

Island of contrasts
(left) Aphrodite's Rock;
(above) Alexander the
Great Hotel

Open *for* business

Cyprus' natural beauty and culture, coupled with a surge in investment, make the island ideal for combining business with pleasure. By *Annie Makoff*

With its miles of sandy beaches, crystal clear waters and luxurious resorts, the island of Cyprus has traditionally been a favourite holiday destination.

According to Takis Kyprianou, founder of DMC Principal Promotions, Cyprus has often been "overlooked" by corporates wanting to avoid swarms of holiday-makers. "Cyprus was perceived purely as a holiday destination, somewhere which wasn't conducive to business," he explains. "Clients tended to opt for other destinations that were more traditional like Berlin or Amsterdam or fly to countries nearer to the UK such as Turkey or Italy."

C&I Investment

However, Koullitsa Demetriou, senior tourist officer at the Cyprus Convention Bureau, which was launched in January to develop and promote Cyprus' C&I offer, doesn't agree. She describes Cyprus as having "a great reputation" for understanding the needs of event planners.

"Cyprus is recognised as having good quality C&I products, both in terms of the facilities available and of the service," Demetriou says. "This island is known for the variety that it offers and the ease with which you can combine business with pleasure."

Thanks to Cyprus taking over the EU presidency in July, there has been a surge in refurbishments and redevelopments, including hotel upgrades and new openings such as the Sunrise Pearl Hotel and Spa, regeneration in Larnaca and Limassol, and major reconstructions among some of the most ancient cities.

"The EU presidency in Cyprus has made a huge impact on the island's investments and developments," says Demetriou. "With all the changes, the Cyprus Convention Bureau has become a central point of reference for corporates wanting to organise their conferences and incentives."

New developments

The Limassol Marina project, expected to be completed by the end of 2012, will span a 6,000m² commercial area, offering elegant boutiques and designer stores, high-end restaurants and several waterfront bars overlooking an estimated 650 yachts.

And to the west of Limassol, further along the coast, the 202-room Alexander the Great Hotel in Paphos is undergoing major refurbishments, due to be completed around March 2013. It will feature larger, spacious guest rooms, landscaped gardens and a brand new infinity pool complete with waterfalls and pressure jets.

The Nicosia International Conference Centre, the current base for the EU presidency, has also seen a total



CYPRUS

refurbishment. Featuring the 1,000-capacity Xenon Conference Hall – its largest space – with a 150-seat auditoria, more than 300 workstations, two suites of six briefing rooms and two specialist delegate suites, the centre is equipped with the latest technology and catering facilities.

However, while the EU Presidency has led to fresh investment, it may not see an immediate boost in C&I business. OM Destination Management owner Stavros Kleovoulou has noticed a drop in UK business throughout the recession, with those booking giving shorter lead times. He says: “Corporate clients have given us very short notice lately. In August I received a request for October – traditionally a good month to find rooms – but because of the EU Presidency we have lost three to four popular meeting places, and with those hotels full the overflow hotels become full too, so it is difficult to find rooms at short notice.”

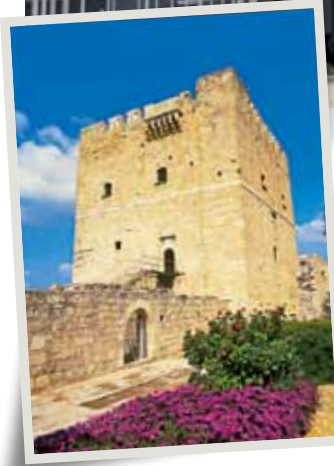
Longer-term, however, there is optimism about the impact the recent developments will have. Due to the level of investment in Cyprus and the mix of sun, natural beauty and culture, Artemis Kasapi, founder of UK-based Cyprus events agency Artkas, believes that corporates considering it won't be disappointed. There are plenty of opportunities for incentives, in addition to low VAT rates, excellent conference facilities and a good exchange rate. “Cyprus is a great place to come whatever the size of your company,” she says.

One of Principal Promotions' UK-based clients, a global IT services company, has been particularly taken with the island. “The company has been to Cyprus for three executive years for its annual sales incentives,” Kyprianou says. “There is so much to offer and we are never short of suggestions as to what the delegates can do. It has created great momentum among its teams and they are intending to return again later in the year.” ■



CTO (LEFT)

Infinite variety (left) Limassol Castle; (above) Nicosia International Conference Centre



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CASE STUDY Aspect Enterprise Solutions



Pre-event planning Aspect Enterprise Solutions, a leading software and applications business specialising in risk management and commodity trading, holds a conference in January every year to motivate its staff and plan the year ahead.

Unlike previous years, this year's three-day conference in the Four Seasons Hotel in Limassol focused on having fun and 'giving something back to the community', in addition to the business-oriented meetings and seminars that took place throughout the weekend.

Cyprus was chosen for its location: as the event was taking place in winter, it needed somewhere with a mild climate that was easy to get to from the UK.

With more than 150 delegates attending from across the UK and Europe, the venue also had to be easily accessible and big enough to accommodate attendees, two criteria that the hotel also met.



Back by popular demand
Aspect plans to return next year

FACTFILE

COMPANY	Aspect Enterprise Solutions
EVENT	Annual conference
GROUP SIZE	60 delegates
DATE	20-23 January 2012
VENUE	The Four Seasons Hotel, Limassol, Cyprus

Challenges As there was no official marketing or event planner at the company at the time, finance assistant Linda Emery took charge and organised the event.

“Coming from a finance background I was concerned how it would work but actually everything went really smoothly,” Emery explains. “We worked with CPC Events in Cyprus and they handled absolutely everything for us.”

Solution Emery worked with CPC Events to fine-tune the details. She wanted the emphasis to be on giving something back to the community in a fun and engaging way, rather than focusing entirely on business strategies.

Some 60 delegates attended the conference, seminar and break-out sessions on Friday and Sunday, taking part in team-building exercises and quizzes. During Saturday, they travelled to the Theotokos

Foundation, a charity that provides care and support for disabled children, and helped staff paint the walls of the Theotokos school.

In the evenings, delegates enjoyed dinners and music entertainment provided by the hotel.

Post-event analysis Delegates enjoyed the experience and the company is hoping to return next year. “The whole event went really well,” says Emery. “We usually have a policy not to return to the same destination twice, but we all loved it so much that we will be going back in 2013.”

Christos Christou, managing director of CPC Events, adds: “Initially the delegates were expecting just sun and beach, but the experience far exceeded their expectations. They were delighted with the five-star hotel and enjoyed everything the island had to offer.”