in person

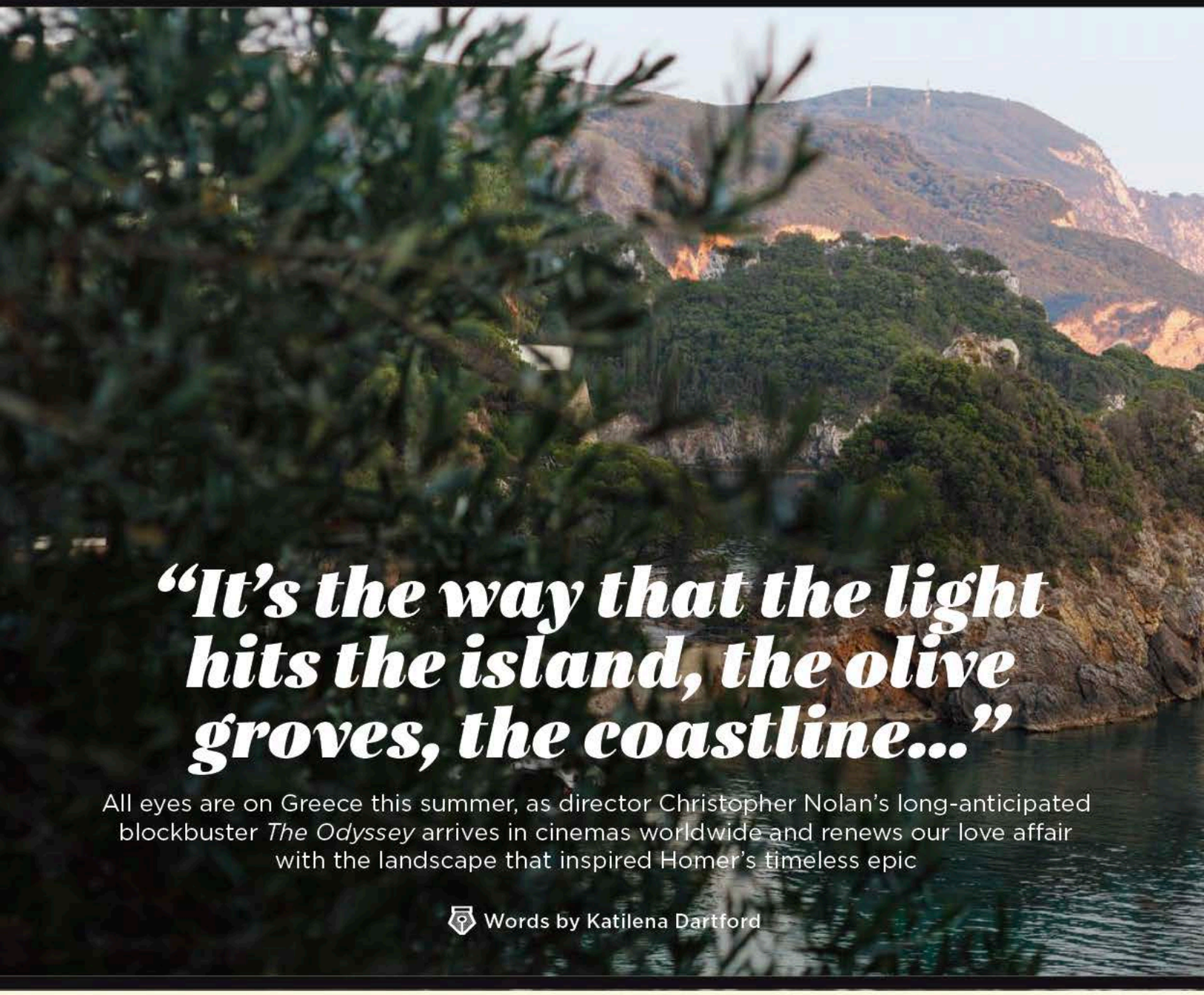


PHOTO: CAPG

An epic adventure in Corfu **p22**

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Making your own perfume near Nice **p33**



"It's the way that the light hits the island, the olive groves, the coastline..."

All eyes are on Greece this summer, as director Christopher Nolan's long-anticipated blockbuster *The Odyssey* arrives in cinemas worldwide and renews our love affair with the landscape that inspired Homer's timeless epic

Words by Katilena Dartford

This summer, a cast starring Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Tom Holland and Charlize Theron lends an extra layer of glitz to a country already long celebrated for its clear waters, remote fishing villages and sunbaked shores. But long before Christopher Nolan's cameras began rolling in southern Greece, one island in the country's northwest had already captured the imagination of an ancient Greek poet – as long ago as the 8th century BC.

Book 5 of Homer's *The Odyssey* – the major epic of Greek literature that Nolan has adapted for cinema screens – introduces the mythical Scheria, associated with the real-world island of Corfu. Shipwrecked and exhausted, and on the last stop of his 10-year journey home after the Trojan War, Odysseus washes up on a beach and falls asleep beneath a pile of leaves. The next morning he's discovered by Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, who gives him food, clothing and safe passage to her father's palace.

The Phaeacians were the greatest sailors in the ancient world, their ships steered by thought alone. The ship without a helm has been Corfu's



Above The mythical Scheria in *The Odyssey* has been widely identified as modern-day Corfu
Below Location scout Carolina Samoili

civic emblem ever since. It is in one of these magical vessels that Odysseus is finally carried home, to Ithaca.

Paleokastritsa, on Corfu's wild northwest coast, is the bay most associated with *The Odyssey*. Standing on its shore, with the glittering Ionian Sea stretching out towards Italy, it's easy to feel the pull of the myth. It comes to life fully each August, when the bay hosts the Varkarola – a festival of illuminated boats reenacting the shipwreck on the water, with fireworks and music.



Carolina Samoili knows this mythical quality well. A location manager at Coasts Productions, she has spent years scouting spots on the island for international film productions. It was Corfu's capacity to feel both ancient and alive that made it a good fit for *The Return*, the 2024 film in which Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche also retell the homecoming of Odysseus.

"*The Return* was my first big movie," she says. She cannot reveal exactly where they filmed –

PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK



Here The rolling green hills of the island of Corfu have lured everyone from Odysseus to James Bond over the years

LIGHTS, CAMERA, CORFU

The Greek island has long drawn filmmakers thanks to its versatile landscapes and crew-friendly infrastructure

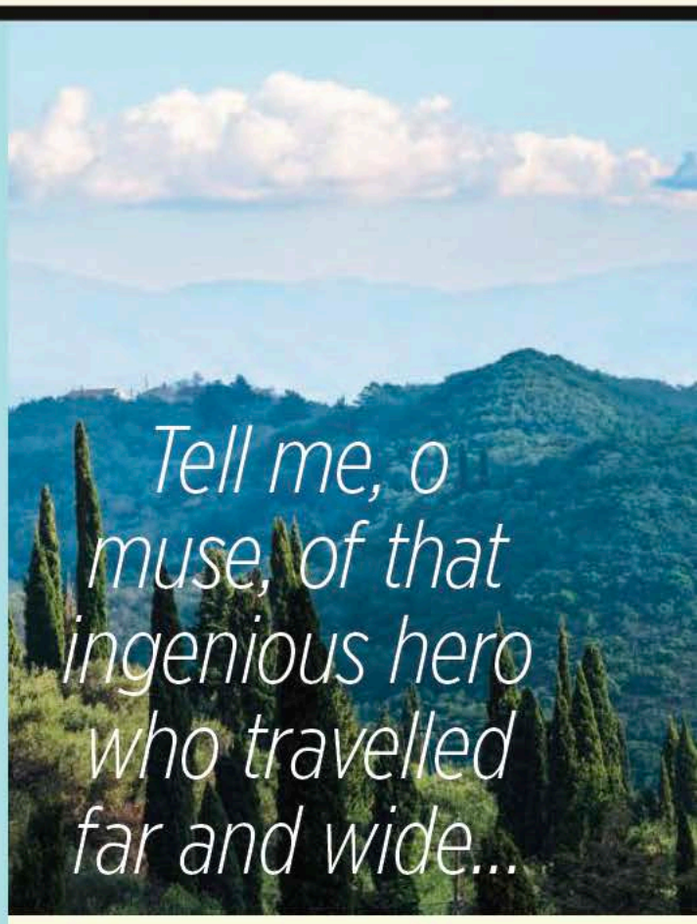
For Your Eyes Only *(1981)* The Vlacherna Monastery features in this James Bond film while the Old Fortress, Issos Beach and Kalami Bay all stand in for Spain and Albania.

The Durrells *(2016–2019)* Based on Gerald Durrell's memoirs of his eccentric family's life in northern Corfu in the 1930s, this British TV series remains the biggest driver of screen tourism that Corfu has ever seen.

The Return *(2024)* Ralph Fiennes as Odysseus and Juliette Binoche as Penelope, with Corfu's wild interior doing the heavy lifting.

Kapodistrias *(2025)* Greek director Yannis Smaragdis filmed across Corfu for this epic about Ioannis Kapodistrias, Greece's first governor, who was born on the island in 1776. Over 130,000 tickets sold in four days, making it the fifth highest-grossing Greek film of all time.

Marble Hall Murders *(filming 2025-2026)* Lesley Manville and Tim McMullan return as characters Susan Ryeland and Atticus Pünd for the third and final chapter of Anthony Horowitz's *Magpie Murders* trilogy, and the first to be set on Corfu.



that would "give away the secrets" – but the crew worked deep in the island's interior, in secluded places reachable only on foot. "We were in the inland areas. It's wilder because it's steep and raw, places that it's very difficult to arrive by car. More rural and ancient."

Finding such places requires patience and local roots. "We go around and ask the people in the villages," she explains. "In the beginning, we read the whole script, and then we start imagining all the paths, all the ways that the movie can evolve."

Being from the island is a big help. "When you're local, they trust you. They bring you into their homes."

Having also worked on TV series *Marble Hall Murders*, Carolina has a theory about why Corfu is a cult favourite filming location.

"Corfu is always chosen because it reminds us a lot of Italy too, for landscapes and architecture," she points out. "Here, there are green forests, olive groves, coastlines, the old city, a lot of fortresses. We have all this input from Venetian people and from the English."

The existing infrastructure helps, too. "We have a lot of departments like location, construction or casting," Carolina adds. "So it's easier from other places to shoot here, like other islands or smaller islands."

It also creates a tourist trade, which Carolina sees as a positive consequence.

"It keeps some places timeless," she says. "Nobody touches them."

Carolina is both Corfiot and Italian and spent 12 years living in Italy, before something intangible brought her back. "It's the way that the light hits the island, and the olive groves, and the coastline, and the clean waters," she says dreamily. The Greeks called it *nostos*: the homecoming, and the sense of longing that drives the whole of Homer's epic poem.

"It calls you home." She pauses. "Like Odysseus returning. It gives you that same emotion."

Wizz Air flies to Corfu

PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK