



WE MOVED TO...
CORFU'S
NORTH-EAST
WORDS ZOE DARE HALL

It began with a holiday romance in a Greek mountain village nearly 30 years ago. Now, the once-smitten teenager has returned as an adult hoping to spread a little love around Corfu's business community

PHOTO © MARCUS GONDOLO-GORDON

FORGET FOAM PARTIES, cocktails served by the fish bowl and whatever other images – perhaps even fond memories – you have of Corfu. Emma Wood's experience of the Greek island was always going to be a different one.

In 1982, when Emma was 16, she left her genteel corner of Kent to elope to Corfu having fallen in love with a local farmer who looked like Tom Selleck. "Of course I thought that island life was all about nights out, beauty spots and touring the island on the back of a Vespa to catch romantic sunsets," says Emma, now 43, "until I realised the man in my life was a brilliant chef in the summer, but an agricultural worker in winter, when he would return to his mountain village of Strinilas to tend to his father's sheep."

Love with the moustachioed one overcame the trials of living in a remote Greek village. Emma befriended her husband's uncle, a monk at Mount Pantokrator Monastery, and he taught her Greek as well as giving her a run-down building in the village square on a peppercorn lease, on the basis that she would restore and run it as a business that would support the local economy. "My parents were horrified when the trust funds they had given me were converted into drachmas and spent on turning a ruin into an organic Greek taverna where the locals provided the produce," says Emma.

"Life was difficult – I had two young sons and no washing machine, so I had to walk 2km to the nearest well with the washing board and tub loaded onto the donkey. But I loved the challenges."

It was an experience that formed her love of Corfu. After the marriage ended six years later, Emma returned to the UK with her sons, Anthony, now 25, and David, 22, and ran a childcare business. "But we couldn't get Corfu out of our system," she says.

So three years ago, Emma, her new husband James and a gaggle of offspring spanning three generations and 10 family members moved back to Barbati on the north-east coast.

Besides running estate agency The Corfu Property Shop (Savills International's affiliate agent on the island) with James, Emma has also launched a venture called The Corfu Club (www.thecorfuclub.com), which encourages business networking and socialising with regular events, and has made Emma a pillar of the local community. "It's not about damaging the authenticity of the island, but about promoting all the good and diverse enterprises here, to create jobs, provide training, encourage investment and enhance life here for everyone.

"Corfu was recently rated the second-most desirable holiday home destination in the world, after Barbados, and it's a stunningly beautiful island. But business-wise it has lost its way," says Emma.

"The island hasn't seen the investment and improvements it needs since mass tourism started here. Take the local idea of customer service – that if you keep smiling, you can get away with the toilet not flushing or not having a Visa machine for customers to pay the bill with. The island needs to embrace change and speed up," she says.

RACHEL TABER encountered challenges such as local planning laws when she opened Medusa – Art, Craft and Meze. However, she was encouraged by interest from the community and by the support of The Corfu Club, of which she is a member. "The spirit of the venture is to support and encourage local producers of Corfiot art and craft," says Rachel, who set up the business after hearing holidaymakers complain they couldn't source authentic Greek products to take home. She also plans to promote the local cuisine and hold language lessons for holidaymakers.

It's said that no man is an island. But with Emma Wood onboard, one woman is doing a very good job at giving one of Greece's best-loved islands a business-focused kick into the 21st century.

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CORFU
SCHEDULE
CHILL TIME
 WORDS ZOE DARE HALL

Grab the kids and check out these fun-filled beaches and activity parks around the island

TODDLERS

Be a Beach Baby

Glyfada Beach on the west coast, half an hour's drive from the airport, is possibly the best beach in Corfu and the most family friendly, with clean, golden sand, no traffic, and a backdrop of beautiful cliffs. There are also plenty of snack bars and shops nearby. St Stefanos, on the north-east coast, and Sidari, in the north-west, also have great, clean beaches that are safe for kids with shallow, gentle waters and good facilities.

Aqualand

Things can get pretty sticky on Corfu in summer, so cool off at the island's largest water park, Aqualand, on the main road to Glyfada. There's 75,000m² of slides, tubes, twistlers and oversized pools and Jacuzzis, plus family rafting and kayaking. *Adults €17 before 3pm or €12 after; 5-11 years €11 before 3pm or €8 after; under four years free.* Agios Ioannis, tel: +30 661 058 351 www.aqualand-corfu.com

TWEENS (8-12 YEARS)

Kassiopi

This attractive ancient fishing town makes a colourful day out on the north-east coast and should keep the whole family content. Its pretty horseshoe-shaped harbour is a great place to watch fishermen and there is a safe beach for younger kids, plus great tavernas and lively bars to while away evenings.

Trailriders Horse Trekking

Based in the village of Ano Korakiana in northern Corfu, in the foothills of the



Pantokrator Mountains, English horse lover Sally-Ann Lewis organises horseback treks all-year round through olive groves and woodland for anyone aged over six years old. Tel: +30 266 302 3090. www.trailriderscorfu.com

Gouvia Marina

It's one of the biggest marinas in the Med and the only privately owned one in Greece. Gaze at the odd visiting super-yacht and watch the sea plane from Paxos taking off and landing next to the jetty. There's a lovely swimming pool open to the public, plus shops, cafés and restaurants overlooking the marina, 6km from Corfu Town. tel: +30 26610 91900. www.medmarinas.com

Grotto Boat Tour

Take a small boat from Paleokastritsa Beach around the small caves and grottos that pepper the rocky coastline, including Blue Eye, a cave with piercingly blue water.

The half-hour trip costs €9 per person. *Corfu Private Tours, tel: +30 228 602 8115, www.corfuprivatetours.com*

TEENS

Mountain Bike Corfu

If you've got excess energy to burn, why not explore the old olive groves, donkey tracks and of course some killer hills by mountain bike. Rent your bikes from the shop in Dassia and take off yourself, or go on guided rides across the island, starting with an "easy" 30km coast-to-coast route. *The Corfu Mountain Bike Shop, Dassia, tel: +30 266 109 3344, www.mountainbikecorfu.gr*

Corfu Ski Club

We're not talking about the winter kind – this is the water-based variety. If you love the sea but find swimming a bit tame, come here. At the Corfu Ski Club, on Dassia Beach, you can go jet-skiing, paragliding, wakeboarding or waterskiing, or you can try

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something called a “flying fish” (a type of pontoon towed behind a boat).
 Tel: +30 694 285 2188,
 www.aqua-striders.com.

Be a Captain for a Day

Hire a boat and explore the uninhabited islands of Diaplo and Gravia off north-west Corfu or the unspoilt coastline from Sidari to Paleokastritsa. Boats are available from San Stefanos Harbour or Arillas Beach and cost from €40 for a half day or €70 for a new speed boat. Hourly rental is also available.
 San Stefano Travel, tel: +30 266 305 1910,
 www.san-stefano.gr

Explore a Ghost Village

Discover the abandoned Byzantine village of Old Perithia, in the hills off the main road between Acharavi and Kassiopi. Old Perithia was once home to 1,500 people. Now just six live there, among the silent squares and empty houses – although there is a taverna if you need lunch. Prepare to be spooked.

★ **THREE HOT PROPERTIES IN CORFU**



★ **UNDER €150,000**

This one-bedroom cottage in Spartilas, a classic Corfiot village above Barbarti at the beginning of the sought-after north-east coast, has incredible sea views stretching to the south of the island, to the coast of Albania and across to Paxos on a cloudless day. The house has a fitted kitchen, a lounge with a log burner, an en suite shower room and a triple-tier terrace with built-in barbecue and a herb bed. It's on sale for €125,000 through The Corfu Property Shop.
 Tel: +30 26630 91338,
 www.thecorfupropertyshop.com
 Savills, tel: +44 (0)207 016 3740



★ **UNDER €300,000**

Set in a tiny hamlet of half a dozen houses near the village of Kato Perithia, the charming Pythos Cottage is a four-bedroom stone house that includes a large open-plan lounge with a kitchen and dining room. There is a verandah overlooking the surrounding Corfiot countryside towards the north coast and an additional section of land that offers enough space to install a decent-sized swimming pool. All this is available for €295,000 through The Corfu Property Shop.
 Tel: +30 26630 91338,
 www.thecorfupropertyshop.com
 Savills, tel: +44 (0)207 016 3740



★ **ABOVE €300,000**

The Old School House, in the hills above the seaside village of Nissaki, has been beautifully restored and features a kitchen with a large fireplace, a stone floor, three bedrooms and an attic. This top-floor attic room is flooded with light and is currently used as an art studio. The property enjoys expansive views along the north-east coastline and across to the Greek mainland and boasts three outdoor seating areas, and a self-contained guest apartment beneath the house with a large bedroom. Available for €490,000 through Aylesford International. Tel: +44 (0)20 7349 5100, www.aylesford.com

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