



Third-generation Kastellorizian-Australian Nicholas Pappas is among those who've contributed to the Aussie flavour of the Greek island of Kastellorizo.

Hailing from the rock

Nicholas Pappas is perhaps best known as the chairman of South Sydney Rabbitohs, although he also heads several other boards, including the Powerhouse Museum's board.

But he is only one of many prominent Australians of Kastellorizian descent. Think television personality John Mangos; fruit and veg giant Nick Moraitis (also owner of Melbourne Cup winner Might and Power); former Labor Party senator Nick Bolkus; governor of Western Australia Ken Michael; former human rights commissioner Chris Sidoti; fashion designer Alex Perry; chef Jonathan Barthelmess; rugby league star Braith Anasta; Pinctada Hotels & Resorts managing director Marilynne Paspaley (also of the pearling empire and previously a successful actress); and actors George Spartels (once of *Play School* fame) and Thaa Penghlis (*Days of Our Lives*).



Fishing is still an important part of the islanders' lives.



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World War I and then a part of Mussolini's empire in the inter-war years. It was finally returned to Greece after World War II, but only after the bulk of its 12,000-strong population had fled in the wake of German bombardments and a devastating fire.

But where did the Kastellorizians go? Many of them journeyed to Australia, to places such as Perth and Darwin, some as early as 1880 (they were one of the earliest Greek communities to emigrate to Australia), and then to east coast cities such as Sydney and Townsville. Some headed to New York and Birmingham in the USA, while another cluster settled in Brazil.

When union with Greece was declared, barely 600 souls were there to see it; that population diminished to a meagre 300 by 1970 and now sits at around 400.

And yet, as the island's lot faded, the fortunes of its expatriate community blossomed.

In Australia, a first generation of hard-working shopkeepers translated to a second generation of successful entrepreneurs, politicians and community leaders. For such a small community, it has produced a disproportionate number of Greek-Australian success stories. Family names such as Paspaley, Kailis and Manettas resonate in Australian commerce, just like the names Bolkus, Photios, Georges and Michael are well known in the political sphere.

Some have attributed the islanders' success to an

in-built mercantile quality that centuries of ancestral trading have instilled. Others say that it is more a case of good fortune because most Kastellorizians preceded other Greek migration to Australia by some decades and were able, along with compatriots from islands such as Kythira and Ithaca, to integrate far earlier into the host community.

Whatever the reason, their success cannot be doubted. And in recent times, more and more Australian-Kastellorizians are reconnecting with the island and rediscovering their long-abandoned ancestral homes.

The result is an island now in a renaissance of sorts, suspended as it is between the desires of a permanent island community eager to create a sustainable, year-long micro-economy, and those of expatriates longing to nestle in the summer

months in lavishly renovated homes, momentarily transplanting their Australian lives to the island of their forefathers. The two groups intersect for an all-too-brief

three-month fiesta of noise and revelry between June and August, when Australian slang is heard as commonly on the narrow quay as the Greek language itself.

Of course, this all occurs against a backdrop of unmistakable beauty. Bright, multicoloured homes line a waterfront as idyllic as St Tropez, and restaurants and bars do a lively trade. The clarity of the azure water remains an endless source of fascination for visitors, and the grotto has long been favourably compared to its more famous counterpart in Capri. There are no beaches, but who needs a beach in this island paradise?

But, for this writer at least, it is in the less obvious laneways, in the forgotten churches, in the island's deserted schoolyards and in the forlorn cemetery that the real secrets of Kastellorizo emerge.

For here we find remnants of another more prosperous time, when the island was a bustling hub for this corner of the Ottoman Empire and any product could find a ready market in its quayside bazaars. This, for me, is where the real Kastellorizo is to be found – away from prostrate sunbathers,

booming music and noisy evening revellers. For it is in these dark recesses that the island's evocative past still waits to be rediscovered by those eager to seek it out.