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Nature Trails of the Akamas

The Akamas Peninsula to the north west of Pafos is a unique area, relatively large and unspoilt, with remarkably diverse features in vegetation, wildlife, geology, beautiful landscapes and coasts, and with a rich historical and cultural heritage.

The variety of landscape and vegetation and the relatively unspoilt state of the countryside and villages make it a real delight for the walker and naturalist.

The two nature trails which are presented here are the first of a series of nature trails planned for the Akamas area in the near future.

It is hoped that the trails and the pamphlet satisfy the needs of the visitor. Any comments or suggestions for improvement are welcome and should be addressed to

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2. Cyprus Tourism Organisation
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History and Mythology

The uniqueness of the Akamas Peninsula is not only due to its natural beauty but also to its cultural background. The area bears considerable Greek history, mythology dating back to 3000 years ago, which the walker encounters with almost every step. The prevailing peace and tranquillity, interwoven with the history, tradition and legend with which the area abounds, creates a climate of ancient mysticism for the traveller.

It would be interesting to learn how the area was named “Akamas”. Is there anything behind this name? It is believed, among other versions, that the area took its name from the Greek mythological hero Akamas, son of Theseus, who came to Cyprus after the Trojan War and founded Akamantis.

The romantic localities of the area such as the famous Baths of Aphrodite and the “Pyrgos tis Rigaenas” are associated with the Goddess of Love, Aphrodite, and her lover Adonis. Although in some legends the Goddess Aphrodite and Adonis are substituted for Regina and Dhigenis (the Medieval Queen and the Byzantine hero) respectively, the legends are the same.

The Baths of Aphrodite are located between Polis and the Cape of Arnaouti offering a magnificent view over the Chrysochou bay.

The historian Hogart referred to this area as the most beautiful of the island. The sea-born Goddess of love after swimming in the crystal clear waters of the bay, used to take her bath in the cool pond surrounded by idyllic landscape and scented by wild flowers. According to legend this was the place where she met her lover Adonis for the first time. Adonis was hunting in the Akamas forest when he stopped by the magnificent spring to quench his thirst. He was startled, however, to see the nude goddess taking her bath in the crystalline water of the pond. Adonis and Aphrodite were dazzled by the beauty of each other.



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The legend also claims that everyone who drinks water from the spring of love feels younger and more loving, no matter how old. **BEWARE.** The water is not potable.

The ruins of “Pyrgos tis Rigaenas” (the shelter of the Queen) are located to the south of “Mouttis Sotiras” in a magnificent glade with a giant oak tree and a quiet spring. In accordance with the ancient legend Pyrgos was the shelter where the Goddess of Love rested after she had taken her bath.

Climate

Is the climate of the area a hospitable or harsh one? The climate being of semi-arid Mediterranean character is the most hospitable it could be. It combines a short winter with a long, dry hot summer. One can visit the area all year round. The season from October to April brings much-needed rain, and is mostly warm and sunny particularly during springtime that is considered to be the best time of the year. The mean daily temperature for January and February, the coldest months of the year, is 16°C. For July and August, the hottest months of the year, it is 31°C. One should keep in mind, however, the secluded beaches and the clear sea water where one can enjoy both sunbathing and swimming.

Flora and Fauna

Cyprus is located at the crossroads of the three major flora zones of Europe, Asia and Africa, and it is therefore not surprising that the number of plant species found on the island runs to 1.750, of which 127 are endemic. In the Akamas peninsula the number of species is approximately 530, of which 33 are endemic. Thus, the ecological and scientific value of the area is self-evident.



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Calabrian Pine Forests, Phoenician Juniper maquis, Rock Rose maquis, and mosaics of Calabrian Pine stands with maquis are the major plant communities of the area. The maquis are characteristic of the Mediterranean climate.

The variety of fauna is equally as impressive: 168 birds, 12 mammals, 20 reptiles and 16 butterfly species have been sighted in the areas.

Geology

The geology is one of the most diverse in Cyprus. Almost all the geological formations found on the island are present in the area. These are

- (1) the Troodos Ophiolite,
- (2) the Troodos sedimentary succession
- (3) the Mamonia complex, and
- (4) the serpentinite.

The wide range of geological formations along with the topography of the area results in different microclimates, the impact of which is reflected through the variety of plant communities and the large number of plant species and particularly the number of endemic species. Is there anything else we should know concerning geology? Yes, it is the strong association between serpentinite and the occurrence of endemic species. *Alyssum akamasicum* and *Centaurea veneris* are cited as examples of this association.



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Recreational Values

The need for recreation is becoming increasingly important as a result of the industrialisation of society. The Akamas area is an alternative to stressful, everyday routine. The relatively unspoilt state of the area, the diverse vegetation, wildlife, landscape, geology, and the rich historical and cultural heritage combine to give the area the right atmosphere for mental and physical relaxation.

Note: In the area of Polis there are hotels and a camping site for those wishing to stay for a few days.

Nature trails – General information

The famous Baths of Aphrodite is the start and end point for both trails. The two trails also have a common part (Baths of Aphrodite to Pyrgos tis Rigaenas) which is approximately 2.5 km long. The total length of each trail is approximately 7.5 km and the walk time varies from 2 to 4 hours.

The two trails are self-guided. The numbered wooden signs you notice along the trails refer to points of interest which are explained below.

In addition to the points of interest you could challenge yourself to identifying any tree or shrub found along the trails, either included as a point of interest or not, simply by using the attached keys.