



VILLAGE PEOPLE

In the heart of the Troodos Mountains, Maria Pieri discovers the real Cyprus and a traditional way of life – and comes close to a rude awakening

Stepping into the shadows, we were gestured by our guide to enter one of the traditional houses in the Cypriot village of Kakopetria, in the heart of the Troodos Mountains. The doors were invitingly open and the cool dark interior promised a respite from the heat. As we noseyed our way round the room, a door to our left was slightly ajar. There rested the owner of this heavy stone and wooden home we were rudely intruding upon. Retreating quickly, we did our best not to wake him.

As legend would have it, Kakopetria, meaning 'bad stone', was named after a big rock crashed down from the mountain, killing a young couple during their wedding ceremony. If this is the

worst that fate has thrown at this village, then so be it, as it's prospered well despite its name.

We were exploring Old Kakopetria — built to the west of the Solea Valley and surrounded by thick forest between the banks of two rivers — and discovering its hidden shops, local inns and church, while trying to navigate using the random street signs.

Beautifully inviting, the village consists largely of traditional wood and stone houses with quaint balconies among narrow cobbled streets, usually with a seated local making their wares or gearing up for a chat.

We were stopped several times as we ambled through the narrow cobbled streets, to buy the traditional *glyko* — translated as a sweet, but also referring to fruit in syrup and anything from walnuts to watermelon peel and cherries — that the world-weary and aged grandmothers were making in the

Above: A shop owner relaxes in Kakopetria

streets beside their homes. Sparking up conversation, we were obliged to provide a sympathetic ear to their woes and walk away with at least two or three jars to appease them.

The old village isn't easy to negotiate, but overlooking all of this is one of its most picturesque attractions. The Mill Hotel and Mylos Restaurant, easy to spot, is imposingly set into the mountain above. Dating from the middle of the 17th century, the building was originally owned by the church, but eventually fell into disrepair in the 1950s.

Today it has been fully restored with a much-lauded Greek restaurant and a 13-room hotel, sensitively complementing the mill's original design with dark woods and heavy, deep patterned rugs. It makes the most of the thick stone walls, keeping the heat at bay.

Rural Cyprus is still very much undiscovered by visitors to the island and this village, and many others like it, offer a richer and more culturally rewarding experience. Agrotourism (promoting trips in working agricultural villages, where people can join in the activity) and even wine tours are available in the region, as are haloumi cheese-making and Greek cooking lessons. There are beautiful frescoed churches to discover nearby, among them Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis and Panagia tis Podithou. But all those activities would have to wait for another day.

For us, like many of the locals who own summer properties here (35 miles southwest of the capital Nicosia), we were making the most of an escape from the stiflingly hot sun. Kakopetria is easily reached on a self-drive itinerary and makes a great weekend escape, allowing you to explore the greener side of the island. We were just in time for lunch, and at least this time we'd been invited.

■ **How to do it:** Sunvil Holidays offers four-nights' B&B at the Linos Inn in Kakopetria from £536 per person, departing in September. The price includes return flights from Gatwick and car hire. www.sunvil.co.uk >>

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