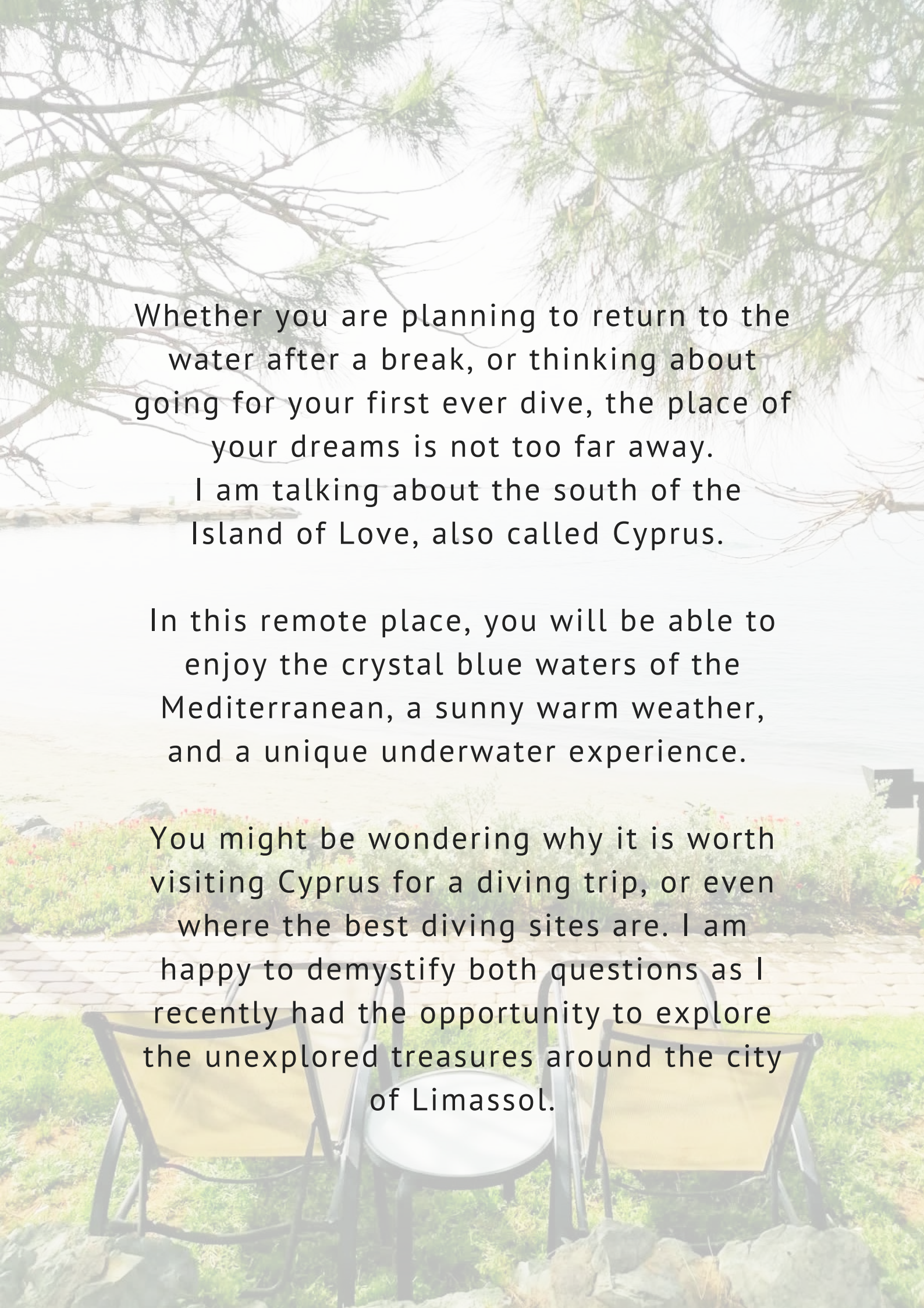


A HIDDEN TREASURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

LIMASSOL - 2021





Whether you are planning to return to the water after a break, or thinking about going for your first ever dive, the place of your dreams is not too far away.

I am talking about the south of the Island of Love, also called Cyprus.

In this remote place, you will be able to enjoy the crystal blue waters of the Mediterranean, a sunny warm weather, and a unique underwater experience.

You might be wondering why it is worth visiting Cyprus for a diving trip, or even where the best diving sites are. I am happy to demystify both questions as I recently had the opportunity to explore the unexplored treasures around the city of Limassol.

Limassol

WRITTEN BY JOSÉ AMARAL

To give a little bit of context, Limassol is located between the southern cities of Pafos and Larnaca, and it is considered a little-known hidden gem in the Mediterranean. From beginner snorkelers to professional scuba and free divers, everyone is welcome and exciting spots are waiting to be discovered. This city not only meets all needs and tastes but it is also one of the cheapest places in the world to do a single dive or get a diving certificate.

Limassol tickles the fancy of those who want a diving experience on a budget. For just 50 euros you could get a local shore dive in various dive centers. As for an introductory course, it offers the best value for diving in the region and you will get a first-class underwater adventure full of vibrant sea life.

However, it is not only the low-budget dives and inclusivity for all diver levels that makes Limassol so attractive. The Mediterranean Sea is very well-recognized for its clear waters, abundant marine life, and beautiful underwater landscapes. There are tons of selling points, which is why the area is becoming increasingly attractive to divers from all over the world. At the moment though, it still has the charm of an unknown spot.





Its proximity to all the exciting diving sites in the country makes Limassol the ideal location as you could roughly reach all the top diving spots in just half an hour by car. You have endless options to choose from. Another extremely attractive part of the diving scene in the area is the shiny light effects that illuminate the marine life and the whole ecosystem in a very special way.

Limassol is surrounded by artificial reefs with sunken wrecks and old vessels; all the conditions are aligned to create a diverse and unique ecosystem. It will not take much longer until the city becomes a hot diving destination worldwide. It has immense potential and the fact that not many people know about it makes it even more raw and pure.

The Department of Fisheries and Marine Research in Limassol is currently working to create, maintain and preserve the protected areas, where fishing is prohibited, and to build a sustainable habitat with the perfect conditions for marine life to thrive. There are currently seven marine reserves in the Limassol area, and luckily, I had the opportunity to explore two of them. These were the radiant Amathous and Dasoudi artificial reefs, which have breakwaters running along their shores to keep the sea serene and intact.

These artificial reefs are built to have the same characteristics as natural reefs and to be able to provide a safe space for underwater creatures to feel at home. The number of marine protected areas is notably increasing and with that goes the recovery and conservation of our biodiversity in the coastal waters of Limassol.



Amathous artificial reef is covered by architectural remains that are embraced by many forms of fauna and flora. The reef is located above a sunken wreck and colored by a dense *Posidonia*: it feels like swimming in a unique underwater forest. In the Dasoudi artificial reef, these flowering plants were also massively covering the wave breaker areas. In this protected site, old vessels are a refuge to diverse biodiversity, making it the perfect shelter for passenger turtles to nest.



I believe the only type of traffic one could handle without burning out due to stress is the one you find while diving. In Limassol, it can get super busy all year round. As long-term residents, you could find groupers, barracudas, sea bass, trumpet fish, sargos, damselfish, and octopuses. You will very likely cross paths with these folks along the coast from Zenobia to Pafos. During summer months, turtles usually start getting familiar with humans and both can swim together in harmony. Even though marine life might not sound extremely exotic at first glance, I promise you will not get bored. The whole diving scene is already extremely exotic by itself.

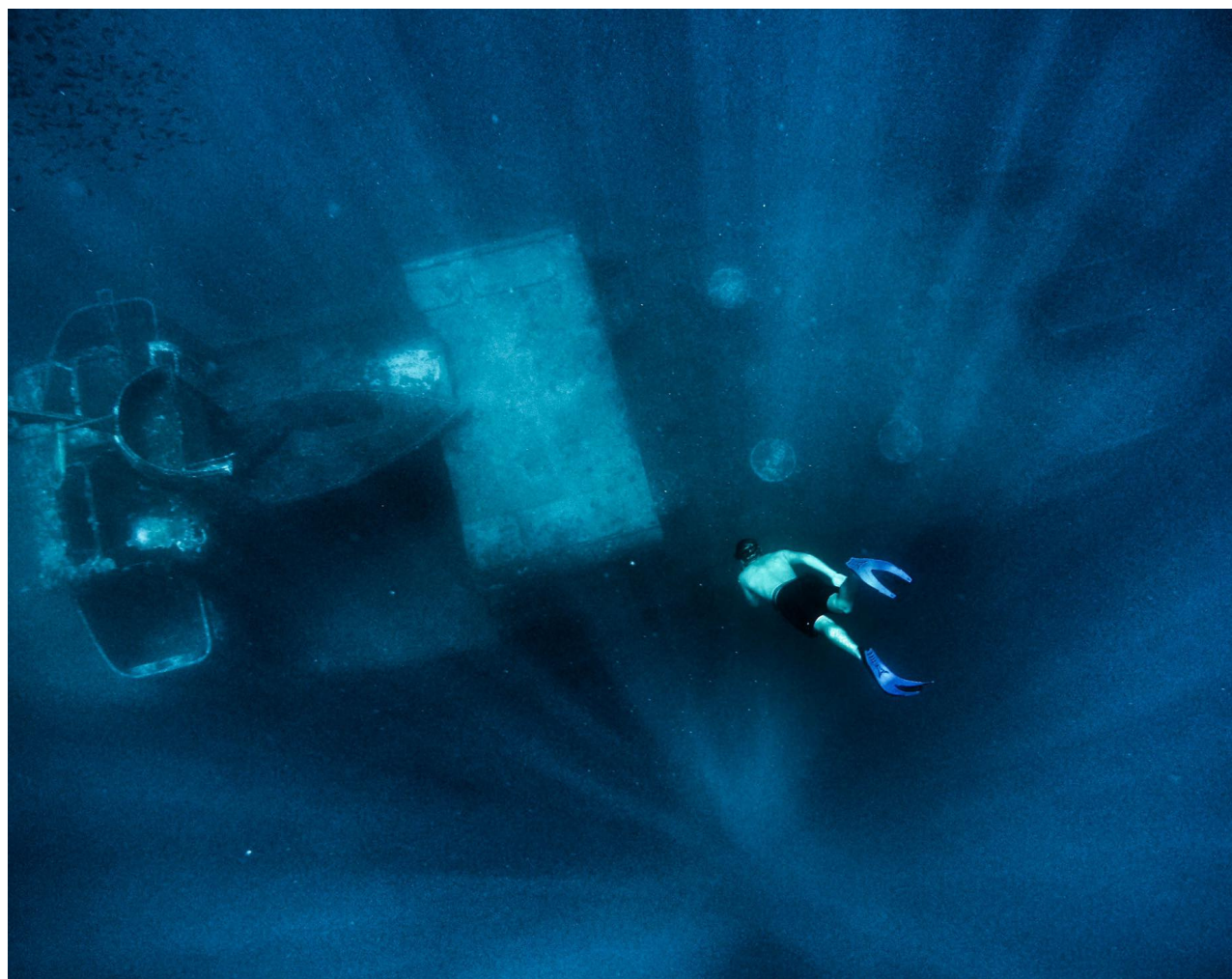


If we go in the direction of Larnaca, the third biggest city in Cyprus, we will find the Zenobia wreck, also known as the Zen. This is one of the world's largest wrecks that was ever explored. It makes us feel that we are insignificant but part of something bigger. In this parallel universe with 178 meters long and 28 meters wide, Zenobia is a shelter for octopus, congers, lionfish, tuna, turtles, anemones, among several other species. It is also expected to be investigated by experienced divers only, as it sits 43 meters deep.

You could also find precious wonders in the other southern corner of the island. If you are looking for an unusual experience, Amphorae Cave might be a good option. A labyrinth of caves that makes you feel you are in a Little Mermaid fairy-tale for its singularity and the abundance of colorful tropical fish within. Close to the famous rock of Aphrodite, you can take your advanced diving experience to a whole different level if you explore the Jubilee Shoals.

In Episkopi Bay, the Jubilee Shoals dive site is one of the most famous attractions for divers. There is a mystical atmosphere around this place as it is a protected ecosystem with a leaning underwater cliff and deep caves that plunge as far as 60 meters. Small rock formations and the remains of the Canberra B2 military aircraft can also be found in this site. Among the several resident species, you will meet moray eels, groupers, damselfish, and crayfish.

There is an extensive coastline for divers to explore. Between the city's old port and the largest lake in Cyprus, the Limassol Salt Lake, you could find the M.V. Habe Wreck and Farsa ii Wreck around the Lady's Mile Beach. Neighboring this, in the southernmost point of Cyprus, you will be amused by Akrotiri Bay. Here you will find fascinating dive spots and wrecks that are totally worth a visit. The Fish Reserve dive spot is a good option to start if you do not feel very confident but want to have a first diving experience. One thing is certain, you will not run out of excitement anywhere around Limassol.



Personally, I feel there is something special about the Constandis wreck. This fishing vessel goes down to 24 meters and was originally built in 1989 by the USSR. It took me less than 7 minutes to reach the site in a speedboat from the Dasoudi beach. The remains of the wreck are home to a dense diversity of maritime life. From barracudas, groupers, sea horses, and moray eels, to greenhead turtles and bizarre sea slugs. If you are in the right place at the right time, you might also find yourself swimming with monk seals.

The majesty and grandiosity of this wreck are impressive: I felt like I was visiting a busy underwater town. Not very far away, separated by a large reef, there is also the Lady Thetis wreck, also part of the Artificial reef project to serve as a recreational dive site. This wreck is ideal for divers of all levels with its passenger coastal vessel immersed to a depth of 18 meters. These two are dives that should not be missed.


And there is even more still! The water temperature and sea conditions make Limassol a fantastic destination and captivating for all dive levels. In the winter, you can be reassured of an average water temperature of 17 degrees Celsius, while in the summer it can go up to 28 degrees, making an annual average of around 22 degrees. Strong sea currents are rare; the fact that the currents are steadily mild all-year-round also contributes to making the area accessible for everyone.

From March to November, you will get flat seas and clear visibility. The diving season in Cyprus is one of the longest in the Mediterranean. Location-wise, if you have booked a short trip, I would suggest you prioritize the Constandis and Lady Thetis wreck, as well as the Zenobia wreck and The Jubilee Shoals. In case you find yourself with some dead time, just start exploring the Dasoudi area and all the magnificent reefs around that are increasingly bringing back life to these crystal waters.

The seascapes in the south of Cyprus reveal their shiniest colors when reflected by the sun, and the marine architecture you can find will make you want to stay there for an eternity. The monumental wrecks and their turquoise waters can speak by themselves. There are also numerous underwater channels that make this area truly unique for divers, who can even find helicopters, cars, and canons full of subtropical wildlife.

Several different reasons are slowly attracting divers to the Island of Love. From its crystal blue waters, quiet seas, calm currents, and excellent visibility to its unrevealed ancient and architectural beauty, all these factors put Limassol in the red cross of the treasure hunting map. What makes this place even more special is the fact that barely anyone is talking about it. And its genuine and pure soul has endless stories to tell.



An underwater photograph showing a shipwreck covered in coral and algae. Two divers are visible in the background, exploring the structure. The water is clear blue, and many small fish are swimming around.

*...this precious
Mediterranean
gem will have
plenty to say in
the future.*

THE AUTHOR:



José Amaral is a Deepblu writer and business developer from Portugal. He is always looking for the next adventure and he is thrilled to be part of projects that connects people with the same love for diving and traveling.