always been famous, a fact which was recently corroborated by Italian archeologist Maria Rosaria Belgiorno during the excavations at Pyrgos. Findings include an alembic ("*lambikos*") and traces of scent in a glass jar dating back to 2000 BC. The laboratory analysis showed that the scent contained essential oils from 7 aromatic plants. Well-known

perfume houses use the so-called “*Chypre*” or “*cypre*” as the basis of their perfumes. “*Chypre*” is a combination of oils from various aromatic plants, mainly oak moss, as the main ingredient, as well as cistus, bergamot, rose, etc.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that *Guerlain* used Cypriot herbs to create its “*Chypre*” perfume in 1850.

Later, in 1880, *Eugene Rimmel* produced its own “*Chypre*”, known as the perfume created for Catherine the Great of Russia.

Over the years, several Parisian perfume houses used scents from Cypriot herbs as the basis for their perfumes. It is not by chance that François Coty, while in Cyprus on holiday in 1917, was inspired and gave the name “*Chypre Coty*” to a series of perfumes which caused quite a sensation at the time.

More recent examples include:

For women: *Mitsouko (Guerlain)*, *Dolce Vita (Dior)*, etc.

For men: *Davidoff (Davidoff)*, etc

In Cyprus, *Mystiko* (meaning, secret) was created by expert herbalist Yiannoula Lazarou, using as basis the ancient perfume which was found during the Pyrgos excavations.

Leonardo Da Vinci, too, who visited Cyprus around 1500, wrote about the fragrances of the island: “from the south coast of Cilicia one can see the beautiful island of Cyprus, land of goddess Aphrodite , and many a navigator enchanted by its beauty wrecked their ships and broke their masts amid reefs beaten by the waves. The beauty of the rolling hills tempts wandering seamen to refresh themselves with the sweet fragrances borne by winds curbed by the island...”

Finally, Homer sang of Aphrodite’s visit to her temple, “... where she has her fragrant altar. She went towards the splendid gates where the Graces bathed and then anointed her with the heavenly oils she brought with her, sweet-smelling as petals upon the bodies of immortal gods”.