

# EUROPEAN DESTINATIONS OF EXCELLENCE

Tourism and Local  
Gastronomy

Pitsilia

EDEN Cyprus







# The EDEN VII Project

The project is a continuation of the European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) initiative, launched in 2006 by the Tourism Unit of DG Enterprise at the European Commission. Since 2014, the project has been part of COSME, the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

The overall objective of the project is “to draw attention to the value, diversity and shared characteristics of European tourist destinations and to promote destinations where the economic growth objective is pursued in such a way as to ensure the social, cultural and environmental sustainability of tourism”. To this end, the National Tourism Organisations of EU member states and candidate countries select a “destination of excellence” in their country.

This year’s theme is “Tourism and Local Gastronomy”. The destination selected through an open competition will be publicised by the European Commission and the participating countries, thereby promoting the diversity, uniqueness and quality of European tourist destinations.

The Cyprus Tourism Organisation was chosen by the European Commission to manage the 2014 EDEN VII Project in Cyprus and to hold the competition to select the “destination of excellence” on the theme of “Tourism and Local Gastronomy” in Cyprus. The winning “destination of excellence” for Tourism and Local Gastronomy was the Pitsilia region, a diverse and very attractive area regarding the manufacture of a broad range of local agricultural products as well as processed goods revealing the expertise and tradition of its residents.





# Cyprus

It is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, which links Europe with Asia and Africa.

Since antiquity, its strategic geographical location has been a significant factor in its turbulent history.

Inhabited in prehistoric times, it was subsequently conquered and/or ruled by, among others, the Greeks, the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Romans, the Franks, the Venetians, the Ottomans and the British, all of whom have left visible signs of their presence on the island.

In order to describe the diverse character of the country, it is worth taking a brief look at its history in terms of the various names given to Cyprus in historical documents over the centuries:

- Aspelia by Xenagoras (possibly a mistranscription of 'ambelia' meaning vineyards) and Pliny, since Cyprus was famed for his wines and grapes.
- Asselia because of its widespread fishing activity.
- Dasoessa since, in ancient times, Cyprus was one of the greenest areas of the Mediterranean, planted with forests ('dasos' means forest in Greek).
- Evelaios / Evoinos / Evodis by Strabo and other writers. These names refer to its excellent olive oil and abundance of olive trees (Evelaios) and its choice wines (Evoinos).
- Tharsis by Syncellus. The name is also found in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 10:5: "Beaten silver will come from Tharsis").
- Kyoforos Many historians believe that it comes from the adjective meaning 'fertile', a reference to the land of Cyprus.
- Chalcoessa because of the many seams of copper (in Greek "Chalcos") on the island.

From the above, it is easy to understand that the main characteristics of the island are minerals and ores, geomorphological features, a particular gastronomy, forests, cultivated land, scents, beauty and Byzantine culture. These, in short, are what Cyprus is made of.





# Life-giving Pitsilia

The pretty Pitsilia region, the most gastronomically varied mountainous region of Cyprus, includes villages on both the north and south sides of the Troodos mountain range, whose highest peaks are Madari (1,612 metres above sea level) and Papoutsia (1,154 metres). The villages of Pitsilia still retain their traditional architecture to a great extent, which bears witness to their long and rich history. Some are built on steep mountainsides among vineyards while others are spread out along cultivated green valleys.

The four main villages of the Pitsilia region are Agros, Palechori, Pelendri and Kyperounda, while the others complete the multi-faceted puzzle that makes up this part of Cyprus and which some have called 'an earthly paradise'. The natural environment is abundant,

its hillsides planted with vines, nut and fruit trees: almond, hazelnut, walnut, apple, pear, cherry, etc. It is an enchanting landscape for visitors, thanks to the constantly alternating vineyards, orchards and pine forests.

The region is especially well-known for its traditional products such as fragrant rose water, gammon, sausages, soujoukos (made from grape must), lountza (smoked pork loin), many and varied spoon sweets and jams, liqueurs and types of bread. An important place in its gastronomic wealth is held by the renowned Commandaria wine and the authentic Cypriot spirit, Zivania.



Pitsilia is a significant point of reference for the continued promotion and manufacture of traditional products since many family workshops continue to operate in the region.

A starting point for calculating gastronomic value is the region's multifarious agricultural production. In northern Pitsilia is the unique hazelnut forest, in Agros the damask rose is cultivated, with which superb gastronomic dishes are created, at Pelendri and Dymes one finds countless apple and pear orchards, while Kyperounda is home to the highest (in altitude) vineyards in Europe. The landscape is completed by scattered vineyards of indigenous varieties, while a large section of southern Pitsilia falls within the Commandaria villages area in which the xynisteri and mavro grape varieties are cultivated to make the best-known Cypriot wine.



Four Byzantine churches in the Pitsilia region are included on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage list, containing impressive icons and iconostases crafted in materials from the Troodos area. Furthermore, there are countless museums in the region (folk art, natural history, historical struggle – the role of the region in Cyprus' National Liberation Struggle has been judged as crucial – many restaurants serving local cuisine, and superb wineries which are investing in their wines and vineyards, reviving the land that has generously offered its produce over the centuries. There is a plethora of attractive nature trails, wonderful village squares, narrow cobbled streets, of gardens lovingly cared for by their owners and shaded with vines, containing traditional ovens in which they bake their own delicious bread.

The changing landscape, the variety of colours depending on the season, the Byzantine churches and chapels, as well as the warm hospitality of the residents, combine to make Pitsilia one of the most attractive regions in Cyprus.



# The pretty villages of Pitsilia

## *Agros: Land of the wild roses*

At an altitude of 1,100 metres above sea level stands Agros, one of the main villages of Pitsilia. It is a real hive of development activity, which respects its true character and invests in it. Agros is a very worthwhile destination for visitors looking for a variety of entertainment and service options, since it is home to a plethora of restaurants, coffee shops, bars, hotels and alternative accommodation. Nature study trails, farms open to the public and traditional workshops complete an already full schedule for anyone staying in the village, which is fragrant with the scent of wild and damask roses which thrive in the area as nowhere else. Every year for 10 days in May, Agros is home to the Rose Festival.

### Tip:

*Legend has it that anyone who drinks from the Kaoura spring in the square at Agros will never leave! If you're not ready to move house just yet, perhaps you should resist the temptation of its cool water! But don't leave without buying some traditional Pitsilia deli products such as hiromeri (gammon), lountza (smoked pork loin), tsamarella (cured goat's meat, posirti (bacon) as well as rose water and traditional spoon sweets. Ask to try the rose sweet or the medlar jam. They are not to be missed.*





## *Alona: The beautiful daughter of Pitsilia, Mother of Zivania*

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Alona lies between the mountain peaks of Madari and Papoutsia at an altitude of 1,100 metres above sea level. As you walk along its narrow cobbled streets, the first thing you'll notice is the natural shade provided by vines, which recall a time when there was a thriving viticulture in the village. Its picturesque corners, the narrow, traditional cobbled streets and stone-built houses made with materials from Troodos, are unique examples of folk architecture and a photographer's dream. A short walk along Alona's lanes is enough to make you realise why the great Cypriot painter and engraver Telemachos Kanthos, who was born in Alona, was inspired by the richness of its nature and immortalised it in some marvellous works of art.

The nature trails that pass through the wonderful Pitsilia hazelnut forest (part of the Natura 2000 network) are also noteworthy. Every August, the village hosts the well-known Alona Festival, one of the oldest in Cyprus, the main objective of which is to promote tradition and cultural heritage.

Don't forget Alona's Zivania production. Every year in November-December, the traditional cauldrons are busy as groups of friends get together for all-night distillation sessions which have all the characteristics of rituals with their secrets and initiations. The November Zivania production reaches its peak with the annual Zivania Festival which attracts thousands of visitors. If you don't care much for Zivania, you can always try the hazelnut liqueur. You'll be impressed.






## *Dymes: An apple orchard walk a day keeps the doctor away!*

Dymes takes its name from the ancient city of Dyme in Achaia, homeland of Cepheus. Today, the village is one of the biggest growers of delicious Cypriot apples and most of the residents are occupied with traditional orchards from which they supply the island's markets. Dymes is at its best in spring when the apple trees are in bloom and provide a wonderful sight thanks to the different colours of the apple blossom and the surrounding lush greenery.

The nature trail is definitely worth taking, as it joins the village with neighbouring Pelendri, passing through pines, apple orchards and bushes while, if you are lucky in November and December and it's sunny, you'll come across red and white wild mushrooms. Ask a villager to accompany you if you've not picked them before as they are difficult to differentiate from the non-edible variety.

## *Tip:*

*Don't leave the village without some delicious traditional deli items and apples. You'll be missing out on something special.*





Some 25km from Limassol is Zoopigi. The earth itself bears the scent of the grape sugars since, for hundreds of years, grapes capable of giving us one of the most ancient wines in the world have been grown there. Next to the village is a forest containing picnic sites where you can enjoy the land that gave us the sweet wine of Cyprus (Nama) which, during the time of the Crusades, had its name changed to Commandaria.

The steep mountain slopes of the area, which is traversed by the tributaries of the Yermasoyia and Limnatis (Xylourikos) rivers, the narrow, deep valleys and the steep hillsides are home to ancient vineyards of the local xynisteri and mavro grape varieties, and provide a unique sensory experience of sight and smell.

The history of this notable wine unfolds at the attractive museum dedicated to Commandaria, grape cultivation and its production from ancient times to the present day.



## *Kyperounda: The highest vineyards in Europe and the place with the cleanest air*

It is a picturesque, pretty village that stretches out beneath the Madari ridge at an altitude of 1,100-1,400 metres above sea level. Kyperounda is famed for its cool, humidity-free climate and, for this reason, is considered an ideal destination for anyone suffering from respiratory problems.

Kyperounda is a lush green orchard full of fruit trees as well as all kinds of vegetables and fruit. Visitors may enjoy a coffee and some delicious apple pie in any of the quaint coffee shops in the square as well as Pitsilia wine and Zivania, dried nuts and tasty cured meats.

The village is also famous for having the highest-altitude vineyards in Europe, a fact that is exploited by the eponymous winery which invests in the cultivation of authentic varieties following in-depth study and research into the soil and microclimate of the area.

### *Tip:*

*Every October, the village holds the Apple Festival which attracts thousands of visitors from all over Cyprus and from abroad. During the well-established days of the Festival, visitors may try everything that is made by the villagers, including milouze (the apple version of grape-based palouze) apple juice, apple cakes, apple liqueur and apple pie, apple zivania and much more. Last year, they made superb cocktails with apple juice and local wines.*



## *Palechori: Bearing the weight of centuries of history*

Palechori is rich in history, since it is the birthplace of three of the best-known heroes of the EOKA liberation struggle. Moreover, there are noteworthy churches in the village with wonderful murals, some of which date from the 15th and 16th centuries. It is also worth paying a visit to the medieval Olive Press of St Luke and the chapel of Agii Anargyri for its folk art wall paintings. The village is planted with vineyards of various wine varieties, as well as apple, pear, quince, peach, olive, almond and walnut trees. Visitors to the village have a chance to try the tasty Pitsilia smoked gammon and sausages which are well-known throughout the island. Moreover, Palechori is famed for the strawberries that are grown in the area.



### *Tip:*

*Take some time to relax in the plane-tree-shaded village square. Order a local coffee and a spoon sweet. Priceless!*

## *Pelendri: The village of teamwork and volunteerism*

Pelendri is one of the biggest villages in the Limassol district and one of the main ones in the Pitsilia region. It stands on a mountainside at an altitude of 800 metres above sea level.

Among the many things that the Pelendri villagers are proud of is the Church of the Holy Cross, which dates back to the 11th century and is included on the UNESCO World Heritage list, mainly because of the wall paintings that cover its interior, which are exquisite examples of Byzantine and post-Byzantine monumental art. Also of particular

value and interest are two Venetian bridges of unique architecture while the presence of traditional olive and flour mills is also noteworthy. The land is planted with peach, apple, pear, plum, almond and olive trees, which thrive thanks to high levels of rainfall.

The village provides agrotourism accommodation, unique tavernas and restaurants, coffee shops and bars, open in winter and summer.

### *Tip:*

*Pay a visit to the winery which is located just outside Pelendri and try Zivania aged in oak barrels. After 10 years, it becomes red in colour and its flavour smoother. In the village you will also find traditional Pitsilia cured meats: hiomeri (gammon), lountza (smoked pork loin), tsamarella (cured goat's meat), posirti (bacon) and zalatina (brawn). Meanwhile, everyone knows the taverna that serves wild mushrooms, wild spinach and terebinth all the year round. Find it!*





## *Lagoudera: The village of hares!*

The name Lagoudera comes from the many hares ('lagos' in Greek) that were once to be found in the area. The lush vegetation on the Madari slopes, combined with the many springs and the lay of the land, all favour the growth of the hare population.

It could be described as a village capable of hosting painters and poets since its luxuriant nature, especially in spring, resembles a divine painting created by a very happy God.

It lies on the fringes of the Madari mountain slopes and on the banks of the Elia river. The road to the village, which starts with the panoramic view of the Xyliatos Dam, passes through a pine forest that covers the deep ravine once formed by the river.

The village, on the west bank of the Elia, starts from the river bed and ascends to the Monastery of the Virgin Mary (Panagia tou Araka) which is about 800 years old and is on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Adjacent to the church is a gigantic oak tree which is believed to have been there since the time the Monastery was built.

## *Saranti: The 40 ('saranta' in Greek) masons who built the Monastery of the Virgin Mary (Panagia tou Araka)*

It is a very picturesque village in the Adelphi Forest. Walking is a real pleasure here since the wild landscape combines with the luxuriant vegetation to create a picture that will take your breath away.

### *Tip:*

*When the hazelnuts are ripe, the trees bend with their weight and between the springs of Fountoukia and Pyrkou there are whole woods of them. A wonderful sight!*



## *Polystypos: A place where you can talk with God*

A breathtakingly beautiful landscape, nature that is both harsh and generous to people, a nature that speaks more clearly than people... Here, nature and man become one; here you may rediscover the mystical bonds with life and talk more easily with God.

The name Polystypos means 'many vines' and in the past, the village and the surrounding area were full of vineyards, which decreased in number during the 18th century (Ottoman era) because they were abandoned as unviable following the imposition of a special tax on wine production.

### *Tip:*

Visit the Mother Earth Festival where, among other things, you will be able to try anything that is made from hazelnuts, while the vibrant Youth Centre holds many events and happenings with performances of world music and cocktails made with local ingredients. There's even a 'bar-dentist'... check it out!





## Livadia:

### *Below Madari mountain peak*

Livadia is a tiny village in the Pitsilia region, built at an altitude of 1,000 metres above sea level beneath Madari, which is the second highest peak in Cyprus after Mount Olympus. It stands in a rough mountain area, surrounded on all sides by steep slopes and wild vegetation such as pine, laudanum and golden oak. It is well-known for the unique drinking water cistern in the middle of the village, one of very few still in operation. The wild mountainous landscape, divided by the Peristerona and Elia rivers, has led to the gradual reduction in the number of village residents.





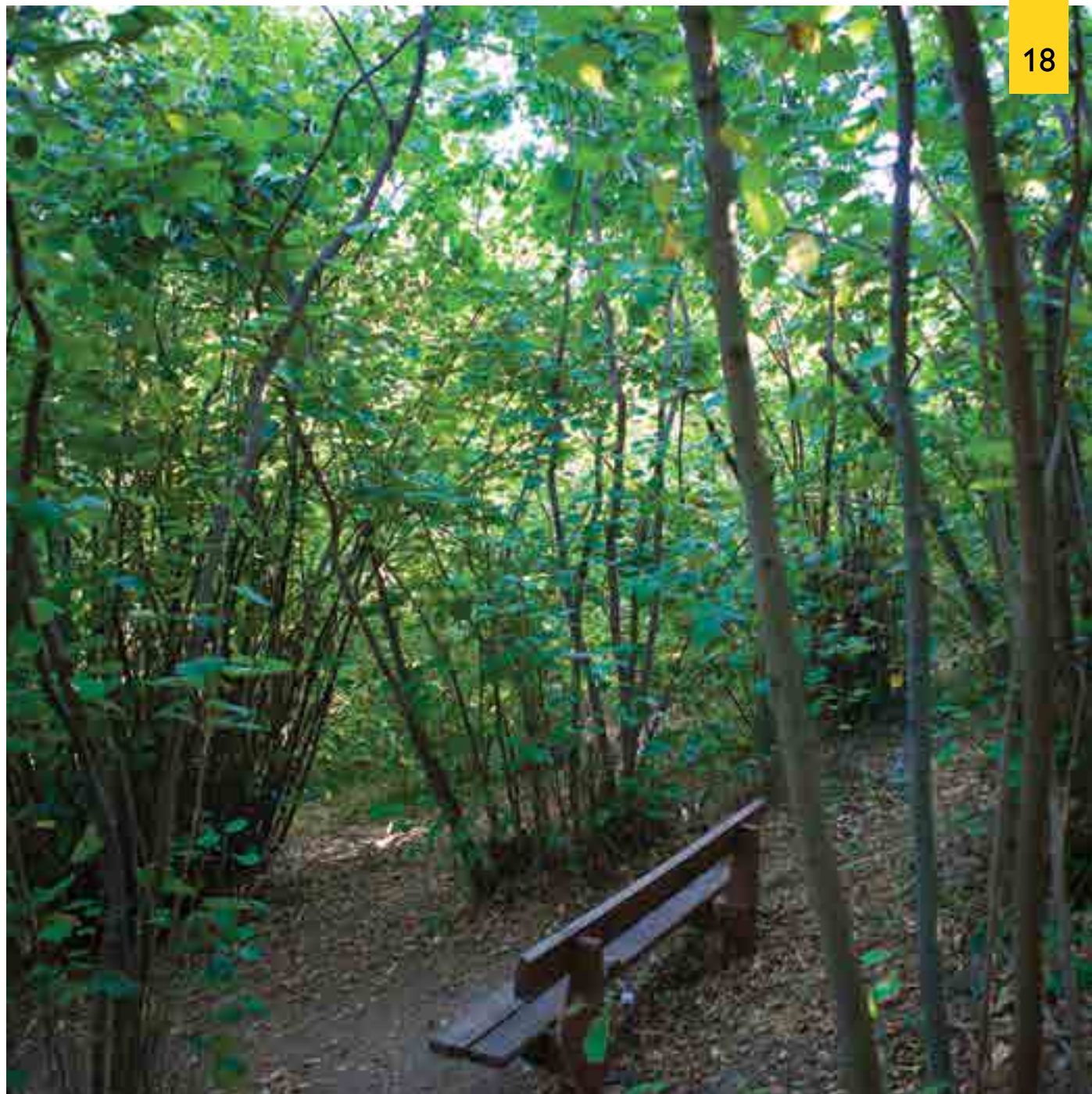
## *Platanistasa: Living proof of the island's Hellenic identity*

Platanistasa stands at an altitude of 940 metres above sea level. The area in which the village was built is rough and mountainous with narrow valleys and steep slopes that reach 1,000 metres above sea level. Words found in Homer remain in daily use in the local dialect of the village as living proof of the island's Hellenic identity.

There are plenty of good reasons for visiting the village: the healthy, dry climate; the wonderful natural environment; the Byzantine Church of the Holy Cross of Ayiasmati which is on UNESCO's World Heritage list; its architecturally important olive and water mills; the unique cobbled square with its pretty vines; the hazelnut forest trail; the narrow lanes with blooming flower pots on the steps and balconies and the Archangel Michael churchyard with its 2,000 basil plants.

### *Tip:*

*Enjoy a coffee in the unique green square in the middle of the village and gaze at the panoramic view of the protected valley of the hazelnut forest that stretches forth below.*





## *Askas: Preserving traditional architecture in all its glory!*

Like every village, Askas has its special features but in this case they are particularly strong and lend it a unique picturesque character. Apart from new buildings, the houses are traditionally built of exclusively local materials: the stone, the earth and the pine wood are all from the surrounding mountains. The tiled roofs have all been made and baked locally.

With its present name, the village is not included in Louis de Mas Latrie's list of Lusignan-Venetian feudal and royal estates. However, the settlement named Asta on Venetian maps is most probably today's Askas.

There is agrotourism accommodation in this pretty village where you can enjoy the wonderful landscape and real moments of relaxation.





## *Fterikoudi: Columns of gabbro and other secrets!*

It is said that the village takes its name either from the Greek word for fern ('fteri') or because it stands on the very edge of the mountainside and resembles a feather ('ftero') in the wind. Fterikoudi was built shortly after 1570 when neighbouring Kalamithasa was destroyed. Indeed, it is mentioned by the French historian Louis de Mas Latrie as one of the royal estates of the Lusignan-Venetian era. Tradition has it that Fterikoudi was founded by the residents of Kalamithasa who survived its destruction by the Ottomans. Today, the area where Kalamithasa stood is the location of the chapel and the tomb of the miracle-working Prophet-Saint Habbakuk. It is worth noting that recent archaeological excavations in the area have brought to light an ancient altar and a tomb entrance that probably belong to the Mycenaean period.

Worth noting: The village is directly linked to the history of copper mining in Cyprus and traces of an ancient gallery have been discovered. At the same time, columns of gabbro have been found, a style that dates from the Mycenaean period, in the form of an ancient altar. Take a closer look at the history of the village and see the remarkable evidence, which combines religious symbols and heavenly bodies.



## *Chandria: Below the “Walls of Madari” tradition is alive and well!*

The area in which the village stands is divided by the tributaries of the Limnatis river with narrow valleys and little cultivable land, which is held in place by countless terraces. The small orchards in the valleys grow walnut, apple, pear, peach and other fruit trees while the hillsides are planted with vines and almond trees.

According to local tradition and other sources, in the Grammata area of the village there stood in Venetian times a large mansion belonging to Cardinal Marco Cornaro, nephew of Queen Caterina Cornaro. The names of other locations, such as Vasiliko, Vasilidji and Netikos indicate that the whole area was his fiefdom.

## *Agridia: Raise your hand and touch a star!*

Agridia is a small, picturesque Pitsilia village in the Limassol district. It stands in a very special location, on a hillside covered in nature's prettiest colours. It is one of the highest villages in Cyprus, at an altitude of 1,100 metres above sea level, with twisting narrow streets and traditional old houses with vines and multicoloured blooms in flower pots in their gardens. The luxuriant natural vegetation is particularly impressive (take a walk along the nature trail with the roses!), as is the “widespread use of local stone, especially diabase and gabbro” as Karouzis notes.

Don't miss this: Walk up to the beautiful and impressive location with the tall, imposing pines and cedars known as “The Rock of the Prophet Elijah” and at an altitude of 1,090 metres is a small chapel dedicated to the prophet, who is the patron saint of the village. In 2011, the village council set up a View Spot in the chapel yard from which visitors may enjoy the beautiful colours and scents of Cypriot nature and take in the view of the surrounding area as far as Akrotiri Bay, Limassol. Thanks to the uninterrupted view, it affords fabulous viewing of the night sky, giving you the impression that if you raise your hand you can touch a star.

## *Kato Amiantos: The site of a historic mine*

The village most likely takes its name from the Greek word for asbestos ('amiantos') which was mined here and was the reason why the area began to be populated by the mineworkers. Since 2005, following the abandonment of the mine area known as Pano (Upper) Amiantos, there is no longer a distinction between the two and the whole village is referred to as Amiantos.

One place definitely worth visiting is the A.G. Leventis Troodos Botanical Garden where you can see some of the rarest species of plants on the island, learn about the history of the mine through film and photographs, as well as finding out about the flora in the country and the garden.

Don't miss this: The Troodos Geopark Visitor Centre is housed in the old Primary School of the mine. Also, one of the village restaurants serves famous traditional lasagna and other traditional dishes.

## *Agios Ioannis Pitsilias: The village of saints and industrious people.*

Having the Archangel Michael as its patron saint and taking its name from St. John (Agios Ioannis) Lampadistis, the village gives off an almost holy energy. One particular characteristic is its location amid a large area planted with peach, apple and cherry trees. The picturesque houses on the hillsides appear to be built one on top of another. These traditional houses with tiled roofs, pretty yards full of pots and flowers, traditional garden hedges, vines in front of the houses and steep, narrow streets are the main characteristics of the village.

The villagers are hard-working, warm-hearted and hospitable. Their industriousness can be seen at once in the gardens, orchards and vineyards that they have managed to establish on the infertile, stony ground.

### *Tip:*

*Every summer the village organizes the excellent cultural month entitled "In the footsteps of tradition", during which seminars, lectures, wine and local food tastings, nature walks and many more events take place. It's definitely worth a visit. Good experiences. Good people.*





## Potamitissa: *Our Lady of the River*

It is reported that the village was built following the destruction of a major village called Rongia. Specifically, when Rongia was attacked by Saracens, its terrified residents sought refuge in a neighbouring area on the banks of the Ambelikos river, where today's village stands.

The name of the village is linked to the tradition concerning the building of a church on the banks of the Ambelikos river, according to which the Virgin Mary chose the place where she wished the church to stand, next to the river, which is why it was dedicated to Our Lady of the River ('Panagia Potamitissa') which gave the village its name.

### Tip:

*Agrotourism accommodation is well-organized and welcoming in the village.*



## *Agios Theodoros Pitsilias: Where centuries-old trees vigilantly stand guard!*

The ancient trees that have stood for years like vigilant guards on the land of Agios Theodoros are very special. One is a terebinth near the Church of the Virgin Mary, one is an oak known as “Koutsofta’s Oak” and the other a pine (“Koutsofta’s Pine”).

All three are protected by the Department of Forests.  
Extra Info: You will find particular references to the village in the paintings of Adamantios Diamantis who stayed there and was inspired by it.  
If you spend a short time in the churchyard with its ancient trees, you’ll understand why.



## *Kato Mylos:* *No trouble up at the mill....*

As its name suggests, the village was known for its mills. A large proportion of the surrounding area's flour production once came from this small village. Historians say that it was founded in 1692, a year that saw the spread of a deadly epidemic throughout Cyprus. At the time there were then two water mills in operation. When the epidemic broke out, the residents of the neighbouring village of Alonatzia abandoned it and some of them settled in the area of the lower ('kato') of the two mills which grew and became known as Kato Mylos.

## *Info:*

*Apart from flour, the village is well-known for its peaches, which thrive in the fertile ground. Every year it is the venue of the Peach Festival, which was the very first of the fruit festivals to be held in Cyprus (1963). Enjoy the natural beauty as you walk along the nature trail that links the village with Agros and the Rodon Hotel where it ends.*

# Pitsilia cured *meats*



The authenticity of Pitsilia's cured meats stems from the uniqueness of the local climate, which determines the special bouquet of the region's wines, and from the experience and know-how of the local producers. These two factors are also inextricably linked to the mountain climate and the region's steeply sloping landscape.

Briefly, the villagers' innate desire to be autonomous and self-sufficient led them to use materials of their own making with the main aim of creating processed products that could be preserved without refrigeration, since this was not available in earlier times. A typical example is a pig, which provided fresh meat while its tenderloin was used to make lountza, its legs were turned into gammon, bacon was made from its ribs, zalatina from the head (photo page 25) and other smaller parts went into sausages soaked in wine. The pig's stomach was blown up to be used as a ball that children would play with and its bones were boiled for soup together with various vegetables. Naturally, the climate of the region and the villagers' know-how helped in all this.

The same applies to vine cultivation and the character of the wine produced from the region's grapes. The Mediterranean environment of Cyprus helps the vines and gives particular characteristics to the resulting wine thanks to the long hot summers, mild winters and the lack of rainfall during the grapes' maturation period. In Pitsilia, however, they are also reinforced by the altitude, the steep slopes, the eroded volcanic rocks and a lack of calcium carbonate.

Today, the production of cured meats takes place in modern factories with hygiene inspections and ISO and HACCP quality systems in place. That said, despite the large number of modern factories, many villagers continue producing their own cured meat products. It is worth noting that Pitsilia cured meats are produced without any added preservatives, maintaining the traditional philosophy and wisdom of the early producers.



# Commandaria, the legendary wine of Cyprus

Commandaria may justly claim to be the world's oldest appellation contrôlée wine. It is a sweet wine that is deservedly a favourite and, having been part of Cyprus' vine and wine tradition throughout the centuries, is one of the most historical wines globally.

The story of Cyprus' renowned Commandaria begins in the early Middle Ages, specifically in 1192 when the Knights Templar bought the island from the English King Richard the Lionheart. The Knights' administrative units in Cyprus were known as Commanderies, the largest of which – the Grande Commanderie – was based at Kolossi Castle. Since ancient times, a sweet wine of exquisite quality had traditionally been produced in the area around the Grande Commanderie, and the Knights named it Vin de la Commanderie, which was eventually shortened to Commandaria. The name was chosen to differentiate it from all the others, due to its excellent quality and its geographical origin, and it has remained to the present day. Like the name, the particular method of production has also remained unchanged.

In 1990, legislation was passed, by which Commandaria is exclusively produced in the Commandaria area of 14 villages on the southern slopes of the Troodos mountains at an altitude of 350-900 metres above sea level. The vineyards producing the grapes must be in the eponymous area and be older than four years. A part of this area is in the Pitsilia region, with the village of Zoopigi at its centre, where the Commandaria Museum is housed. The geology and soil of the area, its microclimate and the uniqueness of the local varieties produce a distinctive sweet wine.

## Tip:

*Tip: A glass of Commandaria after your meal is a unique pleasure and the perfect aid to relaxation after a tiring day.*





# Zivania, the fiery multi-purpose spirit

Everyone in Cyprus owes a lot to this fiery spirit which is tightly bound up with their traditions and way of life. Zivania and Commandaria are two national products that have accompanied the Cypriots during good and bad times but Zivania is viewed as the popular alcoholic drink par excellence which labourers and farmhands have long used for pleasure as well as a medicine. Zivania is a distillate produced from the pomace of the indigenous mavro and xynisteri grape varieties. If it is produced from other grapes, the name of the variety must be stated, e.g. maratheftiko zivania, sultanina zivania, etc.

The people of Pitsilia have always been proud of their Zivania which is the uncontested best accompaniment for Pitsilia cured meats. In recognition of the special value of Zivania to the gastronomic culture of the region, since 2010 a Zivania Week of gastronomic events has been organised in the picturesque villages of Alona and Pelendri.

Well-chilled Zivania goes perfectly with the traditional cured meats of the Pitsilia region or as an accompaniment to Cypriot meze dishes. It is the alcoholic drink of choice among groups of friends; it is the spirit of enjoyment, good company and the taverna; the favourite tipple of ordinary folk and the aperitif of the intelligentsia. Zivania is the drink of all Cypriots.

## Tip:

*To this day, grandmothers in the Pitsilia region don't view Zivania simply as something to drink. It also acts as medicine for influenza, offers pain relief for toothache, is used to clean windows, as a disinfectant and even as the basis for cooking sausages.*

# Wild roses, the scent of May

The wild damask rose, with its pink petals and particularly intense, intoxicating scent, has been grown in the Agros area for a very long time. Nearchos Clerides is the man to whom the village owes its present-day link to roses. Born at the end of the 19th century, he was a distinguished figure of his time – clever, educated and far-sighted – and he realized that through the rose, the village could thrive. On his initiative, Agros gained a distillery for the production of rose water which, to this day, remains an essential ingredient of many sweets and Cypriot recipes. In addition to rose water, the villagers discovered that when rose petals were turned into spoon sweets, they relieved constipation. One lady, whose great-grandmother used to make them as a cure for constipation from 1930, continues to produce Agros rose spoon sweets using the exact same recipe. A visit to Agros will give you a chance to see authentic and pioneering uses for the rose: as an ingredient in confectionery, as a spoon sweet, in tea, as rose water, in religious ceremonies, as a natural face cleanser, in candles, cosmetics and elsewhere.

In April and May, the wild roses are at their most beautiful. They present a remarkable spectacle and an unforgettable experience for anyone participating in the activities of the local businesses and the village council or the Youth Centre. There are lots of ways in which one can participate in the Rose Festival.

Indicative of the amount of wild roses needed for the sweets and rose water is the fact that about one kilo of rose petals is enough to make a small bowl's worth. Imagine how many are required and how many there are in this fragrant village.

## Inside Info:

*If you want to pick wild roses, it needs to be done at dawn. The morning humidity of the soil helps release their scent, making the experience even more magical.*





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**Production:** *Cyprus Tourism Organisation*

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19 Lemesos Avenue  
P.O.Box 24535  
CY 1390  
Lefkosia, Cyprus

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