

Lefkosia (South Nicosia)

Λευκωσία Lefkoşa



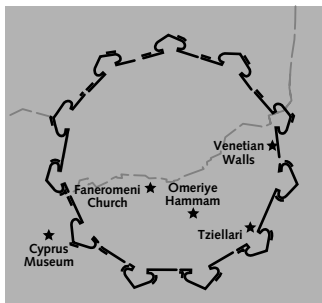
If you get tired of the coast's lazy, beach-bum lifestyle, and even if you don't, make sure you spend some time in the country's capital, known officially (and to Greek speakers) as Lefkosia. The city been labelled with the beaten cliché of 'the last divided capital', a reality that, although still present, is slowly changing thanks to 24-hour checkpoint crossing into its northern half. Clichés aside, Lefkosia (population 213,500) is an attractive, enticing city and the country's cultural heart; it's ideal for experiencing what modern Cyprus is all about. There are great restaurants here, from dark taverns with dancing families and bouzouki players beside metres of meze, to ultramodern, fashionable joints, where young Cypriots twitch to the sounds of electronic music. The country's best museum is here, with its extensive archaeological collection. The long, glitzy stretch of Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III (Makarios Ave) is a consumer's heaven, with chain, designer and local shops displaying goods not for the thrifty-hearted. The Old City with its curious shape that's been likened to a snowflake or a hand grenade is a labyrinth of narrow streets, teeming during the day and ghostly at night. It hides churches, mosques and beautiful, often dilapidated colonial houses.

Lefkosia's high summer temperatures are both a curse and a blessing. It can be painful to traipse along melting pavements at high noon, along with mad dogs and Englishmen, but the heat rescues Lefkosia from the hordes of tourists holidaying on the rest of the island.

The city is split almost evenly between the Turkish-occupied North and the Republican South. The modern parts of (Greek) Lefkosia look like the made up, face-lifted sister of the crackly skinned, traditional (Turkish) North Nicosia, whose streets are full of crafts and faces you may think belong to three centuries ago. Lefkosia/North Nicosia as a whole reflects the story of Cyprus: its two people, divided, hoping for a future that may bring a better solution. With crossing to and fro made easier, in Lefkosia things are already looking up. And what better place to start preparing for the future than in the capital?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the fantastically preserved **Venetian walls** (p61) that surround the Old City
- Delve into the country's ancient past at the **Cyprus Museum** (p63)
- Pamper yourself at the luxurious (yet affordable) **Omeriye Hammam** (p65)
- Check out **Faneromeni Church** (p64) and its peaceful square, which was once the centre of city activity
- Dine on meze at **Tziellari** (p70) and dance to bouzouki music



HISTORY

Established in the middle of the wide Mesaoria plain on the Pedieos River for defence purposes, Lefkosia has always been the country's capital. The city was originally known as Ledra, the name kept by one of its major streets, and grew extensively during the Byzantine period. The Venetians, who briefly held Lefkosia from 1489, built the stone defensive walls around the city. But these did little to keep the Ottomans out in 1570. Life in Lefkosia under the Ottomans saw little growth, and only when the British took control in 1878 did the city begin to spread beyond its walls.

Violence inspired by the Ethniki Organosi tou Kypriakou Agona (EOKA; National Organisation for the Cypriot Struggle) against the British in the 1950s and then the Turkish Cypriots in the '60s saw considerable carnage on the streets of Lefkosia. Intercommunal disturbances between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in 1963 brought a de facto partition of the city. The so-called 'Green Line' came into being at this time when the British military defined the Greek and Turkish areas using a green pen on a military map. The name has stuck to this day. The Turkish invasion of 1974 finally divided the city and it has remained so ever since, chaperoned by the watchful but increasingly weary eyes of UN peacekeeping forces. In 2003, crossing the Green Line was made easier, and

now numerous Turkish Cypriots from the northern side of the city come to work in the southern side of the capital. Many protests take place in Lefkosia for the abolishment of the Green Line and the buffer zone, but so far to no avail.

ORIENTATION

The most interesting part of the city for visitors is the Old City, inside the 16th-century Venetian walls. Reduced in height and dissected by wide thoroughfares, the walls are hardly visible in places. The town centre is Plateia Eleftherias on the southwestern edge of the walls. Fireworks are held here on New Year's Eve. The UN crossover point (the Ledra Palace Hotel crossing) is at the far west, and Famagusta Gate is near the Caraffa Bastion to the east. At the base of the walls there are car parks and municipal gardens. See p174 for orientation tips on that half of the city.

The New City sprawls outwards south of the Venetian walls, and its main artery is the modern Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III (Makarios Ave) where dozens of cafés, bars, restaurants and shops attract Lefkosians.

Maps

The Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO; p61) has a fairly reasonable map of Lefkosia city centre and, on the reverse side, greater Lefkosia. This is available free from all CTO

LEFKOSIA IN...

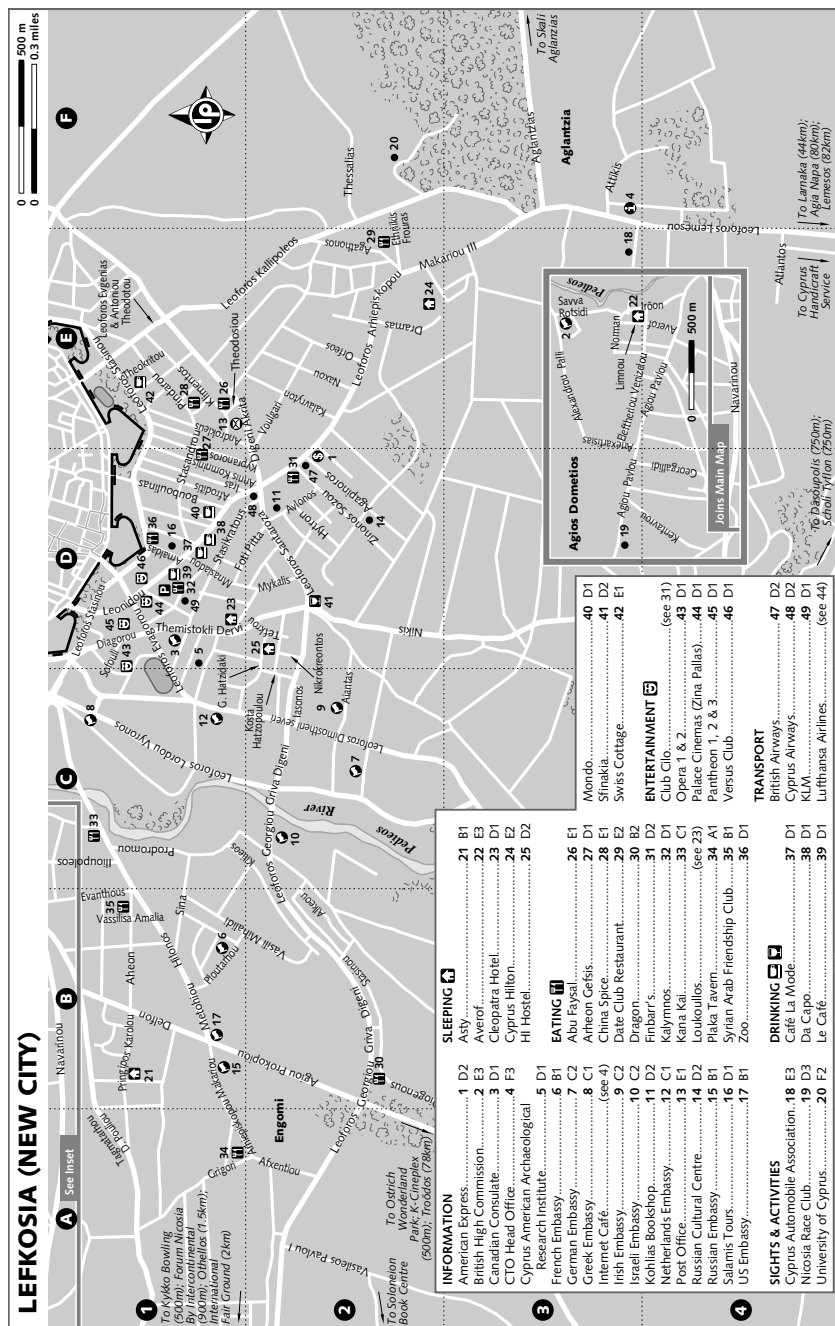
Two Days

Start your day walking along the **Venetian walls** (p61), the city's guardians for centuries. Go to **Famagusta Gate** (p62), where concerts and other events are often held. Visit **Faneromeni Church** (p64), and have a fresh juice at the **Double Six Coffee Bar** (p71). Check out the views of the city from the **Ledra Museum-Observatory** (p64) and see the Green Line. Visit the **Cyprus Museum** (p63), where the oldest artefact dates back to 8000 BC. Dine to *rembetika* music at **Tziellari** (p70), and have some drinks at **Hammam** (p72).

On day two, visit the extravagant **House of Hatzigeorgakis Kornosios** (p65) and the **Archbishop's Palace** (p65) fronted by the looming statue of Archbishop Makarios III. In the afternoon, have a luxurious Turkish bath in the **Omeriye Hammam** (p65). Dine at the **Syrian Arab Friendship Club** (p71) and check out the bars on the trendy Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III (Makarios Ave).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then on your third day visit **North Nicosia** (Lefkoşa; p172) for the day. On the fourth day visit the **Lefkosia Arts Centre & Library** (p66) and then relax in the leafy **municipal gardens** (p68). Dine on brilliant pizza at **Da Paolo** (p70) and drink at **Plato's** (p73), a place reminiscent of a Parisian bistro.



offices. The *Street & Tourist Map of Nicosia* has much better coverage of the outer suburbs and also has a street index. This map is available from most bookshops or stationery shops in Lefkosia.

Some bookshops stock a street directory of sorts, but it is poorly produced and of little practical value. Public street-map displays of the 'You Are Here' kind are found around central Lefkosia.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

There are only a few bookshops in Lefkosia that may be of interest to foreign visitors. Foreign-language newspapers and magazines can be found at either of the Periptero Hellas or Miltis & Evgenis kiosks on the west side of Plateia Eleftherias.

Kohlis Bookshop (Map p58; ☎ 2246 1766; fax 2244 6258; Avlonos 9) Specialises in art books and Cypriot publications.

MAM (Map p60; ☎ 2275 3536; mam@mam.cy.net; Leoforos Konstantinou Paleologou 19) A leading academic bookstore that is worth seeking out.

Moufflon Bookshop (Map p60; ☎ 2266 5155; bookshop@moufflon.com.cy; Sofouli 1) This shop deals primarily in English-language titles (new and secondhand) and stocks a wide range of Lonely Planet guides. It has a good section of books on Cyprus both in English and Greek.

Soloneion Book Centre (☎ 2266 6799; Vyzantiou 24, Strovolos) A little south of the New City, it might also serve your needs.

Cultural Centres

A number of cultural centres offer a wide range of periodicals and books for reference:

British Council (Map p60; ☎ 2266 5152; Leoforos Mousiou 3)

Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (Map p58; ☎ 2267 0832; Andrea Dimitriou 11)

Russian Cultural Centre (Map p58; ☎ 2276 1607; Alasias 16)

Emergency

The general emergency numbers for police and ambulance are ☎ 199 or ☎ 112.

Police station (Map p60; ☎ 2247 7434) Located in the Old City, at the northern end of Ledra, by the barrier.

Internet Access

Internet Café (Map p58; ☎ 2233 9936; Leoforos Lemesou 17a; per hr CY£1; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Fri, 2pm-2am Sat & Sun) In the New City; somewhat inconveniently situated near the CTO.

Nicosia Palace Arcade (Map p60; ☎ 2266 3653; Leoforos Kostaki Pantelidi; per hr CY£1; ☎ 10am-11pm) On the edge of the Old City.

Printways (Map p60; ☎ 2266 1628; Rigenis 63B; per hr CY£1; ☎ 10am-11pm) Close to the Holiday Inn hotel.

Laundry

Express Dry Cleaners (Map p60; Ippokratous 49) In the Old City; will do a service wash for you for about CY£4.

Libraries

At least five public or semipublic libraries in Lefkosia are open for research and reading, although you cannot take books home. The following places are all located on the map of Lefkosia's Old City (p60).

Ahilleios Library (☎ 2276 3033; Leoforos Konstantinou Paleologou 30)

Lefkosia Municipal Arts Centre & Library (☎ 2243 2577; Apostolou Varnava 19)

Makarios Cultural Foundation & Library (☎ 2243 0008; Plateia Arhiepiskopou Kyprianou)

Ministry of Education Library (☎ 2230 3180; Leoforos Konstantinou Paleologou)

Severios Library (☎ 2234 4888; Plateia Arhiepiskopou Kyprianou)

Medical Services

If you need a private doctor or pharmacy, ring ☎ 1432. Visiting hours for doctors are normally from 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm. Local newspapers list pharmacies that are open during the night and on weekends and holidays, as well as the names of doctors who are on call out of normal hours.

Lefkosia General Hospital (Map p60; ☎ 2280 1400; Leoforos Nechrou) West of the Old City.

Money

There are ATMs all over the city that accept most cards. A handy place for cash is the corner of Plateia Eleftherias and Leoforos Konstantinou Paleologou. Banks include the following:

American Express (Map p58; ☎ 2276 5607; Agapi-noros 2; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat) In the New City.

Hellenic Bank (Map p60; Solonos 1a; ☎ 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, 2.30-8pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug) Near the CTO; provides an afternoon tourist service.

Photography

Andreas Papaeracleous Photostore (Map p60; ☎ 2266 6101; Rigenis 48) In the Old City; this is a well-stocked shop catering to all your photography needs.

LEFKOSIA (OLD CITY)

INFORMATION

Alifaios Library	1 E3
Alifaios Paperedocus	39 E2
Austalian High Commission	2 D2
British Council	4 E2
CTO	3 E3
Express Dry Cleaners	5 D3
Hellenic Bank	6 D3
Ledra Palace Hotel Crossing	7 E3
Lefkosia General Hospital	8 C1
MAAM	10 E3
Milits & Evgenis Kiosk	(see 14)
Ministry of Education Library	11 D3
Moufflon Bookshop	12 D3
Nicosia Palace Arcade	13 D3
Peripetro Hellas	14 D3
Police Station	15 D1
Post Office	16 D2
Primways	17 D2
Saverios Library	19 F2
Telephone Office	20 C2
Toilets	(see 5)

SLEEPING

Castelli Hotel	46 D2
Classic Hotel	47 D2
Holiday Inn	48 D2
Tony's Bed & Breakfast	49 E3

EATING

1900 Pael Kairos	50 D3
Agios Georgios Taverna	51 E2
Bonsai	(see 48)
Da Paolo	52 F3
Egeon	53 F1
Saverios Library	54 E2
Estiatorio Savvas	55 E2
Nikos	56 D3
Orfeos	57 F1
Pago Pago	(see 46)
Paint Ice	58 D2
Taverna Avothera	59 F1
To Steki ts Loxandris	60 E2
Tzeliari	61 F2
Zanetos Taverna	62 E2

DRINKING

Cyprus Handicrafts Centre	26 D2
Cyprus Jewellery Museum	27 E3
Cyprus Museum	28 C2
Ethnographic Museum	30 F2
Famagusta Gate	31 F2
Faneromeni Church	32 D2
Holy Cross Catholic Church	33 D2
House of Hatzigeorgakis	34 E2
Komesios	35 D2
Ledra Museum-Observatory	36 E2
Lefkosia Municipal Arts Centre & Library	37 E3
Lewentis Municipal Museum	38 F2
Liberty Monument	38 F2

SHOPPING

Theatre Workshop of the University of Cyprus (theapak)	73 F1
Theatro Ena	74 F1
Emes	(see 35)
Virgin Records	75 D3
Allialla	76 D3
Box Office	77 F3
Red	72 E2

ENTERTAINMENT

Lefkosia Municipal Theatre & Box Office	71 C2
Red	72 E2

TRANSPORT

Bus to Protaras & Paralimni	77 F3
Buses to Lemesos, Pafos & Larnaka	79 D2
Kykos	80 D3
Olympic Airlines	81 D3
Taxi Stand	82 D3
Travel & Express	83 F2
Urban Bus Station: A Petras & Sons	84 D3

SHOPS

Buses to Agia Napa, Troodos & Kakopetria	78 E3
Buses to Lemesos, Pafos & Larnaka	79 D2
Kykos	80 D3
Olympic Airlines	81 D3
Taxi Stand	82 D3
Travel & Express	83 F2
Urban Bus Station: A Petras & Sons	84 D3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Agios Ioannis Church	21 F2
Arablar Mosque	22 E2
Archbishop's Palace	23 F2
Boyrazkar Mosque	24 E3
Chrysomissa Crafts Centre	25 F1
Cyprus Classic Motorcycle	26 D2
Cyprus Handicrafts Centre	27 E3
Cyprus Jewellery Museum	28 C2
Cyprus Museum	29 C2
Ethnographic Museum	30 F2
Famagusta Gate	31 F2
Faneromeni Church	32 D2
Holy Cross Catholic Church	33 D2
House of Hatzigeorgakis	34 E2
Komesios	34 E2
Ledra Museum-Observatory	35 D2
Lefkosia Municipal Arts Centre & Library	36 E2
Lewentis Municipal Museum	37 E3
Liberty Monument	38 F2

Post

Post office (Map p60; ☎ 2230 3123; Leoforos Konstantinou Paleologou; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) The central post office is east of Plateia Eleftherias. This is where poste restante mail comes to. There is also a small post office close to the northern end of Ledra near the Green Line lookout, and another branch in the New City.

Telephone

The main telephone centre in Lefkosia is the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority (CYTA; Map p60), which is close to Pafos Gate. It has some phone booths inside and outside the building.

There is no real cause to go there since public phones are found throughout the city, with a large concentration on Plateia Eleftherias.

Toilets

Public toilets are situated near the Venetian walls; the nearest ones to the centre are by Plateia Eleftherias. There are also toilets in Laiki Yitonia, near the CTO office.

Tourist Information

Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO; www.visitcyprus.org.cy) head office (Map p58; ☎ 2233 7715; fax 2233 1644; Leoforos Lemesou 19); Old City (Map p60; ☎ 2244 4264; Aristokyprou 11; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) The CTO's head office is in the New City, although it is not really geared to handling over-the-counter queries from the public. There's a branch in the touristy, restored area of the Old City.

Travel Agencies

While you'll find a large number of travel agencies throughout Lefkosia, none is likely to offer significant price advantages over the others. One that is helpful:

Salamis Tours (Map p58; ☎ 2276 2323; fax 2275 8337; Amaldas 7c) In the New City; arranges airline tickets and other travel-related bookings, including cruise tickets for Salamis Lines.

Universities

University of Cyprus (Map p58; ☎ 2289 2000; www.ucy.ac.cy; Kallipoleos 75) The only university in the Republic of Cyprus is on the southeastern side of the New City. It was established in 1989 and admitted its first students in 1992. It currently has around 3000 undergraduate students and 500 postgraduate students.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Lefkosia is a remarkably safe city to walk around. However, the Old City streets, particularly near the Green Line, can appear dingy and threatening at night, and solo women should avoid them. Crossing into the North is allowed only at official checkpoints; you'd be ill-advised to try to cross at any other place. This illegal move would lead to serious trouble.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The sights in this section are found on the map of the Old City (p60). Allow yourself at least two days to see most of the major sights properly.

Venetian Walls

The Venetian walls are like Lefkosia's logo. They form a border around the Old City that is so unique that when you see it once, on a map or from a high viewpoint, you'll never forget it. And that's partly to do with its odd shape: is it like a snowflake? A star? A hand grenade? Or a horizontally sliced artichoke?

Despite its impressive appearance, this circular defence wall that surrounds both the northern and southern halves of the

PREPARING A NEW SQUARE

A massive reconstruction project is about to begin in Lefkosia's Plateia Eleftherias. A sweeping, floor-lit design is intended to paint the capital's main attraction, the Venetian walls, in sharp relief, while remaining in harmony with its ancient surroundings. The architect, Zaha Hadid, is renowned for her socially aware projects. Her impressive CV includes the Strasbourg tram station, a housing project for IBA-Block 2 in Berlin, and the Mind Zone in London's Millennium Dome. Hadid plans to construct a green belt along the moat that surrounds the walls at present, turning the area within into Lefkosia's central park, encircled by a palm-tree-lined pedestrian walkway. She calls the design an 'urban intervention' and hopes that it may become the catalyst for the eventual reunification of the island. A little over-ambitious perhaps, but the designs look promising on paper. Work should start in 2006, so watch this space.

Old City unfortunately failed in the purpose for which it was built. The Venetian rulers erected the walls between 1567 and 1570 with the express aim of keeping the feared Ottoman invaders out of Lefkosia. The appointed engineer Ascanio Savorgnano designed the ramparts and fellow engineer Francesco Barbaro built them to specifications, while adding 11 fortifying bastions spaced equally around the ramparts for added protection. A moat was also dug, although it was apparently never intended to contain water. In July 1570 the Ottomans landed in Larnaka and three months later attacked Lefkosia, storming the fortifications.

The walls have remained in place more or less unchanged ever since. Five of the bastions, **Tripoli**, **D'Avila**, **Constanza**, **Podocataro** and **Caraffa**, are in the southern sector of Lefkosia. The **Flatro** (Sibeli) Bastion on the eastern side of the Old City is occupied by Turkish, Greek Cypriot and UN military forces. The remaining bastions, **Loredano** (Cevzili), **Barbaro** (Musalla), **Qirini** (Cephane), **Mula** (Zahra) and **Roccas** (Kaytazağa), are in North Nicosia.

The city's walls were originally punctured by three gates: the Famagusta Gate (below) in the east, the Pafos Gate (right) in the west, and the Kyrenia (Girne) Gate in the north.

The Venetian walls and moat around Lefkosia are in excellent condition. They are used to provide car-parking space and venues for outdoor concerts, and for strolling and relaxing. In North Nicosia, the walls are in poorer shape and have become overgrown and dilapidated in parts. There are vehicle access points around the walls now, which allow regular traffic access to the Old City.

In the following section, the sights within the walls are organised by interest.

Famagusta Gate

The easternmost **Famagusta Gate** (Pyli Ammohostou; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri) is the most photographed and best preserved of the three original gates that led into the Old City of Lefkosia. It's in the Caraffa Bastion off Leoforos Athinas. Following more than a century of neglect, the whole structure was renovated in 1981 and now serves as a concert venue and exhibition hall. Its impressive wooden door and sloping façade

open out onto a tunnel that leads through the rampart wall. Outside the tunnel and to the right is a small open-air arena where concerts by visiting artists are held, usually during the summer months. The area surrounding the gate has great trendy eating and drinking places (see p69 and p72).

Bayraktar Mosque & Liberty Monument

West of Famagusta Gate, this prominent mosque, situated on the Constanza Bastion, marks the spot where the Venetian walls were successfully breached by the Ottomans in 1570. The Ottoman *bayraktar* (standard bearer; for whom the mosque is named in Turkish) was immediately cut down by the defending forces, but his body was subsequently recovered and buried on this spot. The small mosque has attracted a lot of unwanted attention. It has been the target for terrorist activity, and in the early 1960s EOKA-inspired attacks damaged the mosque and nearby tomb of the standard bearer. It was eventually repaired and the mosque closed to the general public. In 1999 a plot was uncovered to bomb the mosque.

Close by is the elaborate **Liberty Monument**, on the Podocataro Bastion. It represents Greek Cypriots' liberation from the British Colonial powers, with figures of 14 EOKA fighters being released from prison in 1959, alongside peasants and priests, representing the various strata of Greek Cypriot society. Presiding over it is the Statue of Liberty. The monument, erected in 1973, does not include any figures of Turkish Cypriots, reflecting the divisions between the two communities.

Pafos Gate

This westernmost gate, known by the Venetians as Porta San Domenico, is one of the three traditional entrances to Old Lefkosia. It has been a spot for a kind of flag stand-off since 1963, with the flags of the Republic of Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, Greece and Turkey fluttering defiantly at each other. The gate served as an arsenal warehouse for the Ottomans, and as a police headquarters for the British. The Pafos Gate, left firmly open, guards a narrow pedestrian passage under the wall. The adjoining breach in the wall that allows traffic into the Old City is a much later addition.

Holy Cross Catholic Church

Across the road, east of the Pafos Gate on Pafou, this church is in the uncomfortable position of backing onto the Turkish sector while resting within the UN buffer zone. Despite this, the church still functions as a place of worship on the proviso that the back door leading onto the Turkish-controlled sector remains firmly closed. Mass times are posted inside the front-door vestibule.

Roccas (Kaytazağa) Bastion

The Roccas Bastion was unique throughout Cyprus in that it was the only place where Greek and Turkish Cypriots could eyeball each other at close quarters, before 2003. Now it's hardly an attraction, since it's so easy to actually cross over to the opposite side and eyeball each other face to face. It is interesting, however, as a reminder of the noncontact between the two communities that lasted for around thirty years.

It is situated about 200m south of the Ledra Palace Hotel crossing (below) and is easily identifiable by the no-parking signs along the bastion walls. The UN buffer zone separating the two sides by a normally comfortable margin virtually disappears here for a stretch of about 200m, while the border of Turkish-controlled Northern Cyprus ends at the very edge of this bastion.

If you are in North Nicosia you can easily reach the Turkish-held side of the Roccas Bastion. See the boxed text, p178 for details.

Ledra Palace Hotel Crossing

This is the only spot on the island reserved exclusively for pedestrian and bicycle crossings between the North and the South. Masses of tourists and locals now cross from one side to the other, and many cross in the middle of the night too, after a late night out.

The crossing is partially blocked by a blue-and-white painted wall with graphic posters depicting those missing since the 1974 invasion. There are also posters depicting the murder of three Greek Cypriots by Turkish soldiers near Deryneia in the eastern part of the island at a demonstration in 1996 (see p167). On Sunday mornings Greek Cypriot women gather to remember the 1974 invasion and hand out literature, accompanied by songs of lamentation and protest.

The crossing itself is about 300m long. To the left, as you head north, is the former

Ledra Palace Hotel, now renovated and occupied by the UN. The renovation is part of the EU-sponsored 'Nicosia Master Plan' project. Started in 1979, many interesting and valuable buildings in the city have been (and are being) renovated. The project office is just outside the Ledra Palace Hotel, and has displays of all the work completed and planned.

Abandoned shops lie to the right of the hotel. A white iron gate marks the entry to Turkish Cypriot-controlled territory, after which lies the fairly innocuous Turkish Cypriot checkpoint building. A prominent sign welcomes you to the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' while another sign reads 'TRNC forever'.

Cyprus Museum

This is the island's most interesting **museum** (☎ 2286 5888; Leoforos Mouseiou 1; admission CY£1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) and houses the best collection of archaeological finds in Cyprus. The original building, erected in 1883, is opposite the lovely municipal gardens. It's a 10-minute walk west of Plateia Eleftherias.

Highlights include the remarkable display of **terracotta figures** in room 4, discovered in 1929 at Agia Irini, north of Morfou (Güzelyurt) in the North. The 2000 figures, dating back to the 7th to 6th centuries BC, are displayed as they were found, in a semi-circular order. Apart from two female representations, the figures are male and many are warriors. Their war chariots indicate the worship of a warrior god, presumably a centaur or minotaur. There are figures that represent demon-servants of the god; the snake representations symbolise fertility and suggest a deity that was also identified with fertility and the underworld.

Another highlight is the collection of three **limestone lions** and two **sphinxes** found in the Tamassos necropolis south of Lefkosia. The statues, which show a definite Egyptian influence, were only discovered in 1997. They date from the Cypro-Archaic II period (475-400 BC).

Also look out for the famous **Aphrodite of Soli** statue in room 5, widely marketed as the 'goddess of Cyprus' on tourist posters and also depicted on the CY£5 banknote. An enormous bronze statue of **Emperor Septimius Severus**, found at Kythrea (Değirmenlik) in

1928, is the main exhibit in room 6 and can hardly be overlooked.

A couple of lovely mosaics, such as the **mosaic of Leda & the Swan** from Palea Pafos, are displayed in room 7B, alongside various displays of gold.

Faneromeni Church

The centre of the city before Plateia Eleftherias took over in 1974, Plateia Faneromenis is a quiet square, so silent that birdsong can be heard only metres away from the bustle of Ledra street. In the centre is the impressive Faneromeni Church, built in 1872 on the site of an ancient Orthodox nunnery. It is the largest church within the city walls and is a mixture of neoclassical, Byzantine and Latin styles. The **Marble Mausoleum** on the eastern side of the church was built in memory of four clerics executed by the Ottoman governor in 1821, during the newly declared Greek War of Independence.

Arablar Mosque

Alongside Plateia Faneromenis is Plateia Okostiogdois Oktovriou, where this tiny mosque is squirrelled away. A curious building, unfortunately no longer open to the public, it was the church of Stavros tou Misirikou in Lusignan times. Inside, if you manage to find someone to let you in, is a beautiful octagonal dome, on top of impressive colonnaded arches.

WALKING THE GREEN LINE

Despite the fact that crossing into the North is now easy and some of the 'mystery of the other side' has therefore vanished, the Green Line and the spooky buffer zone with its abandoned, crumbling houses still fascinate foreigners. The Green Line is unmissable and it exudes a sense of division. While there's not a lot to see once you are there (save for some creative graffiti work), its mere presence gives Lefkosia its bizarre edge. You'll see the double minarets of the Agia Sofia mosque, North Nicosia's most remarkable landmark, with the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot flags that hang between them like washing. The Green Line embodies the eeriness of the capital's and the country's division, especially when coupled with so many 1974 stories that you hear from every Cypriot.

UN and Greek Cypriot **bunkers** punctuate the line across the city, and you are not supposed to approach them too closely or get your camera out. The CTO-signposted walking tour takes you hard up to the line at the far eastern side of the city close to the military-controlled **Flatro (Sibeli) Bastion**. Take the last turn left off Leoforos Athinas along Agiou Georgiou and look for the little street on the right with Taverna Axiothea (p70). Walk to the end of Axiotheas and squeeze through the gap into the next street, following the walking-tour sign. There is an area of particular desolation and destruction towards the end of **Pendadaktylou** where it meets **Ermou**, the street that originally bisected the Old City more or less equally into two.

It is thought that many of the streets and ruined buildings are booby-trapped with mines.

Ledra Museum-Observatory

Not really a museum, although it likes to call itself one, **Ledra Museum-Observatory** (☎ 2267 9396; 11th fl, Shakolas Tower, cnr Ledra & Arsinosis; admission CY€0.50; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) is an observatory on top of Ermes (formerly Woolworths) department store (p74). A good vantage point over the city, here you can use telescopes to gaze at the whole of Lefkosia and trace the Green Line. It is also a great place to orient yourself. Explanations of various buildings and neighbourhoods are given in English, French and German.

Leventis Municipal Museum

The small, two-storey **Leventis Municipal Museum** (☎ 2267 3375; Ippokratous 17; admission free; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) has exhibits dating from before 2000 BC to the present day. Among items on display are household equipment, traditional dress, books and prints. There is also a gift shop.

Laïki Yitonia

Laïki Yitonia, meaning 'popular neighbourhood', was restored after it served for many years as an area for painted ladies and dodgy merchants. This tiny southern part of the Old City is Lefkosia's only tourist area. This means that it's crammed with bad restaurants with tacky water features, where waiters try to lure you in with cheesy greetings, and the food is often overpriced. However, it's

rather pretty, and a nice place for a short stroll. With so many good restaurants and taverns in the city, try to avoid eating in this area, with the exception of 1900 Paei Kairos (p70).

The CTO has an office here, and you can stock up on most maps and other tourist brochures free of charge.

Cyprus Jewellery Museum

The small **Cyprus Jewellery Museum** (☎ 2266 7278; Praxippou 7-9; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) in Laïki Yitonia presents the history of jewellery from the end of the 19th century to today. The exhibits include ornaments, religious items, silver utensils and old tools.

Cyprus Handicrafts Centre

A government-sponsored foundation aiming to preserve Cypriot handicrafts, **Cyprus Handicrafts Centre** (☎ 2230 5024; Athalassis 186; 🕒 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Thu) is well run and nicely presented. Here you can watch pottery, woodwork, embroidery and other crafts being practised and nurtured. Many of the products are on sale for visitors.

Omeriye Mosque

Originally the Augustinian Church of St Mary, the **Omeriye Mosque** (Ömeriye Camii; cnr Trikoupi & Plateia Tyllirias; 🕒 outside prayer times) dates from the 14th century. The church was destroyed by the Ottomans as they entered Lefkosia in 1570. It was subsequently restored as a mosque, based on a belief that this was the spot where the Muslim prophet Omer was buried in the 7th century. Its tall minaret can easily be spotted some distance away; the entrance to the mosque is about halfway along Trikoupi. Today the mosque is used primarily as a place of worship by visiting Muslims from neighbouring Arab countries. Non-Muslims may visit as long they observe the general etiquette required – dress conservatively, leave shoes at the door and avoid official prayer times.

Omeriye Hammam

Switch off your mobile, put your shower cap on, and strip down to your birthday suit for a lovely, relaxing Turkish bath at **Omeriye Hammam** (Ömeriye Hamam; Plateia Tyllirias; admission & Turkish bath CY€10, traditional body peeling CY€6, massage CY€12-25; 🕒 9am-9pm, men only Tue, Thu, Sat, women only Wed, Fri, Sun, tours Mon 11am-5pm). This building

was recently restored and sports a luxurious, stylish design. The domed reception has an enormous chandelier hanging over the circular bar area, while candles, mirrors and a refreshing minty scent accompany the baths themselves. The 16th-century Omeriye Hammam is a safe, popular and relaxing spot, with separate days for men and women, and same-sex masseurs. As you enter, you get a complimentary bottle of water, towels (one large, one small) and a cup of herbal tea to relax with after the bath. Apart from the basic steam bath, you could indulge in body scrub (which comes at an extra cost) or have a Chinese or aromatherapy massage for CY€25 each. If you don't fancy the bath experience, you can take a tour on a Monday.

House of Hatzigeorgakis Kornosios

The well-preserved **House of Hatzigeorgakis Kornosios** (☎ 2230 5316; Patriarchou Grigoriou 20; admission CY€0.75; 🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) belonged to Kornosios, the Great Dragoman of Cyprus from 1779 to 1809. A dragoman (*tercüman* in Turkish) was an interpreter or liaison officer between the Ottoman and Orthodox authorities. Kornosios, originally from Kritou Terra village, accumulated his vast wealth through various estates and tax exemptions, and became the most powerful man in Cyprus at the time. But, as you may guess, his extravagance was his undoing. A peasant revolt in 1804, aimed at the ruling classes in general, forced him out of Cyprus and to Istanbul. Returning from exile five years later, he was accused of treason, his property was confiscated, and he was beheaded. The house itself is more beautiful and interesting than any of the exhibits inside. Only one room is set up as mock living quarters, with plush floor cushions and nargileh (Middle Eastern water pipes) for smoking. The rest of the mansion is given over to displays of antiques and Ottoman memorabilia.

Archbishop's Palace

A mock Venetian building on Plateia Arhiepiskopou Kyprianou, this was the scene of much of the fighting in 1956, as well as during the 1974 military coup and subsequent Turkish invasion of the North. The palace was almost totally destroyed by EOKA-B (the postindependence reincarnation of EOKA,

which mostly fought Turkish Cypriots) while they attempted to kill Archbishop Makarios on 15 July 1974, but it was rebuilt during the 1980s. The building, which is generally closed to the public, is the official residence of the Archbishop of Cyprus. The palace (and everything else in the vicinity) is overshadowed by a hideous black **statue of Archbishop Makarios III**, which looms across the square. See the boxed text, p110, for more about the life of this revered archbishop-president.

Makarios Cultural Foundation

This complex of the **Makarios Cultural Foundation** (☎ 2243 0008; Plateia Arhiepiskopou Kyprianou; admission CY£1; 🕒 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) consists of three main exhibition areas. The **European Art Gallery** presents 120 oil paintings of various European schools of art from the 16th to the 19th centuries. The themes are mainly religious with works by Van Dyck, Rubens, Tintoretto, Lorraine and Delacroix.

Close by is the **Greek Independence War Gallery**, which contains maps, copper engravings and paintings of people and events from the Greek War of Independence in 1821. The **Byzantine Art Museum** has the island's largest collection of icons related to Cyprus. There are some 220 pieces in the museum, dating from the 5th to the 19th centuries. Among the more interesting items on display are the icons of **Christ & the Virgin Mary** (12th century) from the Church of the Virgin Mary of Arakas at Lagoudera, and the **Resurrection** (13th century) from the Church of St John Lambadistis Monastery at Kalopanayiotis. In addition, there are six examples of the Kanakaria Mosaics, which were stolen from the Panagia Kanakaria (Kanakaria Church) in Northern Cyprus after the 1974 Turkish invasion.

Ethnographic Museum

Close to the Makarios Cultural Foundation, the small **Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 2243 2578; Plateia Arhiepiskopou Kyprianou; admission CY£1; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) houses the largest collection of folk art and ethnography in the country. The building dates back to the 15th century, although some later additions have been made. Here you will see fine examples of embroidery, lace, costumes, pottery, metalwork, basketry, folk painting, leatherwork and woodcarving.

National Struggle Museum

This display is really for die-hard history buffs. The **National Struggle Museum** (☎ 2230 5878; Kinyras 7; admission CY£0.25; 🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Thu) exhibits documents, photos and other memorabilia from the often bloody 1955-59 National Liberation Struggle against the British.

Lefkosia Arts Centre & Library

For something a little less cerebral than the museums, duck into the small arcade to the right of the National Struggle Museum and head along Apostolou Varnava for one block to the rather avant-garde **Lefkosia Arts Centre & Library** (☎ 2243 2577; Apostolou Varnava 19; admission free but donations welcome; 🕒 10am-3pm & 5-11pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun). Its air-conditioned interior contains an occasionally bizarre but mostly interesting collection of art. The permanent collection includes paintings and sculpture, and other works from the Dimitris Pierides Museum of Contemporary Art in Greece. Exhibitions vary monthly. The centre also has a coffee shop and art library for visitors.

Panagia Chrysaliniotissa

The church of **Panagia Chrysaliniotissa** (Arhiepiskopou Filotheou) is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and its name means 'Our Lady of the Golden Flax' in Greek. It's considered to be the oldest Byzantine church in Lefkosia and was built in 1450 by Queen Helena Paleologos. It is renowned for its rich collection of old and rare icons.

Chrysaliniotissa Crafts Centre

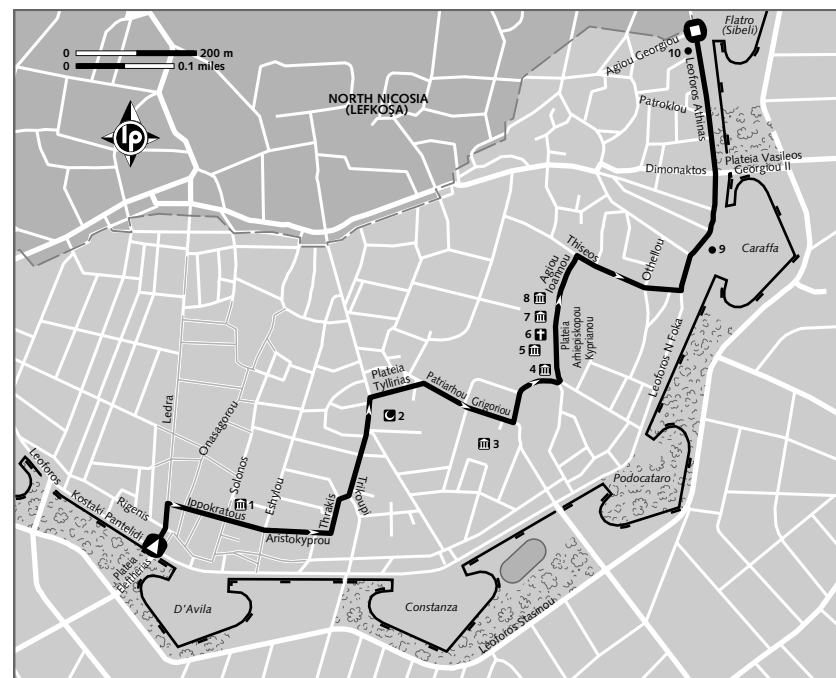
This small **arts centre** (Dimonaktos 2; 🕒 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) is worth dropping into for its display of Cypriot arts and crafts. Eight workshops and a coffee shop surround a central courtyard in a building designed along the lines of a traditional inn.

WALKING TOUR

This tour goes along the Old City's main streets and past many of its museums.

Starting from Plateia Eleftherias follow Ledra and turn right onto Ippokratous. At No 17 is the **Leventis Municipal Museum** (1; p64), which traces the city's development from prehistoric times to the present.

Continue along to the end of Ippokratous, turn left onto Thrakis and take the dogleg onto Trikoupi. Soon you'll see the



WALK FACTS

Start Plateia Eleftherias
Finish Flatro (Sibeli) Bastion
Distance 2km

Omeriye Mosque (2; p65) on your right. Turn right onto Plateia Tyllirias and shortly after you will reach Patriarchou Grigoriou. About 125m along this street on the right is the 18th-century **House of Hatzi Georgakis Kornosios** (3; p65), which is now a museum.

The next left leads you to Plateia Arhiepiskopou Kyprianou, dominated by the **Archbishop's Palace** (4; p65) and a colossal statue of Makarios III. Here you'll find the **Makarios Cultural Foundation** (5; opposite), comprising the European Art Gallery, Greek Independence War Gallery and Byzantine Art Museum. In the grounds of the foundation is **Agios Ioannis Church** (6), which was built in 1662 and has wonderful frescoes dating from 1736. Next door is the **Ethnographic Museum** (7; opposite), and also nearby is the **National Struggle Museum** (8; opposite).

Continue north along Agiou Ioannou and turn right onto Theseos, which leads onto Leoforos N Foka. Turn left and you'll see the imposing **Famagusta Gate** (9; p62), which was once the main entrance to the city. From here it's a 400m walk past Lefkosia's trendy night-time dining area along Leoforos Athinas to where the street abruptly ends at the barbed wire and UN watchtowers of the **Flatro (Sibeli) Bastion** (10). The most direct way back to Laiki Yitonia is to take Leoforos N Foka, following the signposts to the CTO. Check out the Venetian walls along the way.

LEFKOSIA FOR CHILDREN

Unlike the seaside towns and resorts, Lefkosia's appeal to children is rather low, although Lefkosians are child-friendly, like most Cypriots. There are no professional baby-sitting services in the city, as so many families seem to have their own, live-in nannies. The CTO has a list of events taking place throughout the year, and will know what's on while you are around. Ask about watching a traditional Cypriot shadow-puppet theatre show.

Ostrich Wonderland Theme Park (☎ 2299 1008/9;

Agios Ioannis Maloundas; adult/child CY£1/0.50; 🚗 9am-7pm May-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Apr) This theme park might tickle your fancy. It's reputedly the biggest ostrich park (and farm) in Europe and is 25 minutes outside Lefkosia. Your kids can learn everything there is to know about the powerful speedy birds and their eggs too, and use the park's playground; a sightseeing tour is included in the admission price. To get here, follow the Troödos highway, take the Palehori exit and follow the signs to Agios Ioannis Maloundas.

Kykko Bowling (☎ 2235 0085; Archimidou 15-19, Engomi; 🚗 1.30pm-1.30am) This 19-alley bowling centre, sitting behind the Hilton, is a great place to get your kids to wear uncomfortable shoes and share in Homer Simpson's great passion. The café with snacks and drinks will allow them to share his other passion (the fast food one).

Cyprus Classic Motorcycle Museum (Map p60; ☎ 2268 0222; Granikou 44; admission CY£1; 🚗 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Although this place attracts kids of all ages, it's a great stop to make with young ones, obsessed as they probably are with vehicles of all kinds. This is a private museum whose owner is more than happy to chat extensively about his collection. It may just keep the parents happy too.

Municipal Gardens (Map p60; Leoforos Mousieou) This is a lovely spot for a walk and a rest on a hot summer's day, and the playground can be used for some fun on the slide.

TOURS

The **CTO** (Map p60; ☎ 2244 4264; Aristokyprou 11; 🚗 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) runs free guided walks on Monday, Thursday, and Friday, all starting at 10am, from the CTO office in the Old City.

'Chrysaliniotissa & Kaimakli: the Past Restored' is a bus and walking guided tour that runs on Monday; Thursday is a walk through Old Lefkosia; Friday is 'Nicosia - Outside the Walls', a bus and walking guided tour. All walks last two hours and 45 minutes, and have a 30 minute break in the middle.

Alternatively, pick up a CTO walking-tours brochure or follow our walking tour around the Old City (p66).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Cyprus International Film Festival** (www.ciff2006.com), first held in March 2006, emphasises

Cyprus' position as a middle-ground between the West and the Middle East. It screens contemporary film and video productions from around the world related to dialogue among civilisations. Events also take place in Larnaka and Lemesos.

The **Cyprus State Fairs Authority** (☎ 2235 2918/2316; www.cfa.org.cy) takes responsibility for three annual fairs and exhibitions. The biggest event is the annual **Cyprus International Fair** that takes place between May and June; the **Motorshow** takes place in the first week of November; **Offitec** is a tech-fest of computers, office machines and telecommunications equipment. All events are held at the International Fair Grounds in the western suburb of Makedonitissa.

SLEEPING Budget

There is very little budget accommodation left in Lefkosia. Most of what once existed has either closed down or been upgraded to a midrange category.

Tony's Bed & Breakfast (Map p60; ☎ 2266 6752; fax 2266 2225; Solonos 13; s/d CY£18/28; 🚗) This is one of those places that seems to have been forgotten by time and redecoration, although the air-conditioning units would suggest otherwise. The old building, bang in the centre of the Old City, is in a fantastic location. The prices are low, and the beds feel as if they've been there since 1974. Nice little balconies compensate for the dodgy showers. Each room comes with a semicold fridge and a fuzzy-picture TV.

HI Hostel (Map p58; ☎ 9943 8360; Tefkrou 5; dm CY£5) In a quiet part of the New City about six blocks from Plateia Eleftherias. You can have a double or single room here, but you have to book in advance. Follow the signs from Hatzidaki, off Themistokli Dervi. It's basic but quite reasonable for a cheap sleep.

Midrange

Midrange hotels are the most common accommodation in the city. But, as in many other places in Cyprus, hotels at this price range aren't too used to dealing with solo travellers, or those who don't look particularly groomed (or who look a bit scruffy). So don't be surprised if you don't get the 'feel at home' treatment that's advertised.

Classic Hotel (Map p60; ☎ 2266 4006; www.classic.com.cy; Rigenis 94; s/d CY£54/65; 🚗) This three-star

hotel, close to Pafos Gate, is a member of the 'Small Luxury Hotels of the World' group, and you can see why. Everything, from the reception to the rooms, is done up in relaxing creamy, wood colours; the design is minimalist; the rooms are smart and comfortable. The 59 Knives restaurant, part of the hotel, specialises in *haute cuisine*, adding its own contribution to the Classic's luxuries.

Castelli Hotel (Map p60; ☎ 2271 2812; hinnicres@cytanet.com.cy; Ouzounian 38; s/d CY£99/114; 🚗 🚗 🚗) Next door to the Holiday Inn, and close to the Classic, this is a hotel aimed at the business lot and therefore slightly aloof towards dishevelled-looking travellers, so don your suit before you ask about vacancies. The rooms are smart and comfortable and have Internet ports. The hotel also has a sauna, particularly handy as a hangover cure after too many cocktails at the Pago Pago Polynesian restaurant-bar downstairs (p71).

Cleopatra Hotel (Map p58; ☎ 2235 6666; cleo@hotelcleopatra.com.cy; Florinis 8; s/d CY£58/75; 🚗 🚗) The Egyptian Pharaoh would not have approved of the lack of luxury and rather boring, impersonal rooms in this (again) business-oriented hotel. The pool looks more ravishing than any other feature in the building and on a hot Lefkosia day, could be a life-saver. Travellers with scruffy bags or clothes may be frowned upon or ignored altogether.

Averof (Map p58; ☎ 2277 3447; www.averof.com.cy; Averof 19; s/d CY£26.75/39; 🚗) Close to the Old City, near the British High Commission and in a quiet part of Lefkosia, this place prides itself on its rather kitsch rustic décor and 'personal touch'. The mock-traditional rooms are clean and bright.

Asty (Map p58; ☎ 2277 3030; fax 2277 3311; Pringipos Karolou 12; s/d CY£38.50/63; 🚗) This two-star place promises peace and quiet, plus some comfortable rooms over in Engomi.

Top End

Lefkosia's top-end hotels are all the usual suspects, with luxurious comfort and design, but there is a lamentable lack of imaginative and original establishments in the city.

Cyprus Hilton (Map p58; ☎ 2237 7777; www.hilton.com; Leoforos Arhiiepiskopou Makariou III; s/d CY£169/204; 🚗 🚗) This premier five-star hotel was apparently the gathering-ground for eastern and western spies during the Cold War, when Cyprus' strategic position was invaluable.

Who knows what political manoeuvring went on in its luxurious rooms, indoor and outdoor pool, tennis and squash courts and in-house restaurants. With a knowing smile, ask about the discounts that apply from 1 July to 31 August, when rooms can go down to as low as CY£95 a night.

Holiday Inn (Map p60; ☎ 2271 2712; hinnicres@cytanet.com.cy; Rigenis 70; s/d CY£150/188; 🚗 🚗) The great location could perhaps justify the extortionate room prices, but a serious lack of imagination makes this hotel sterile and indistinguishable from most top-end chain hotels. Lefkosia's Holiday Inn is most popular for the restaurants that it cradles, such as the Japanese restaurant Bonsai (p71). Guests get to use the indoor pool, gym and sauna.

Forum Nicosia By Intercontinental (☎ 2235 6666; forum@louisshotels.com; Leoforos Georgiou Griva Digeni; s/d from CY£65/112; 🚗 🚗) Four star; the only one of the bunch that is a little way out of town, in the western suburb of Engomi. It has excellent rooms and facilities, and a 30% discount applies from 1 July to 31 August.

EATING

Lefkosia offers three basic locations for eating: the Old City, the New City, and the burgeoning suburbs to the east or west. While we stick mainly to the Old and New Cities, suburbs such as Engomi to the west or Strovolos to the south have their own culinary enclaves, and a drive to either may turn up some surprising finds.

Dining in Lefkosia can be a real treat. Because the city is not a prime tourist target, it is thankfully bereft of low-quality, high-cost tourist traps that pander to foreign palates. The growing internationalism of Cyprus, coupled with the fact that many Cypriots now hanker after food other than their own, means that there is a wide array of ethnic cuisines available. Chinese and Indian restaurants are among two of the main growth areas.

A word of warning: many restaurants in Lefkosia close down for a couple of weeks in August for the annual holidays. Phone beforehand to be on the safe side.

Old City

Dining in the Old City is centred on two main areas with a sprinkling of low-frills, cheap eateries scattered in between. Laiki Yitonia

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Tziellari (☎ 2243 1099; Korāi 24; meze per person CY€10; 🍷 dinner) You won't have to look hard to find this place. All you have to do is open your ears as you get to the murky night-time Plateia Achiepiskopou Kyprianou, then follow the sound of the bouzouki down a dark alley and push the heavy doors into Tziellari. There is such a distinct atmosphere in this restaurant that you might feel as if you'd walked onto a film set from the 1930s: dark wooden walls, demure lighting, and often entire families dining and Greek dancing, arms outstretched. The meze is as typical as you get, starting the Cypriot favourites such as olives, grilled haloumi, souvlaki and *seftalia* (grilled Cypriot sausage). There is house wine, *zivania* (local firewater) and Cypriot brandy, all of which will come in handy if you try to master some of that dancing.

is mainly popular with the lunchtime crowd of day-trippers, who then normally retreat to the coast, while the Famagusta Gate strip is full of bars and restaurants and attracts evening revellers, most of whom are locals. The eateries in this section are found on the Old City map (p60).

RESTAURANTS

Greek Cypriot Cuisine

Zanettos Taverna (☎ 2276 5501; Trikoupi 65; mains CY€2.50-3) This place has a great reputation in the city, as it is allegedly one of the oldest traditional taverns. The locals flock here in their dozens, and it's definitely worth joining them. A great place for meze, it's hidden away in a slightly shady part of town, where the painted ladies sit in their doorways, waiting for business.

1900 Paei Kairos (☎ 2266 7668; Pasikratous 11-15; meze CY€2.50-4.50; 🍷 dinner) The only place in the tourist part worth going to. It's a pretty little Greek-style *mezedopolio* (a small restaurant specialising in *mezedes*). It serves mix-and-match *mezedes* such as *stryffari* (a pie made up of five cheeses), eggplant stuffed with cheese in filo pastry, and eggplant patties. Have a tippie of *tsipouro* (a clear, distilled spirit) or try a selection of the mainly Greek wines on offer.

To Steki tis Loxandras (☎ 2267 5757; Faneromenis 67; meze CY€6.50; 🍷 dinner) Live traditional music, good quality Greek-style *mezedes* and lots of people is the standard at Loxandras. Booking is an absolute must for dining on weekends.

Erodos (☎ 2275 2250; Patriarchou Grigoriou 1; mains CY€4-8; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This is certainly the loveliest front yard in the Old City, on Plateia Tyllirias, abutting the Omeriye Hammam. The food is reasonable, although by no means exquisite.

Orfeas (☎ 2234 3447; Leoforos Athinas 23; meze CY€7.50, grills CY€4; 🍷 dinner) A sprawling taverna with tables in the park, always packed full of Cypriots coming to eat their national favourite: souvlaki. An old solitary mama observes the evening activity from inside, reading a newspaper, unperturbed by her successful business.

Odos Othellou (Othellou 1; meze CY€8; 🍷 dinner) This small Greek blue-and-white house is like an apparition on the dimly lit street. The little wooden tables outside are perfect for a quiet dinner or drink (p73), away from traffic and people. Like most traditional out-fits, this place serves meze, but the emphasis is on the mainland Greek version, which is all about grilled meat. For CY€12.50, you can eat, have one free drink and listen to bouzouki (inside the restaurant only).

Taverna Axiothea (☎ 2243 0787; Axiotheas 9; mains CY€3-4; 🍷 dinner) A little, unassuming joint on the last street before the barricades. It is good for low-priced and tasty *mezedes*.

Egeon (☎ 2243 3297; Ektoros 40; meze CY€7-12; 🍷 dinner) The ever-so-discreet yet very popular Egeon draws a faithful following of mainly local devotees. You dine in an atmospheric old house on a rich platter of imaginative *mezedes*. Bookings are essential.

Also worth checking out is **Estiatorio Savvas** (☎ 2276 3444; Solonos 65; mains CY€5; 🍷 noon-4.30pm Mon-Sat), unadorned, simple and basic but offering good home-cooked dishes, just like **Agios Georgios Taverna** (☎ 2276 5971; Plateia Paliou Dimarhiou 27; grills CY€2.50-4.50) on the north-ern side of the market.

International Cuisine

Da Paolo (☎ 2243 8538; Leoforos Konstantinou Paleologou 52; mains CY€5.50; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A small Italian place with pizza that smells so divine you will throw caution to the wind and forget all

about your low-carb diet. The interior (only used in winter) is a red-brick room, with high ceilings and tall, wooden-shuttered windows. Everything smells of the herbs and garlic that dangle above the ovens. Waiters risk their lives carrying your food across the street to the summer garden, which sits right on top of the Venetian walls. Wood-fired brick ovens bake your pizza, and the pasta is always *al dente*.

Bonsai (☎ 2271 2712; Rigenis 70; mains CY€5-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The best Japanese place in town. Sitting deep inside the Holiday Inn (p69), Bonsai serves tasty sushi that goes around the counter, as you sit on high stools and get hypnotised by the moving choice. *Nigiri* sushi (CY€11.60) consisting of raw tuna, hamour, sword fish, omelette, salmon, mackerel, octopus, shrimp, squid and California rolls is a delicacy. An all-you-can eat sushi buffet (CY€12.50) is on offer every Monday and Thursday lunchtime from 12.30pm to 2pm, and Tuesday dinner time from 7.30pm to 11.30pm.

Pago Pago (☎ 2271 2812; Ouzounian 38; mains CY€7.50-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Put on your grass skirt and grab a pineapple and umbrella-adorned cocktail as you wait for a table. Pago Pago is located in Castelli Hotel (p69). Tahitian duck (CY€10) is recommended, as is lots of dancing to live Cuban music.

CAFÉS

Double Six Coffee Bar (☎ 2266 8998; Faneromenis; snacks CY€1.50-2, juice CY€1.50; 🍷 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) A great café decked out in smooth ebony furniture, hauled from Bali by Vassos, the owner. The atmosphere is relaxed, there are cushions to recline on and delicious fresh juices to boost your system. Try sweet Cypriot prickly pear, hydrating watermelon, or delicious kiwi juice. Breakfast on haloumi, tomato and *lountza* (pork-loin sausage) sandwiches, and a delicious cappuccino.

QUICK EATS

Nikos (Rigenis 3A; kebabs CY€3-5; 🍷 11.30am-11pm) A quick, quality kebab for a hungry, wandering traveller.

Pahit Ice (☎ 2267 7141; Ledra 120; ice cream CY€1; 🍷 noon-10pm) So many ice-cream flavours, so little time. A local ice-cream maker whose outside tables are always full of kids, families and just about anyone on the hot summer days.

New City

All the eateries in this section are found on the New City map (p58).

RESTAURANTS

Greek Cypriot Cuisine

Zoo (☎ 2275 8262; Leoforos Stasinou 15; mains CY€5-7; 🍷 9pm-1am) Great for romantic dining, the restaurant overlooks the Old City from the 4th floor, and serves a modernistic, Mediterranean menu. Laid out in chrome and steel, it has a reputation for being one of Lefkosia's better places to eat. After dinner, for a bit of indigestion, go dancing in the club downstairs (p73).

Date Club Restaurant (☎ 2237 6843; Agathonos 2; mains CY€4-6; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Flashy and a little hard to find, this place is really popular with the well-heeled of Lefkosia, including prime ministers and presidents who come for the casserole lunches. The vanilla-white interior is a little glitzy, so dress up before you come to eat here.

Kalymnos (☎ 2247 2423; Zinas Kanther 11; fish per kg CY€10-18; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A fish tavern that also attracts the Cypriot high-flyers, as well as el Presidente; it's a modest little place and the fish is to die for. There's a small bar for a pre-dinner drink.

Loukoullos (☎ 2267 1000; Florinis 8; mains CY€4-6; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The management of Cleopatra Hotel may be stuffy, but it doesn't stop its in-house restaurant from being considered one of Lefkosia's better hotel restaurants. In summer, dine on *mezedes* or European cuisine next to the pool.

Plaka Tavern (☎ 2244 6498; Plateia Arhiepiskopou Makariou 8, Engomi; meze CY€7; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) If you have plenty of time in the city and fancy a change, head west of the centre and dine at this superb little taverna. It's best visited during the summer months when dinner is served on the square. The *mezedes* are best here but be warned: there are many of them and you'll need a big appetite.

International Cuisine

Syrian Arab Friendship Club (SAFC) (☎ 2277 6246; Vassilias Amalia 17; 🍷 11am-midnight; meze CY€10) Apart from being one of the best places to eat in Lefkosia, this is the ideal place for vegetarians. The meze is massive, so approach it with respect, and if you come for lunch, you won't be eating dinner. The large garden is laden with cooling fans and greenery,

and children are welcome to play. The service here is superfriendly, and the wonderful food is an experience of its own: green beans, chick peas, *tabouleh* (bulgur-wheat and parsley salad) and plenty of meat too. Try the delicious *mahalabia* (a light, rice custard, which is served cold) dessert and, once you're so stuffed you can't move, puff on a nargileh.

Abu Faysal (☎ 2276 0353; Klimentos 31; meze CY£7; ☺ lunch & dinner) Lebanese cuisine is a gourmet's heaven, and if you want to sample or simply indulge in some fantastic Lebanese dishes, this is Lefkosia's best place. Three blocks south of the Constanza Bastion, the restaurant is an old house in a quiet backstreet with a leafy courtyard. The *mezedes* are recommended, as is a bottle of Lebanese Ksara Riesling.

Arheon Gefsis (☎ 2245 2830; Stasandrou 29; mains CY£4-8; ☺ dinner) 'The roof of all pleasures is the satisfaction of the stomach' said Epicurus (341-270 BC). The owners of this place have taken this to heart and offer up foods that the ancient Greek philosopher himself may have feasted upon. Dine on dishes featuring figs, nuts, honey, beets, chickpeas and olives.

China Spice (☎ 2287 5875; Pindarou 26; mains CY£7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) Chinese cuisine like they eat it in the posh parts of Shanghai or Hong Kong perhaps. The décor is minimalist, with black wood, white walls, and beige cushions, and a plant adorns the centre of each table. The delicious, elegantly presented dishes are prepared by nine Chinese chefs.

Finbarr's (☎ 2237 6625; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 52b; mains CY£5-7; ☺ lunch & dinner) This Irish pub (see opposite) is an up-market version of its more 'earthy' clones around the world. The menu is all Irish cuisine: either traditional, or 'fusion', such as beef-and-stout pie, or a jazzed up basil-and-chicken boxty (stuffed potato pancake).

Dragon (☎ 2259 1711; Leoforos Georgiou Griva Digeni; mains CY£6-8; ☺ lunch & dinner) If you fancy a Chinese takeaway, try this place. There is a good range of dishes, all cooked by a Chinese chef.

Kana Kai (☎ 2277 3820; Metohiou Hilonos 25; set menu for 2 CY£8.80-10.80; ☺ lunch & dinner) An intimate place close to the Old City, which does a mean Peking duck. You can order takeaway chicken dishes for around CY£4.

CAFÉS

The following places are open from 9am to 11pm.

Le Café (☎ 2275 5151; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 16; snacks CY£2-3) This is the place to be seen for everyone who's anyone in Lefkosia's fashionable elite. Witness the Prada and Gucci brigade nibble on salads, or businessmen deep in conversation on their mobiles while eating pasta dishes, as you sip your frappé. No alcohol is served.

Swiss Cottage (☎ 2243 3000; Leoforos Stasinou 31; cakes CY£1.50-2) On the corner of Theokritou close to the Old City, this place is great for late-night coffee and cake. The Swiss-trained pastry chef makes some exquisite European-style tarts and flans, but prices tend to be a little steep.

Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III is packed with cafés and bars, so for a bit of guidance, sample the following:

Da Capo (☎ 2275 7427; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 30B) The mother of all trendy Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III cafés. This is the place that started the sipping-coffee-outdoors trend. It also has wi-fi Internet points.

Mondo (☎ 2277 8044; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 9A) A spacious café and bar with an upstairs terrace, catering for all types and not only the usual plenty of lip-gloss and blonde-highlights girls, or muscle and designer-wear boys.

Café La Mode (☎ 2251 0788; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 12A) Believe it or not, Marks & Sparks hosts one of the city's most stylish cafés. Alongside delicious coffee, this place also serves rather swish food.

DRINKING

If you're about to hit the streets of Lefkosia for a night out, consider this: to really fit in, you must really dress up. Designer stuff is big here, and Lefkosia is the only place on this small island where there are any so-called 'trendies' to be found. If you're not the 'dressing-up' type or you didn't bring your Prada outfit along, well, you'll survive. But don't say you weren't warned...

From the Famagusta Gate area in the Old City, to bars alongside Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III, you can have lots of fun exploring the city through an alcoholic blur. Usually, none of the following places show signs of life before 9pm and don't close until around 2am.

Hammam (Map p60; ☎ 2276 6202; Soutsou 9) Right behind Omeriye Hammam, this heavenly old colonial house, with a grand arched door

and beautifully tiled floors, is perfect for sitting under the stars and sipping a cocktail beneath the aromatic fig tree. The music is good and the atmosphere relaxed.

Plato's (Map p60; ☎ 2266 6552; Platonas 8) Hidden inside an old house, this place feels like a jazz joint or a bistro that wouldn't be out of place in Montmartre. Beer from all over the world is served, but only to those who are respectably dressed: no shorts or T-shirts allowed (miniskirts are OK, though).

Bastione (Map p60; ☎ 2243 3101; Leoforos Athinas 6) A neat little bar built into the wall next to Famagusta Gate, catering mainly for an older crowd wanting a quiet drink.

Ithiki (Map p60; ☎ 2243 4193; Leoforos N Foka 33) This popular street-bar is on the corner of Leoforos N Fokas and Thiseos, with funk music and keen-to-party Lefkosians.

Odos Othellou (Map p60; Othellou 1) A gorgeous little house, one block west and just away from the main drag, this is a haven for a quiet drink under the stars. It serves great food too (p70).

Erotiko (Map p60; ☎ 2234 8111; Athinas 2-3) Although it's by Famagusta Gate, this place feels and looks like a beach bar. There's loud house music, the garden is surrounded by bamboo fences, and the crowd is young and jolly (although not wearing bikinis).

Sfinakia (Map p58; ☎ 2276 6661; Santaraza 2) In the New City, Sfinakia is a popular, buzzing preclub bar that packs in a crowd of people-watchers and posers.

Finbarr's (Map p58; ☎ 2237 6625; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 52b; pint of Guinness CY£2.70) Posh Lefkosians check each other out, while some expats drink Guinness and Caffrey's and chill with a newspaper or a magazine. There is a 'happy hour' from 4.30pm to 8pm.

Kyklos Café (Map p60; ☎ 2266 9998; 36 Ippokratous; nargileh CY£3.50) A great place for the gap-year crowd and backpackers who want to chat to their mates, smoke lots of nargileh (the really *in* thing to do), and play backgammon 'til late.

ENTERTAINMENT

For listings, particularly for classical-music concerts and the theatre, pick up *Nicosia This Month* and the *Diary of Events* pamphlets, available from the CTO. Note that some events may not be listed in the latter publication as this goes to print several months before the events take place.

Nightclubs

Zoo (Map p58; ☎ 2275 8262; Stasinou 15) Under the Zoo restaurant (p71), Zoo club is the embodiment of style and sophistication on Lefkosia's club scene (although its '70s 'flower power parties' put a bit of a bluish on that image). The music ranges from international to Greek pop.

Red (Map p60; ☎ 2276 7711; Dionysou 15) A live-music venue and nightclub in a former warehouse with a great atmosphere and eclectic music choices, such as R&B, Greek pop, and trance.

Club Cilo (Map p58; ☎ 2276 0061; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 52) Garage on Friday, house on Saturday; great for after some drinks at Finbarr's Irish pub, which is next door.

Live Music

Lefkosia occasionally hosts classical-music concerts; the best way to find out about them is to look in the local press. Other than this, watch for posters or drop by the Lefkosia Municipal Theatre box office (p74), diagonally opposite the Cyprus Museum on Leoforos Mouseiou, or visit Virgin Records (p74).

The best way to get to see and hear some traditional music is to head for any of the restaurants offering live music in Laiki Yitonia. Otherwise keep your eyes peeled for posters over the summer advertising visiting musicians from Greece.

Concerts are commonly held at the **Skali Aglantzias** (www.aglantzia.com) outdoor venue in Aglantzia and the **Scholi Tyflon** (School for the Blind) outdoor theatre near the southern suburb of Dasoupolis.

If you're keen, get in touch with promoters **Papadopoulos & Schinis Productions** (☎ 2537 2855; schinis@cytanet.com.cy) for interesting upcoming events.

Cinemas

K-Cineplex (☎ 2235 5824; www.kcineplex.com; Makedonitissis 8; ☺ 5-10.30pm) The best cinema experience to hit Lefkosia, 2.5km out of the city in Strovolos. Sporting multiple screens, K-Cineplex runs all the latest-release movies and provides movie-goers with ample parking, a cafeteria and hi-tech sight-and-sound systems.

There are a number of other cinemas scattered around Lefkosia that show varying permutations on the latest films and sometimes reruns of English-language movies. Foreign-language films are subtitled in Greek.

Among these cinemas (all on the New City map, p58) are the following:

Opera 1 & 2 (☎ 2266 5305; Hristodoulou Sozou 9)

Palace Cinemas (Zina Pallas; ☎ 2267 4128; Theofanous Theodotou 18)

Pantheon 1, 2 & 3 (☎ 2267 5787; Diagorou 29)

Admission to K-Cineplex is normally around CY€3 per person; other cinemas are slightly cheaper.

Theatre

There is a thriving local theatre scene. However, plays performed in Lefkosia are almost always in Greek.

Theatre Workshop of the University of Cyprus (thepak; Map p60; ☎ 2243 4801) Regularly puts on good shows at its little theatre close to the Green Line northwest of Famagusta Gate.

Theatro Ena (Map p60; ☎ 2234 8203; Leoforos Athinas 4) Also try this theatre in the Old City for any productions that may meet your linguistic needs.

Lefkosia Municipal Theatre (Map p60; ☎ 2246 3028; Leoforos Mouseiou 4) Opposite the Cyprus Museum. At the handy box office you can find flyers for all upcoming events – musical as well as theatrical – and buy your tickets.

Sport

Football (soccer) is the main spectator sport in Lefkosia. The football season is from September to May. Check out **Takis-on-Line** (http://soccer.kypros.org/cyprus_links.htm) for the lowdown on the nation's teams. The 16-times champion, APOEL Nicosia, held the top place for many years. The city is also home to clubs Omonia and Olympiakos.

Nicosia Race Club (Map p58; ☎ 2278 2727; www.nicosiaraceclub.com.cy; Grigoriou Afentiu 10-12) In the western suburb of Agios Dometios, this club caters for keen horse punters. Meets are normally held on Wednesdays and Sundays in winter and Wednesdays and Saturdays in summer, starting at 4pm.

SHOPPING

With its army of designer babes around, it's no wonder that Lefkosia rules when it comes to clothes shopping. The so-called 'discount stores' offer clothes and shoes at 30% to 80% off their original price, and many a Lefkosian can be found elbowing their way to the best bargain. Join them if you have the time and energy, so that

you can return home with a new outfit and boast about your bargain-spotting skills.

Otherwise, there are two main shopping areas. Ledra street in the Old City has lots of old-style shoe and clothes shops, and it's home to the swish Ermes department store. Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III in the New City is a mecca for chain-stores, which are not always the best value (the prices are not converted into Cyprus pounds in some British chains, so they end up being more expensive). Tourist shops tend to be centred on Laïki Yitonia and generally sell all the same things as any other tourist shops around the island at the same high prices.

Cyprus Handicrafts Centre (☎ 2230 5024; Athalassis 186; ☎ 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Thu) Get your Cypriot lace and embroideries here at decent prices, as well as leather ware, mosaics, ceramics and pottery. Even better, watch these products being made at various workshops.

Ermes (Map p60; ☎ 2244 7801; Shakolas Tower, Ledra) The former Woolworths is a classy department store selling anything from food and cosmetics to clothes and stationery.

Virgin Records (Map p60; ☎ 2276 1190; Arnaldas 8) A place that music-lovers might want to head for, just off Leoforos Stasinou near the D'Avila Bastion. Here you can get all the latest Greek and non-Greek releases as well as buy tickets for the many music acts that come to Lefkosia in the summer.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lefkosia's international airport is in the UN buffer zone and is no longer a functioning airport. All air passengers for Lefkosia will arrive at Larnaka airport in the South.

Most airlines that serve the Republic of Cyprus have offices or representatives in Lefkosia:

Alitalia (Map p60; ☎ 2267 4500; www.alitalia.com; Leoforos Evagorou 1 54-58)

British Airways (Map p58; ☎ 2276 1166; www.britishairways.com; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 52a)

Cyprus Airways (Map p58; ☎ 2275 1996; www.cyprusairways.com; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 50)

KLM (Map p58; ☎ 2267 1616; www.klm.com; Zinas Kanther 12)

Lufthansa (Map p58; ☎ 2287 3330; www.lufthansa.com; nr Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III & Leoforos Evagorou I)

Olympic Airlines (Map p60; ☎ 2267 2101; www.olympic-airways.com; Leoforos Omirou 17)

Bus

There are many private companies operating out of Lefkosia. Most buses depart from one of three areas (Map p60): Plateia Solomou, abutting the Tripoli Bastion; Leonidou near the corner of Leoforos Stasinou; and the bus lot next to the Constanza Bastion, 700m further east.

Other services have their own departure points.

Agia Napa & Paralimni

Eman Buses (☎ 2372 1321; Constanza Bastion) One bus at 3pm Monday to Friday to Agia Napa (CY€2.50, one hour).

PEAL Bus Co (☎ 2382 1318; Leoforos Stasinou 27) Runs a bus at 1.30pm Monday to Friday to Paralimni and Protaras via Agia Napa (CY€2.50, 1½ hours).

Larnaka

Intercity Buses Co (☎ 2266 5814; Plateia Solomou) Six buses run Monday to Friday and two on Saturday (CY€1.50, 45 minutes).

Lemesos

Alepa Buses (☎ 9962 5027; Plateia Solomou) There are two buses a day (2.45pm and 3.45pm, one hour) on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and one at 12.45pm on Wednesday and Saturday (CY€2, one hour).

Intercity Buses Co (☎ 2266 5814; Plateia Solomou) Seven buses run Monday to Friday and two on Saturday (CY€1.50, one hour).

Pafos

Alepa Buses (☎ 9962 5027; Plateia Solomou) There is a service at 3.45pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (CY€3, 1½ hours) and at 12.45pm on Wednesday and Saturday (CY€3, 1½ hours).

Nea Amoroza (☎ 2693 6822; Plateia Solomou) A bus runs at 6.30am from Monday to Friday via Lemesos and at 7am on Saturday (CY€3, 1½ hours).

Solis (☎ 2266 6388; Plateia Solomou) A minibus runs at noon Monday to Saturday (CY€5, 1½ hours).

Troödos

Clarios Bus Co (☎ 2275 3234; Constanza Bastion) Has a bus to Troödos at 11.30am Monday to Friday (CY€1.50, one hour) and up to 12 buses a day in summer to Kakopetria (CY€1.20).

Kambos Buses (Leonidou) Runs a bus to Kykkos Monastery at noon Monday to Saturday (CY€1.90).

Pedoulas-Platres Bus (☎ 9961 8865, 2295 2437; Leonidou 34) Runs a bus at 12.15pm Monday to Saturday to Pedoulas and Platres (CY€2). The Saturday bus doesn't continue to Platres.

Car & Motorcycle

Traffic approaching Lefkosia tends to come from either the Troödos Massif to the west, or Larnaka and Lemesos in the south. The Larnaka-Lemesos motorway ends fairly abruptly on the outskirts of Lefkosia about 6km south of the Old City. By following the extension of the motorway into the city centre, you will eventually reach Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III, the main thoroughfare in the New City. Traffic from Troödos will enter the city along Leoforos Georgiou Griva Digeni.

Parking is most easily found at the large car parks abutting the city bastions, to the right of Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III, or to your left if you approach from the Troödos. The most convenient one for new arrivals is the large lot between the D'Avila and Constanza Bastions on Leoforos Stasinou. Parking costs a minimum of CY€0.30 for two hours. Buy a ticket from the machine and display it on the inside of your windscreen.

Getting out of Lefkosia is made easy by the prominent signs all along Leoforos Stasinou. Be wary, however, of the many one-way streets and the numerous on-street parking restrictions. Avoid the peak period of 11am to 1pm on weekdays when traffic can be very slow.

Service Taxi

All service-taxi destinations are handled by **Travel & Express** (Map p60; ☎ 7777 7474; Municipal Parking Place, Leoforos Salaminos) just next to the Podocataro Bastion. Rates are CY€4.50 to Lemesos (1½ hours), CY€3.50 to Larnaka (45 minutes to one hour) and CY€9 to Pafos (2½ hours). Although Travel & Express will pick you up at an appointed time from anywhere in urban Lefkosia, delays of up to 30 minutes are the norm. Be prepared and leave at least an hour extra if you're getting a service taxi to the airport.

Passengers boarding at the Podocataro Bastion will usually spend up to 30 minutes picking up other passengers before actually departing Lefkosia. Service taxis deliver passengers to both Larnaka and Pafos airports.

Things have changed significantly when it comes to crossing into the North. Crossing via the Ledra Palace Hotel, as a pedestrian, is hassle-free. To take a rented car,

or indeed a car of your own, refer to the boxed text *The Elusive Insurance*, p175. Otherwise, the easiest thing to do, if you have luggage and don't want to walk, is to get a taxi to take you anywhere in the North. Most drivers should be happy to do this, but if one refuses, try another. A journey from Lefkosia to North Nicosia should cost anywhere between CY€10 and CY€15, and a journey from Lefkosia to Kyrenia should be no more than CY€25. Also, most taxi drivers who go to the North regularly will have the visa leaflet that you will need to fill out. For more info, see the boxed text *Crossing the Thin Green Line*, p235.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

There is no public or airline transport between Lefkosia and Larnaka or Pafos airports. You can, however, take a service taxi to either airports, but do make sure you leave at least an hour for your journey, as picking up and dropping off the other passengers can take a long time. This applies particularly to those flying from Pafos airport, because passengers travelling from Lefkosia to Pafos with a service taxi have to change in Lemesos, which can sometimes include a wait of around 30 minutes.

A service taxi to Larnaka airport will cost around CY€3.50, and around CY€9 to Pafos airport.

Bus

The urban bus station is at Plateia Solomou. **Lefkosia Buses** (☎ 2266 5814) operates numerous routes to and from the city and suburbs. Because most of the major sites and hotels are within walking distance of each other, urban buses are of limited use.

Car & Motorcycle

At Plateia Solomou is the urban bus station, **A Petsas & Sons** (Map p60; ☎ 2246 2650) where you can hire cars. There are no bicycles for rent in or around the Old City.

Taxi

There is a large taxi stand on Plateia Eleftherias (Map p60). Some local taxi companies: **Apostrati** (☎ 2266 3358; Plateia Eleftherias) **Elpis** (☎ 2276 4966; Leoforos Arhiepiskopou Makariou III 63c) **Ethniko** (☎ 2266 0880; Plateia Solomou)

AROUND LEFKOSIA

The plain of the Mesaoria (which means 'between two mountains') is a sprawling, parched landscape during the summer months, when the land is totally exposed to the relentless sun. But come spring and winter, the Mesaoria, like most of Cyprus, transforms into a green, fertile plain. The two mountain ranges surrounding the plain are the Kyrenia (Girne) Range to the north and the Troödos Massif to the south. For the visitor wanting to explore the Mesaoria, there are a couple of ancient archaeological sites and a sprinkling of churches and monasteries. Note that for some of the churches and monasteries, you need to be in a group to be of any interest to those with the keys to unlock the buildings.

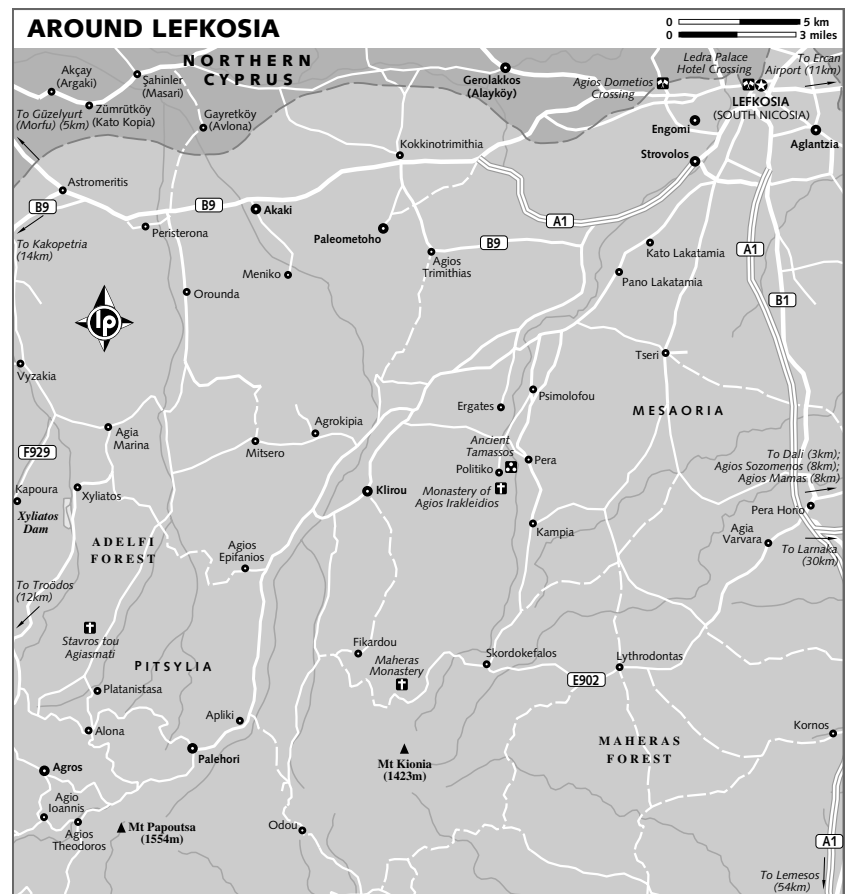
Getting There & Around

A car will be necessary to see some of the sites listed in this section. While public buses (often colourful and old-fashioned) connect most of the Mesaoria villages with Lefkosia, they're basically scheduled to service workers and schoolchildren, and not curious travellers, so will be of limited use. Generally, you'll need your own transport here, but if you have the time and patience you should be able to get around, perhaps fitfully, by hitching. Locals hitch fairly regularly and you might find it an interesting diversion to pick up someone yourself, if you have your own wheels. However, bear in mind the dangers of hitching; see p242 for more.

Cycling in the area is easy because of the mostly gentle gradients, but it is not recommended: the weather gets very hot in summer and the traffic on the main highways to Troödos can be heavy and dangerous.

ANCIENT TAMASSOS

Homer mentioned **Ancient Tamassos** (admission CY€0.75; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun) in *The Odyssey*, where it is referred to as Temese. The goddess Athena says to Odysseus' son, Telemachus: 'We are bound for the foreign port of Temese with a cargo of gleaming iron, which we intend to trade for copper.' The site of this otherwise obscure and little-known city kingdom is on a small hillside about 17km southwest of Lefkosia next to the village of Politiko. Tamassos' main claim



to fame was its seemingly endless supply of copper – the mineral from which the name of Cyprus (Kypros in Greek; Kıbrıs in Turkish) is derived. A copper-producing settlement here dates from at least the 7th century BC, and production of copper ran well into the Hellenistic period. Excavations of the remains of the citadel began in 1889, and two tombs dating back to the 6th century BC were discovered. Today these two tombs constitute the site's major attraction, as the citadel itself is little more than a scattering of nondescript foundations.

The tombs probably contained the remains of the citadel's kings. Looters have long since spirited away the rich burial treasures that may once have been buried here.

A hole in the roof of the larger tomb shows where grave robbers broke in. The walls are unusually carved in such a way as to imitate wood – a feature that some archaeologists have linked to a possible Anatolian influence at the time of the citadel's zenith. Some theorists suggest that Tamassos was even part of the Hittite Empire.

MONASTERY OF AGIOS IRAKLEIDIOS

Easily combined with an excursion to Tamassos is a visit to the nearby **Monastery of Agios Irakleidios** (☎ groups 9am-noon Mon, Tue & Thu). St Irakleidios was born in Tamassos and guided St Paul and St Barnabas around Cyprus. He was later made one of the first bishops in Cyprus by Barnabas. The bishop has been

subsequently attributed with performing a number of miracles, including exorcisms.

The original church was built in the 5th century AD, but the current monastic buildings date from the late 18th century. The church today boasts the usual panoply of frescoes and icons. On a table to the eastern side of the church you can spot a reliquary containing one of the bones and the skull of St Irakleidios.

AGIOS MAMAS CHURCH AT AGIOS SOZOMENOS

This is the somewhat forgotten site of the 16th-century Gothic church of **Agios Mamas**, whose arches were never finished in the first place; it's like an exercise in nonstarters. Perhaps that's why the beautiful arches have a sense of nostalgia about them. The church was built in retrograde Lusignan style and, although the site is locked and cannot be entered, the arches, the nave, and two aisles can be easily seen and admired. The isolated ruins are in the deserted mud-village of Agios Sozomenos, an area that has been abandoned since some intercommunal incidents in 1964.

The church and village can be reached from Lefkosia on the A1, taking exit 6 (for Potamia), and going on to a minor, paved road about 2km before Potamia, following a sign for Agios Sozomenos.

MAHERAS MONASTERY MONH TOY MAXAIPA

It's a fair hike out to the sprawling **Maheras Monastery** (☎ 9am-noon Mon, Tue & Thu), perched in the foothills of the eastern spur of the Troödos Massif and under the all-seeing radar installation on Mt Kionia (1423m) to the southwest. The Maheras Monastery was founded in a similar way to the Kykkos Monastery (p110). In 1148 a hermit named Neophytos found an icon guarded by a sword (*maheras* means knife or sword in Greek) in a cave near the site of the present monastery. The monastery developed around the icon and flourished over time. Nothing remains of the original structures; the current building dates from around 1900.

The monastery is a popular outing for Cypriots who come as much for the cooler climate as for spiritual enlightenment. There is a small cafeteria in the grounds, and pilgrims may stay overnight. One less spiritually

inspired visitor was Grigoris Afxentios during the EOKA uprising of 1955–59. The fearless EOKA leader hid out in a cave just below the monastery, but was eventually tracked down and killed by British soldiers in 1957. A huge black statue of the hero now looms over a commemorative shrine.

The monastery is open for visits by groups of parishioners only at certain times. Ask locally or perhaps at the CTO in Lefkosia on how you might join one of these groups, which will mostly consist of Cypriot pilgrims. Visits should be conducted with reverence and solemnity. Maheras Monastery is best approached via Klirou and Fikardou, since the alternate route via Pera and the E902, while very pretty, is winding and tortuously slow.

Drivers up this way might look out for the Skordokefalos picnic area east of the Maheras Monastery.

MESAORIA VILLAGES

Renting a car and driving around the Mesaoria is a good way to see the area's villages, but keep in mind that roads tend to fan out haphazardly along roughly defined valleys and ravines, and cross from one valley to another. The journey can therefore be slow as the roads are narrow and winding. So-called 'safari' tours often take travellers to see some of the villages of the Mesaoria as part of a wider tour around Cyprus.

One of the more popular villages is **Pera** (population 1020), a couple of kilometres from Tamassos. While there are no specific sights here, Pera is nonetheless pretty. A stroll through the cobbled backstreets leads photographers to some particularly captivating scenes: old houses covered in bougainvillea, ancient stone jars, pretty doors and cats on walls, the stuff that postcards of rural idyllic scenes are made of. Visitors stop at the *kafeneio* (coffee shop) for refreshments, while the locals and often the village priest sip coffee and engage in gossip in a world where time means little.

The villages of **Orounda** (population 660) and **Peristerona** (population 2100), west of Lefkosia, both have interesting and photogenic churches. The village of **Lythrodontas** (population 2620), 25km south of Lefkosia, is a cool, get-away-from-it-all kind of place.

The postcard-pretty village of **Fikardou** (population 6) is close to the Maheras

Monastery (opposite), and visits to both are easily combined. Fikardou is the 'official' village in a clutch of well-preserved villages in the eastern Troödos Massif. Its Ottoman-period houses with wooden balconies are a visual relief after the cement structures of many modern Troödos mountain villages. That said, there's not a lot to Fikardou and few people live here permanently.

The central strip is no more than a few hundred metres long, and photo opportunities are frustratingly elusive. Most visitors (many on Troödos 'safari') content themselves with sitting idly at the village's café-cum-restaurant while awaiting the next move. Still, if you are in the region, a visit is recommended since there are few places left in Cyprus that retain at least a tenuous architectural link with the past.

From these villages, roads lead in various ways to the higher reaches of the Troödos, via the Pitsylia region, offering a slow but scenic route into the mountains. This option is particularly useful on weekends when Lefkosians in their hundreds storm the Troödos via the main B9 road (through Astromeritis and Kakopetria) for picnics and a day out in order to escape the city heat.

You will find a tavern or restaurant in most villages and even in out-of-the-way places along the road. Many Lefkosians

come to the country to eat on weekends and usually have their favourite haunts. Advertised widely around **Agia Marina** (population 630) is **Katoí** (☎ 2285 2576; Agia Marina Xyliatou; mains €€5-7), overlooking the village itself. Its lights are visible from afar at night and it commands a great view over the Troödos foothills and the Mesaoria. The restaurant serves solid Cypriot staples and a pretty imaginative selection of *mezedes*.

Around here, you can have some pleasant picnics at picnic grounds, usually situated in cool and leafy spots. Try the **Xyliatos Dam** near the village of the same name, or **Kapoura** on a picturesque back road (F929) linking Vyzakia with the B9, or even high up in the Maheras Forest south of Pera, at **Skordokefalos** along the E902 that leads to the Maheras Monastery. All picnic grounds in this area have barbecue areas, tables, chairs and, most importantly, shade.

Agrotourist lodgings are your best bet for accommodation in the Mesaoria, although there is really only one place that serves the region. Close to the Maheras Forest, **Avli Georgallidi** (☎ 2265 5100; www.yourcyprus.com/agro-tourism/lythrodontas.htm; Markou Drakou 3; tw €€20, ste for up to 5 people €€38) is situated in the village of Lythrodontas. It can sleep up to 14 people in self-contained rooms and has a courtyard, phones, central heating and log fires.

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