

Troödos Massif



For a small country, the variety of landscape in Cyprus is sometimes quite astounding. And the Troödos Massif, holding up the country's highest peak, Mt Olympus, like a proud beacon, offers the perfect antidote to the hot, lazy life of the beach. When temperatures in the high thirties blister the backs of the tourists and parch the island's soil, the atmosphere in the Troödos relieves and refreshes even the most heat-muddled mind. Cool shade and the smell of the tall pines beckon many Cypriots, who spend their summer holidays in the lap of the mountain. And, come winter, they take up their skis and submit themselves to gravity and snow (sometimes with entertaining effects).

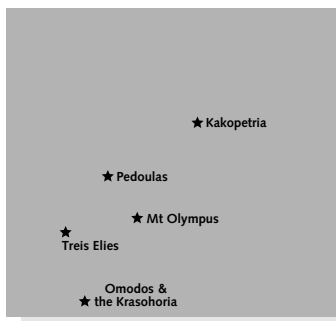
But it hasn't always been an area for frolicking in the shade or snow. Over the years, the mountains have provided refuge to religious communities and various underground fighters on the run, as well as the wealthy of the Levant and the colonial civil servants who also tried to get away from the heat. And in their wake, they left magnificent frescoed village churches, unexpected mansions and some quite bizarre museums. But what has also remained, thanks to Troödos' mountain remoteness, is the essence of Cypriot life, most often undisturbed (or, at least, not as disturbed) by the rampaging tourist industry.

Visiting the Troödos during the summer is great for hiking and cycling, simple relaxing, and visiting the frescoed churches and monasteries that date from at least the 15th century. The churches' magnificent frescoes are unique in Cyprus.

Driving is a good way to see all of the little villages, and the roads, although windy, are good. Apart from services to and from the villages of Kakopetria, Troödos, Platres and Pedoulas, public transport to the Troödos is sketchy at best and cannot be relied upon for properly exploring the area.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get divine inspiration at the Unesco World Heritage-listed **Byzantine churches** (p100)
- Breathe fresh air while **hiking** (p101) and **cycling** (p102) the green spaces in the shadow of Mt Olympus and explore the region's natural beauty
- Stay in some of the island's most authentic accommodation and get a taste of Cyprus' rural life in villages like **Treis Elies** (p106), **Kakopetria** (p111) and **Pedoulas** (p108)
- Sample away at the **krasohoria** (p107), the wine-producing villages on the southern Troödos slopes



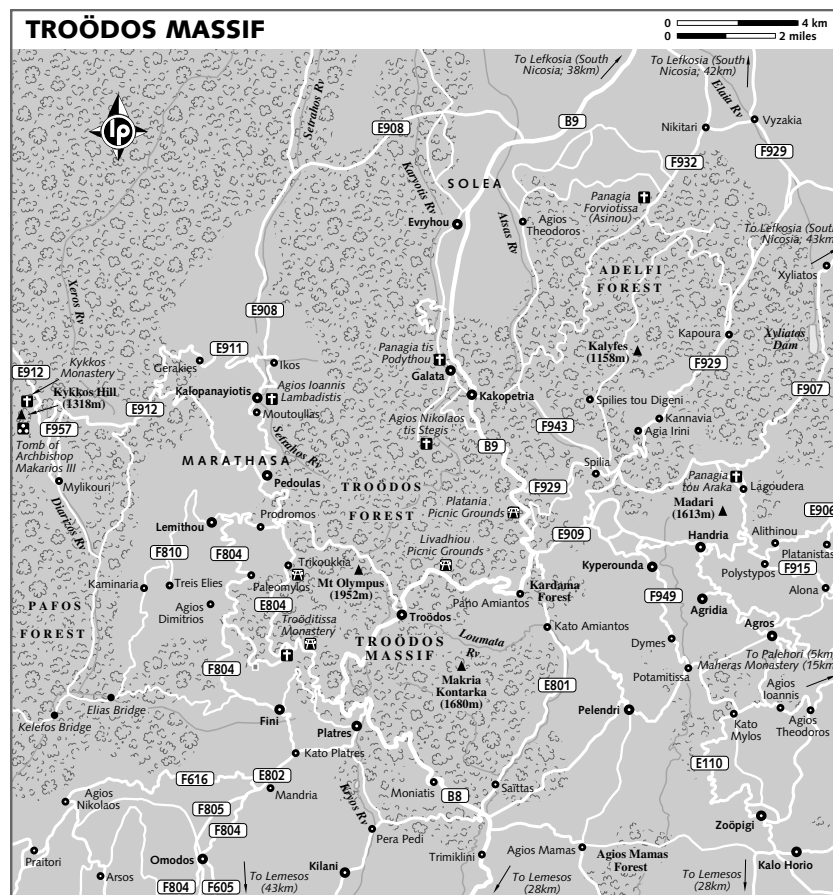
CENTRAL TROÖDOS ΚΕΝΤΡΙΚΟ ΤΡΟΟΔΟΣ

Mt Olympus sits at the top of the central Troödos region, watching over settlements, ski runs, hiking trails and picnic grounds. The peak itself is inaccessible, but you can admire the gigantic golf ball balanced on top, which might look like a loving tribute to the great golfing nations but is in fact a military radar installation.

From January to the beginning of March you can usually ski on the slopes of 1952m-high Mt Olympus, known in Greek as Hionistra.

Troödos village itself is a bit of a non-entity, but it's the centre for all skiing and hiking activities. Although it is cooler up on the Troödos than on the plains, hiking is probably best undertaken in spring or autumn, when there is no summer heat haze and the superb views can be better appreciated.

This area consists primarily of two settlements: Troödos village, just below the summit of Olympus; and the larger village of Platres (sometimes Pano Platres on maps), 10km further down the southern slope. Central Troödos can be reached by way of a reasonably fast road from Lemesos (the B8) or by the B9 up the mountain's northern flanks from Lefkosia.



TROÖDOS MASSIF

TROÖDOS MASSIF

THE FRESCOED BYZANTINE CHURCHES OF CYPRUS

For many people, the main reason for visiting the Troödos region is a series of remarkable small churches that were built and decorated with vivid frescoes between the 11th and 15th centuries. These are the frescoed churches of Cyprus and 10 of them have been designated by Unesco as World Heritage sites. The churches covered in this chapter are Arhangelos Mihail (p108), Agios Ionnis Lambadistis Monastery (p109), Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis (p112), Panagia tis Podythou (p113), Panagia Forviotissa (Asinou; p113), Stavros tou Agiasmatis (p115) and Panagia tou Araka (p115).

By the time the French Catholic Lusignan dynasty took control of Cyprus in 1197, work on a series of small churches in the mountains had already begun. But it was the repression and discrimination exercised by the Lusignans against the Orthodox Greek Cypriots that prompted the Orthodox clergy, along with artisans and builders, to retreat to the northern slopes of the Troödos Massif. Here they built and embellished private ecclesiastical retreats where Orthodoxy flourished undisturbed for some 300 years.

What came out of this activity were many churches built in a similar fashion. Most were little bigger than small barns; some had domes, some did not. Because of the harsh winter weather, large, steeply inclined, overhanging roofs were added to protect the churches from accumulated snow. Inside, skilled fresco painters went to work producing a series of vivid images.

Not all churches were lavishly painted, but the Unesco-designated churches described in this chapter represent the finest examples. The frescoes are remarkable for their clarity of detail and the preservation of their colour. The later didactic-style frescoes are unusual in that they are painted almost like a cartoon strip, ostensibly to teach the illiterate peasants of the time the rudiments of the gospels.

You would need at least two days to visit all the churches, bearing in mind that a lot of time will be spent in tracking down caretakers, as a number of churches are kept locked. Donations of CY€0.50 to CY€1 are appreciated and generally expected. You'll need a car to visit most of the churches, as public transport in the area is scarce.

Central Troödos can also be accessed from the east (Pitsylia) and from the west (Pafos and the Pafos hinterland) by good but often winding and slow roads. At peak times, such as Sunday evenings, traffic can be very heavy on the roads to the coast or Lefkosia.

TROÖDOS ΤΡΟΟΔΟΣ

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With its souvenir shops, restaurants and scattered public buildings, Troödos may look like an improvised main street. Yet it draws multitudes of activity-seeking tourists, who flock to this central mountain town for the hiking trails, and for skiing in the winter months, when Troödos becomes the Cypriot centre of all snow-related activity. There are also enough forest roads and trails to keep even the most fanatic mountain biker happy for a week.

But don't expect any wild nights in Troödos (apart from being chased by a wild boar perhaps). Everyone is so tired after the day's activities that, come midnight, they are snuggled up in bed.

Orientation

From Troödos, one road leads north towards Lefkosia, while another heads west to Prodromos and further afield. The third approach road, to Lemesos and Platres, goes south. There are plenty of road signs, some of them totally confusing. Troödos itself centres around the little main square with its restaurants and souvenir shops, and the visitor centre, which sits to the south of the square. The Jubilee Hotel and HI Hostel are to the north, as are the skiing facilities.

Information

The town has a small store with a post office agency, and there are several prominent old UK-style phone boxes.

It's really worth visiting the **Troödos Visitor Centre** (☎ 2542 0144; admission CY€0.50; 🕒 10am-4pm), just down from the Troödos main street. Although the display of stuffed animals is a little eerie, the graphic outline of the region is rather informative and there is good information on the fauna and flora of the Troödos National Forest Park. There is also a minitheatre where a 10-minute video

is shown to visitors. Do go on the 300m botanical and geological trail that runs around the centre. It displays examples of all the plants that grow in the region, although in high summer most of them are either dead or simply twigs.

You can pick up information on the Troödos hiking trails here too.

Activities

HIKING

The following four trails give you a good overall picture of the Troödos. Many of the trees and plants you pass are marked with their Latin and Greek names, and there are frequent wooden benches conveniently positioned beneath shady trees to allow you

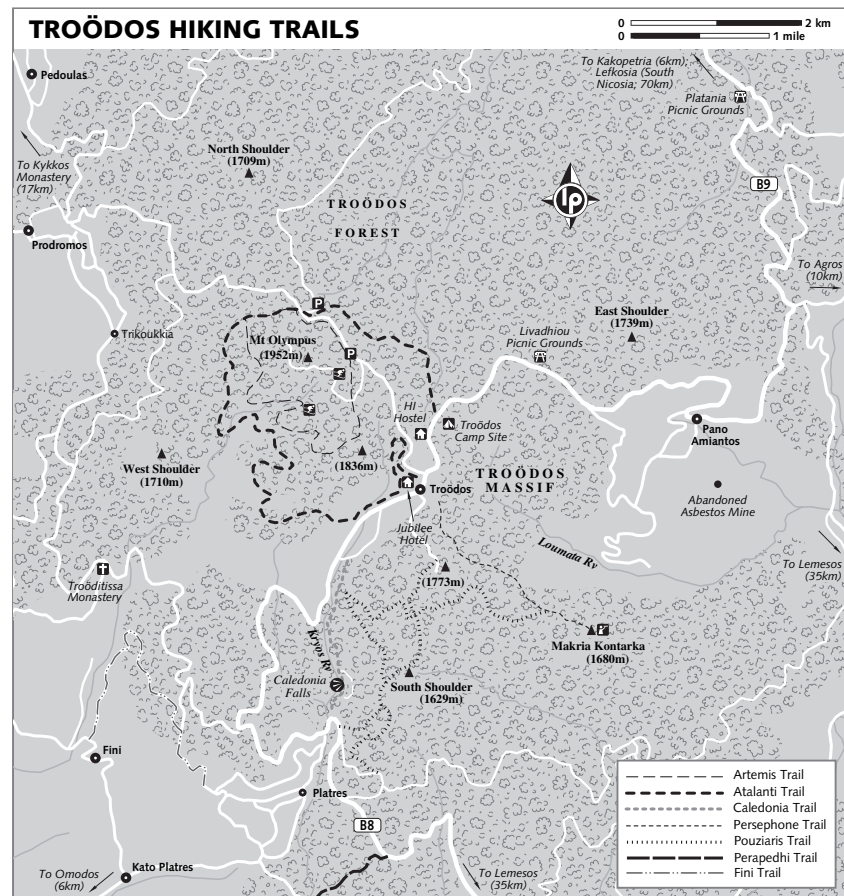
to catch your breath or simply to admire the views.

A useful booklet published by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO), *Nature Trails of the Troödos*, outlines all the trails and gives a description of the flora and natural features to be found along the way. Detailed, though not professional, maps of the trails accompany the text.

Artemis Trail

Of the four trails, this is the one that you should perhaps tackle first. It is the newest of the trails and takes you around the summit of Mt Olympus in a more or less circular loop.

The trail begins and ends at a little car park off the Mt Olympus summit road; it's



better to get there by car to avoid the 1.5km walk along the often busy highway. A sign directs you to walk clockwise, though there is no reason why you should not tackle it anticlockwise. The end of the trail is unmarked and on the opposite side of the Mt Olympus summit road.

The complete walk should take 2½ to 3½ hours, allowing for stops along the way. It is 7km long with very little climbing. The track runs alternately through partly shaded and open areas, and the views on the south side of the mountain, over the foothills, are spectacular indeed. Look out for signs to the **giant pine trees**. Take care not to lose the trail around the ski runs on the south and north sides. There is no water along the route so take your own supplies.

Atalanti Trail

This trail is for people who like walking. Starting at the square in Troödos, it involves a fair hike along the main Prodomos–Troödos road to get back to the village. The Atalanti Trail, named in honour of the ancient forest nymph, runs at a lower altitude than the Artemis Trail but follows roughly the same route. It is relatively easy going and is well marked. There is a spring with drinking water some 3km from the trail's beginning.

The views are not as spectacular as those from the Artemis Trail higher up but it is a most enjoyable walk. Allow five hours for this 12km walk.

Caledonia Trail

The 3km Caledonia Trail is perhaps the most enjoyable of the four Troödos trails. It begins about 1km or so down the hill from Troödos and conveniently ends up near the Psilo Dendro Restaurant (p105), just outside Platres. The trail follows the course of the **Kryos** river – in reality a gurgling stream – as it winds its way down a thickly wooded, shady valley to Platres. There are many stream crossings via stepping stones and makeshift log bridges, and the trail is steep in parts. It's best tackled from north to south (Troödos to Platres) as it drops some 450m throughout its course. About 1km from the trail's southern end are the **Caledonia Falls**, a 35m drop of cascading water. The trail is shaded for the most part (great for those really scorching

days) and is well marked. You can return the way you came or arrange to be picked up in Platres. If you have a car, leave it at the Platres end and hitch a lift up the hill to the starting point. You can also try using the local bus service (make a booking), although times may be inconvenient. Allow 1½ to two hours for a comfortable hike.

Persephone Trail

This is probably the easiest trail to undertake if you are based in Troödos without transport. Known in Greek as the **Makria Kontarka Trail** (named after the mountain it ascends), it is a simple out-and-back hike through attractive pine forest and some open areas. The trail is 3km long and it should take you about 45 minutes to reach the **lookout** at the top of Makria Kontarka, the end point of the walk. From here you can gaze out over the southern foothills or, if you look to your left, you will see the enormous scar caused by the now closed asbestos mine at Pano Amiantos. The marked trail begins opposite the Troödos police station. From the main street, walk south along the narrow road heading upward to the left and you will quickly find the trail after about 200m.

CYCLING

Mountain bikers have a choice of forest tracks to ride along. A *Cycling Routes* booklet, with detailed information on bike tracks in Troödos and around the island, is available at the visitor centre and any CTO office. Bicycles can be rented at the **Jubilee Hotel** (☎ 2542 0107), 350m from the village along the Prodomos road, for CY£10 a day and CY£5 a half-day. There is nowhere for repairs and spare parts, so have a basic repair kit with you.

HORSE RIDING

The small horse-riding outfit next to the public toilets on the south side of the village is best if you want to give your kids a little introduction to riding, or if you don't expect any galloping chases. Choose between a 10-minute escorted ride around Troödos for CY£3, or go wild and have yourself a 20- to 25-minute ride for CY£5.

PICNICKING

Having a picnic is a wonderful way of spending the day here. You can set up almost anywhere, but bear in mind that lighting open

fires is not allowed, so a picnic ground is the best solution if you wish to join Cypriots in grilling chops or spit-roasting some *kontosoufli* (large chunks of lamb).

Fortunately, there are plenty of well-organised picnic grounds on the approach roads to the Troödos summit. A particularly good picnic ground is the **Livadi tou Pasha**, 3km down the Troödos–Lefkosia road (B9) on the left, thankfully before you reach the ghastly sight of the former Pano Amiantos asbestos mine. There is a barbecue area, and fixed benches and tables are scattered among the pine trees.

Further along the Lefkosia road, about 8km from Troödos, is the very popular **Platania** (Plane Trees) picnic ground. This place gets inundated with weekend revelers, but is well organised and has plenty of shaded facilities, including a children's adventure park. Get there early if you want a good position.

Sleeping & Eating

Jubilee Hotel (☎ 2542 0107; jubilee@cytanet.com.cy; s/d CY£30.50/53, 6-12 yrs/under 6 yrs half-price/free) A surprisingly stylish and elegant hotel, 350m from the village along the Prodomos road. Outside the hotel there are deck chairs for reclining and enjoying the fresh air. Inside is a soothing lounge in dark wood, decorated with shadow puppets and furnished with inviting armchairs. The rooms are comfortable and cosy, and there is central heating in the winter. A family-friendly place, this is probably not suitable for those looking for peace and quiet during the holiday season.

Camp site (☎ 2242 1624; tent sites CY£2; ☹ May–Oct) A kilometre or so north of Troödos along the Lefkosia road and in a pine forest, this good camp site is a really popular spot with many Cypriots, who come here to relax and escape the beach crowds. There is an on-site restaurant and a minimarket.

HI Hostel (☎ 2542 0200; dm 1st/subsequent nights CY£5/4; ☹ usually May–Oct) If you'd like a cheap indoor place to sleep, the Troödos hostel, with its 10 bunk beds, is your best bet. It's airy and clean and there's a big common area with a kitchen. Ignore the conflicting signposting in Troödos village; the hostel is set back 200m on the left as you head down the Lefkosia road.

Your eating choices are, frankly, abysmal. But if you're desperate perhaps try a kebab at

Fereos Restaurant (☎ 2542 0114; full kebab CY£5) or a below-average meal at the **Dolphin Restaurant** (☎ 2542 0215; mains CY£4-6), near the visitor centre. A wide range of mediocre Cypriot and international dishes is served, with large buffets on weekends and public holidays.

Getting There & Away

There is a **Clarios Bus Co** (☎ 2275 3234) service that leaves the Constanza Bastion in Lefkosia at 11.30am (Monday to Friday) for Troödos (CY£1.50) via Kakopetria. It departs from Troödos for Lefkosia at about 6.30am, but only if reservations have been made in advance. Service taxis do not operate out of Troödos.

PLATRES ΠΛΑΤΡΕΣ

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«Τ' αηδόνια δε σ' αφήνουνε να κοιμηθείς στις Πλάτρες.» ("The nightingales won't let you sleep in Platres.")

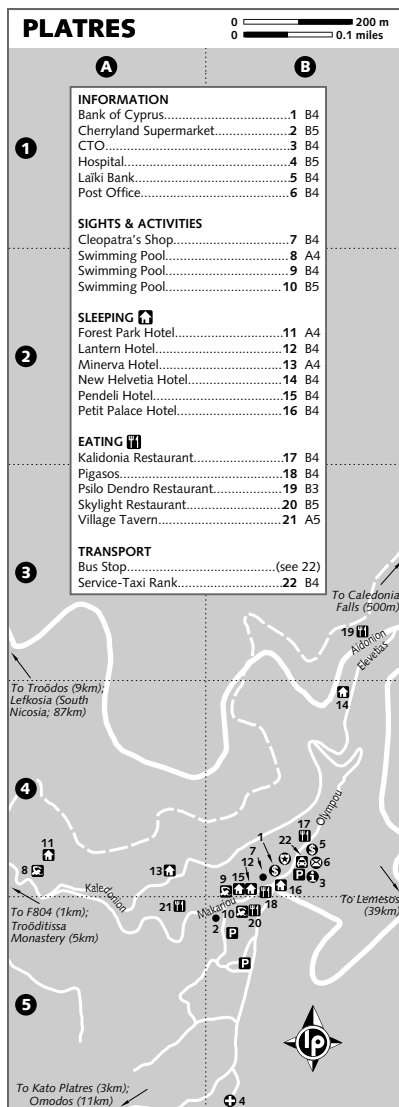
Georgos Seferis, 'Eleni', 1953

Platres has its roots in British colonial times, when it was the most chic mountain vacation resort for the well heeled and well connected of the era. This included such 'celebrities' as the Nobel Prize-winning Greek poet Georgos Seferis, who wrote poems about the place, and King Farouk of Egypt. But beach holidays suddenly started to look more attractive to many and Platres became a little forgotten. Modelled on the colonial hill stations of India, it has all the trappings of a cool mountain retreat: forest walks, gurgling streams, relief from the searing heat of the plains, and gin and tonics that are drunk on the balconies of old-world hotels catering to their guests' every wish.

Today, it's a little less elegant, and hikers, retirees, and travellers who still prefer the hills to the beaches make up the numbers. It's a nice enough place to base yourself for a couple of days, staying in one of the few very good hotels.

Orientation

At first sight, Platres is confusingly strung out around a series of snaking roads, just off the main Lemesos–Troödos highway. Platres basically consists of an upper road, which is home to a number of hotels, and a lower road, which is the town's main street and home to its restaurants, shops and bars.



hiking trails and the rest of Cyprus, and the staff are very willing to help with queries.

The police station and post office are near the CTO office. The hospital is about 600m south of the village centre, just off the main road to Kato Platres and Omodos. Call ☎ 1407 to report a forest fire.

Some English-language newspapers may be purchased at the little shop opposite the Bank of Cyprus or at the **Cherryland Supermarket** (Makariou).

Sights & Activities

Offering the temptation of drinking brandy sours in the company of a good novel around one of the three outdoor **swimming pools**, Platres is ideal for a relaxing break away from the torrid heat of summer. In winter you can go **skiing** or simply relax around a roaring log fire.

Visitors can undertake the four **hikes** (p101) around Troödos village. Other options include hikes from Platres to Fini (a longish 9km downhill route to the west perhaps requiring a taxi or lift back), Platres to Perapedhi (slightly shorter at 7km) or Platres to Pouziaris (shorter at only 3km, but uphill). These hikes and others are described in greater detail in the CTO brochure *Platres*, which also contains a map of the village.

Make sure you pop into the fabulously strange **Cleopatra's Shop** (Makariou; ☎ 9am-6pm summer, closed Feb & Mar), in the village centre opposite the Petit Palais Hotel. Located in a gorgeous, envy-provoking mansion, this shop is run by two charming ageing sisters who are happy to pass on little details about the history of Platres. The mansion is a sight in itself, and you may find an unusual souvenir among the many knick-knacks.

Sleeping

Reminders of colonial Britain still linger, particularly in the hotels, where the history is sometimes more appealing than the rooms. Discounts apply to all these hotels out of high season.

Minerva Hotel (☎ 2542 1731; minerva@globalsoftmail.com; Kaledonion 6; s CY£20, d Sep-Jun/Aug CY£28/38; Ⓟ) This is the loveliest hotel in Platres. The reception feels like a shrine to wildflowers, with pictures covering every inch of the walls. The rooms and the minisuites are great: many have antique wrought-iron four-poster

BRANDY SOUR & THE ROYAL CONNECTION

Touted as Cyprus' national cocktail, a brandy sour goes down perfectly after a hard day on the beach or hiking through the forests. Like so many alcoholic concoctions, it has a story behind its origins.

One of the regular visitors to Cyprus in the 1930s was the young King Farouk of Egypt. He liked to stay at the then new and fashionable Forest Park Hotel in Platres. Following a state visit to the UK, he stopped off in Platres, where he was due to meet a delegation of Cypriot VIPs and foreign dignitaries. A Western-educated and rather worldly royal, Farouk was not averse to the odd tippie or two. Not wishing to cause a scene by appearing to drink alcohol in public (as he was Muslim), he had his aide instruct the head barman at the Forest Park, a chap by the name of Stelios, to whip up a cocktail that looked like iced tea.

Without shifting his shaker an inch out of sync, Stelios proceeded to mix two parts of the best Cypriot brandy with one part of fine lemon squash. He then added two drops of Angostura bitters and poured it all over ice cubes, topping up the mixture with soda water. A slice of lemon completed the illusion. King Farouk got his tippie, the dignitaries were none the wiser and the Cypriot brandy sour was born. Cheers!

beds, towering antique wardrobes, TVs and telephones. Two-bedroom family houses can be rented for CY£14 per person.

Pendeli Hotel (☎ 2542 1736; pendeli@cylink.com.cy; Makariou; s/d CY£40/55; Ⓟ) A decent three-star hotel with neat, luminous rooms that have lovely views of the forest and valley from the balconies. Each room has a fan and TV.

New Helvetia Hotel (☎ 2542 1348; helvetia@spidernet.com.cy; Elvetias 6; d CY£50) This isolated, quiet three-star place is at the northeastern end of the village near the main highway. All rooms are double and have TVs, phones and small balconies. Perhaps the best thing about the New Helvetia is the bar, which is dark and broody, with a wonderful terrace, surrounded by pines.

Forest Park Hotel (☎ 2542 1751; www.forestparkhotel.com.cy; s/d CY£49/78; Ⓟ) A place with more history than charm, but with a great setting. This place has hosted Greek, Egyptian and British royalty, the former Indian prime minister Indira Ghandi, the former West German chancellor Willy Brandt, and the East German leader Erich Honnecker. But its appeal has since diminished and its character paled. It does have two pools, a gym, a massage parlour and a sauna, and the rooms are reasonable. The hotel is popular with prosperous Cypriots.

Petit Palais Hotel (☎ 2542 1723; petitpalais@spidernet.com.cy; r per person CY£18) A palace it may have been once, but it has now lost some of its grandeur. The rooms are slightly dingy, but they do have two balconies each, TVs and odd-looking space-age telephones.

Lantern Hotel (☎ 9945 2307; Makariou 6; r per person with/without Jacuzzi & TV CY£19/15) This is the cheapest of Platres' hotels. The rooms are quite basic, although the Lantern also offers 'luxury' rooms with Jacuzzis and satellite TVs.

Eating

Fish and creatures from the woods find their way onto many restaurants' plates.

Psilo Dendro Restaurant (☎ 2542 1350; Aidonion 13; trout CY£5.75; ☎ 11am-5pm) This is the best place to eat in Platres, and the most difficult to find. Behind a bend in the road above Platres, it's hidden behind an inconspicuous house. This restaurant is also a trout farm, so the fish is fresh and tasty.

Village Tavern (☎ 2542 2777; Makariou; mains CY£5; ☎ lunch & dinner) Get your whiskers into a juicy *stifado* (beef and onion stew) or feast on some *leftiko* (oven-baked lamb) here after a hard day's hiking. Try the house red wine.

Kalidonia Restaurant (☎ 2542 1404; Olympos 41; mains CY£4.50-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) The usual meze and souvlaki draw the Cypriots here, which is always a sign that an establishment knows what it's doing.

Pigasos (☎ 2542 1744; Faneromenis 1; sandwich CY£2; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Pigasos is really only good for a quick snack and a cold beer, and it's located right in the centre. You can breakfast on haloumi (helimi) and *lountza* (smoked loin of pork) sandwiches, or *lah-majoun* (pitta bread stuffed with spicy mince).

Information

There are ATMs at the Bank of Cyprus and the Laiki Bank, close to each other on Platres' main street.

The **Cyprus Tourism Organisation** (CTO; ☎ 2542 1316; platresinfo@cto.org.cy; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2.30pm Sat, closes 30min earlier Jul & Aug) is well stocked with brochures both on the Troödos

Getting There & Away

The Lemesos–Platres bus (CY€2.50) leaves from Lemesos at 9.30am and arrives in Platres an hour later, Monday to Friday. It returns to Lemesos at 3.15pm. There is also a very early morning bus between Platres and Lefkosia (CY€2.50), via Pedoulas and Troïdos, Monday to Friday. You'll need to make a reservation. For more information, phone the **bus service** (☎ 2357 0592). There are no buses on weekends and public holidays. All public transport arrives at and departs from the area adjoining the CTO office.

Service taxis (☎ 2542 1346) regularly run between Platres and Lemesos for CY€2.50 per person. The service-taxi rank is next to the CTO office.

AROUND PLATRES

Platres is an ideal base for day trips to the surrounding mountain slopes or to the sunny villages of southern Troïdos, known locally as the *krasohoria* (wine villages). Exposed to the southerly sun, vines grow here in abundance and many vineyards have taken the opportunity to produce some of Cyprus' best wines, including the famous rich, red dessert wine Commandaria. You can visit a number of these wineries and sample their produce.

You will need your own transport to explore this area, so go easy on the wine.

Mountain Village Driving Tour

The F804 road creates an elongated circle on the west side of Mt Olympus, taking in some of the lovely villages that dot the western flanks of the mountain.

Travelling anticlockwise, the first point of interest along this route is the 13th-century **Troïditissa Monastery** (☎ 6am–noon & 2–8pm), gorgeously located amid thick pines at the top of a steep gorge. Founded after the discovery of a miraculous icon of the Virgin, the monastery's buildings date from the 18th century. The silver icon was discovered in a nearby cave, which had been guarded by two hermits until their death in the 13th century. The icon is said to be helpful to those wishing for children. It's quite difficult to go inside the monastery, as it is a working religious establishment, not too inclined to receive curious onlookers.

Continue along the very pretty mountain road, passing a couple of idyllic, shaded **picnic**

areas in cool pine forests, until you reach the village of **Prodromos** (population 150). This small village to the west of Troïdos used to have a sizable hill-station clientele, but has not weathered the changes as well as Troïdos and Platres. The main claim to fame of this quiet little backwater is that, at 1400m, it is officially Cyprus' highest village.

Loop back and down at this point, following signs to **Paleomylos** (population 30) and **Agios Dimitrios** (population 55), a pair of timeless villages barely touched by tourism and almost buried beneath the greenery of fruit trees and grapevines.

A little further on, **Fini** (population 445) is a great place for tasting some *loukoumades* (Turkish or 'Cyprus' fritters with honey), said to be the best in the country. This village is quite popular with visitors, particularly for its handmade **pottery** and **pithoy** (large clay olive oil storage jars). If you choose to have some lunch here, eat at **Neraida** (☎ 2542 1680; meze CY€10; ☎ lunch Thu–Tue, dinner Fri & Sat), which has some fantastic meze and trout. It's on the western side of the village.

Treis Elies

Southwest of Prodromos, on the F810, is Treis Elies, a small hamlet with a wonderful place to stay. If getting away from the crowds and tourists is what you want, this village is ideal. It is unscathed by people, and its calm atmosphere is perfect for relaxation. There are hiking trails around the village and a small river. It is also close to the wonderful **Venetian bridges**, which are ideal for hikes.

Once upon a time, when the Venetians ruled Cyprus, a Venetian camel-caravan route passed near to Treis Elies village, leaving in its wake three impressive Venetian bridges: **Kelefos**, **Elias** and **Roudhias**. The hunch-backed beasts (the camels, not the Venetians or the bridges) transported copper from the Troïdos down to Polis and Pafos, and the path they walked has been all but lost.

All three bridges are connected by a nature trail marked E4. There is also a sealed road between them, if you choose to drive. Closest to Treis Elies village is Elias bridge, after the village of Kaminaria. Elias bridge is the smallest of the three and was the easterly link of the caravan route. It's set in dense forest, with a fresh stream flowing underneath. Kelefos bridge is the loveliest of the three,

with a strong, single pointed arch. This is a great picnic spot. To reach Kelefos bridge by car from Treis Elies, follow the signs for Agios Nikolaos. The trek from Elias to Kelefos should not take you more than two hours. It is possible to reach Roudhias bridge from Kelefos via a trail going past the Pera Vassa forestry station, but trekking this distance will take a good few hours.

To Spitiko tou Arhonta (☎ 9952 7117, 2546 2120; www.responsibletravel.com/Accommodation/Accommodation100227.htm; 1-/2-bedroom apt from CY€35/57) is a traditional house converted for ecotourism. Cypriots who want to revisit their roots flock up here during the summer and at Christmas. Perched almost on top of the village, with a shady front yard, the house has two one-bedroom apartments and one two-bedroom apartment, all self-catering and decorated like a bucolic paradise. The friendly owner Androulla may even give you a lesson in *kleftiko* cooking if you've developed a taste for Cypriot cuisine.

Omodos & the Krasohoria

Ομοδος και τα Κρασοχώρια

The shimmering, brilliant vineyards lie spread out across the land around the village of **Omodos** (population 310), situated on the southwest flank of the Troïdos Massif. Coming from Lemesos, the landscape on the drive to the village is mesmerising. The village itself, which has a central area paved with cobbled stones and accessible to pedestrians only, is slightly too geared towards the tourist, and souvenir stalls and shops dot the streets.

Omodos is built around a monastery – it's very unusual in the Greek world that a monastery is at the centre of a settlement. The Byzantine **Moni Timiou Stavrou** (Monastery of the Holy Cross), was built around 1150 and was extended and extensively remodelled in the 19th century.

One good shop for souvenirs is **Socrates Traditional House** (admission free; ☎ 9.30am–7pm), signposted prominently in and around the back streets of Omodos. You can taste and buy bottles of the homemade Commandaria wine here, and you can also take a look at the ornaments, photos, wedding attire, wine and *zivania* (Cypriot firewater) presses, loom, corn mill and other items of rural life.

And what would be the point of visiting a wine region if you didn't sample any wine?

Pitsylia Winery (☎ 2537 2928; tsiakkas@swaypage.com), located between the villages of Platres and Pelendri, on the southeastern side of the Troïdos, is particularly welcoming to visitors. The local grapes Mavro Ambelissimo, Xynisteri, Ofthalmo and Pambatzies make pretty palatable reds, whites and rosés. Visiting times are fairly loose, so it's a good idea to ring beforehand. You'll probably be expected to buy a bottle.

To reach the Pitsylia Winery from Platres, turn left onto the E806 before you get to Trimiklini. The winery is just before Pelendri village.

To Katoï (☎ 2542 1230; Omodos; 2–4 person apt CY€15–20 per person) has spacious apartments with shady front yards and conveniences like TVs and washing machines. Its pleasant little stone-and-wood taverna is good at making hearty village sausages and garlic mushrooms; snacks are CY€1.20 to CY€3.50. It's open from 11am to 4pm and 7.30pm to midnight.

Giannis Agathokleous (☎ 2542 1376; Omodos; apt CY€30) is just next door, with an eight-person apartment for rent year-round.

MARATHASA VALLEY

ΚΟΙΛΑΔΑ ΜΑΡΑΘΑΣΑΣ

The beautiful Marathasa Valley cradles some of Troïdos' most important and impressive sights: the giant Orthodox Kykkos Monastery, the wonderful frescoed church of Arhangelos Mihail in the amphitheatrical village of Pedoulas (the valley's tourist centre), and the impressive Agios Ioannis Lambastidis monastery in Kalopanayiotis. From Pedoulas, at the valley's southern end, the plains open out onto Northern Cyprus. The Setrahos river flows through the valley and empties into Morfou Bay in the North.

There is some good accommodation to be found in agrotourism-restored traditional houses, and spring and autumn, when wildflowers display their colours like fireworks, are particularly romantic times for visiting.

While not physically within the confines of the Marathasa Valley – it is actually out on the edge of the Tyllirian wilderness – the Kykkos Monastery is accessible from Kalopanayiotis. Although the monastery was

once reached by pilgrims through this valley, most visitors now head up the newly improved side road via Gerakies.

PEDOULAS ΠΕΔΟΥΛΑΣ

pop 190

Pedoulas, at the southern end of the valley before the rise over the Troödos ridge, is a good base in the Troödos Massif, with a good choice of eating and sleeping options. It is the main settlement and tourist centre in the Marathasa Valley, and has banks and a post office. Wonderful cool air and a bracing climate make it an attractive place to sleep on summer nights. It is also famous for its spring water, which can be found on sale all over Cyprus.

Sights

Most people to Pedoulas for the gable-roofed church of **Arhangelos Mihail**, one of ten Unesco-listed churches in Cyprus. It sits in the lower part of the village, and dates from 1474. The **frescoes**, restored in 1980, show a move towards the naturalism of the post-Byzantine revival, and are credited to an artist known only as Adam. Depicted are, of course, the Archangel Michael, who looms above the faithful, the sacrifice of Abraham, the Virgin and Christ, and a beautiful baptism scene where a naked Christ is coming out of River Jordan, fish swimming at his feet. There are also paintings of Pontius Pilate and the denial of Christ.

The key to the church is with the (very) old lady about 10m up the road, who walks painfully down to unlock the door.

Sleeping & Eating

The sleeping options here are decent, although none are outstanding in décor or comfort.

Capuralli Hotel (r per person CY€12) This is the cheapest place in the village, and has the best views of the valley. The corridor and little lounge leading into the rooms look like a typical Cypriot village living room, with white tiles and lace tablecloths, and a TV in the centre. The rooms have a slightly retro feel, but are clean and basic. The food in this place is all homemade and traditional, great for sampling local specialities like preserved sweet aubergines.

Mountain Rose (☎ 2295 2727; fax 2295 3295; r per person incl half-board/full board CY€15/25) A hunters'

lodge kind of place, with a stuffed eagle pointing its claws at you as you enter the reception area, which is cluttered with soft toys, bizarre murals and hanging baskets. The rooms are a bit stuffy, and the ones not front-facing are rather dark. All have fridges and TVs. The hotel is full board in August, and half-board during the rest of the year.

Central (☎ 2295 2457; fax 2295 3324; d CY€35) This place feels a lot like a hostel, but without the hostel prices. Nature posters adorn the slightly run-down halls, rooms have sliding doors, and families are crammed together on wobbly beds. The large terrace is comfortable and populated by a collection of senior citizens who listen to bouzouki full blast, the sound interfered with only by the noise of backgammon dice scrambling against the wooden board.

Rooms to Rent (☎ 2295 2321, 9955 9098; r per person CY€10) Many rooms sleep three or four in this small, basic place. It's on the south side of the village, and is run by the people from the Platanos restaurant.

The eating choices are rather limited.

Platanos (☎ 2295 2518; mains CY€2-4) Where would a Cypriot village be without a restaurant called Platanos (plane tree)? And under a plane tree it certainly is. It offers nice kebabs, and the old chef makes the coffee on the hot ashes on the terrace, the traditional way.

Mountain Rose (☎ 2295 2727; mains CY€3-4) Part of the hotel, and really rather touristy and of dubious quality, it serves things like *pastitsio* (an oven-cooked dish of minced meat and vegetables), *sheftalia* (pork sausages), and *koupepia* (stuffed vine leaves). It also sells cheap wine – CY€5 for a bottle of red.

Getting There & Away

There is a daily bus from Lefkosia to Pedoulas (CY€2) via Kalopanayiotis at 12.15pm Monday to Saturday, which continues on to Platres (except Saturday) via Troödos village. The bus returns to Lefkosia from Pedoulas the following morning at 6am. For information ring ☎ 2295 2437 or ☎ 9961 8865.

KALOPANAYIOTIS ΚΑΛΟΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΗΣ

pop 290

The village of Kalopanayiotis, although not as generous in its number of accommodation options, nevertheless has at least one good-quality agrotourism place to stay, and dinner

can be had in Pedoulas' Platanos tavern. It's a quiet, genuine place to stay for a few nights, as no day-trip buses arrive here to vomit out the crowds. Kalopanayiotis is home to one of Cyprus' most remarkable monasteries and a fabulous museum, which has the most enthusiastic guide you will ever meet.

Sights

Unesco-listed **Agios Ionnis Lambadistis Monastery** (donation encouraged; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-6pm May-Sep) is signposted from the long main street of Kalopanayiotis and is reached by following a road downwards and then upwards again at the opposite side of the valley. Built in the traditional Troödos style with a large barnlike roof, it is actually three churches in one, built side-on to one another over 400 years from the 11th century. The original **Orthodox church** has a double nave, to which has been added a narthex and a Latin chapel.

This composite church is one of the better preserved of the Troödos churches and has the most intricate and colourful **frescoes**. The best are the 13th-century works in the main domed Orthodox church, especially those dedicated to Agios Irakleidis. The charming fresco of the entry into Jerusalem features children in black gloves climbing up date trees to get a better look at the donkey-riding Jesus. Other frescoes include the **Raising of Lazarus** and the **Crucifixion**, and the **Ascension**. The wonderful, vivid colour scheme suggests that the artists hailed from Constantinople.

More frescoes can be viewed in the narthex and **Latin chapel** and date from the 15th and 16th centuries. The frescoes in the Latin chapel are said to be the most developed Italo-Byzantine frescoes in Cyprus, meaning that the artist had spent some time in Italy. The scenes represent the **Akathistos** hymn, which praises the Virgin Mary in 24 verses; there are, in turn, 24 pictures, each beginning with a letter of the Greek alphabet. The **Arrival of the Magi** depicts the Magi on horseback, wearing crusader armour. They flaunt red crescents, which are said to have been a Roman symbol before being taken on by the Byzantines and, later, the Turks.

The monastery keys are with the village priest, who can be found in the local *kafeneio* (coffee shop) during the spring and summer months. From October to April

you will have to seek him out in his village house. Photographs are not allowed.

As part of the monastery, there is also an **icon museum** (admission CY€0.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mar-May, 9.30am-7pm Jul-Sep, 10am-3.30pm Oct-Feb). Its main display is the collection of 15 icons, discovered in 1998, that date from the 16th century. As the informative and enthusiastic guide will tell you, the icons stood underground for many years, buried when the Orthodox priests ran from the invading Ottomans. Some of these icons went on tour in London in 2001.

The iconostasis (the screen holding the icons) has its top covered in carvings of the ferns that grow in abundance by the river in Kalopanayiotis, showing its local origins.

Sleeping

Olga's Katoí (☎ 2295 2432; fax 2235 1305; d CY€35) A wonderful agrotourism traditional house, this place has 10 spacious double rooms and balconies overlooking the valley and the monastery. Breakfast is served on the terrace, and there is an overpriced dinner, not quite worth the money.

Polyxeni's House (☎ 2249 7509; fax 2235 4030; 4-person house CY€40) This two-bedroom house, also part of the agrotourism scheme, is on the Lefkosia side of the village. The house is decorated with traditional furniture, and large wooden doors open onto a peaceful, sunny courtyard. There is also a kitchenette and a large bathroom.

Kastalia (☎ 2295 2455; fax 2235 1288; s/d CY€15/30) An elegantly decorated old house with oval portrait paintings and quaint chaise longue-style seating in the living-room area. The rooms are small but clean and neat, and there is a fresh and airy conservatory hallway, full of plants, and a nice shared balcony. Most rooms are doubles and families are welcome.

Getting There & Away

There is a daily bus (12.15pm, Monday to Saturday) from Lefkosia to Kalopanayiotis, which continues on to Pedoulas and, Monday to Friday, Platres and Troödos. For information ring ☎ 2295 2437 or ☎ 9961 8865.

Visitors to Kykkos can save some time by taking the newly upgraded road from Kalopanayiotis to Kykkos, via Gerakies. There's no public transport to the monastery.

AROUND KALOPANAYIOTIS

Panagia of Kykkos Monastery

Μονή Παναγίας Κυκκου

The richest and most famous of Cyprus' religious institutions had humble, if rather odd, beginnings. The founder of the **monastery** (admission free; ☞ dawn-dusk) was a hermit called Isaiah, who lived in a cave near the current site in the 11th century. One day, while out hunting, the Byzantine administrator of Cyprus, Manouil Voutomytis, crossed paths with Isaiah. Because of his ascetic vows, Isaiah refused to talk to the self-important Voutomytis, who promptly beat up the hermit.

Later, while suffering an incurable illness in Lefkosia, Voutomytis remembered how he had mistreated Isaiah and sent for him in order to ask for forgiveness, on the off chance that his act of charitable penance might also restore his failing health.

In the meantime, God had already appeared to Isaiah and asked him to request Voutomytis to bring the icon of the Virgin Mary to Cyprus from Constantinople. This icon had been painted by St Luke.

After much delay and soul-searching by Voutomytis, the icon was finally brought to Cyprus with the blessing of the Byzantine emperor, Alexios I Komninos. The emperor's daughter developed the same illness that had afflicted Voutomytis and was cured after Isaiah's timely and, by extension, divine intervention. The icon now constitutes the *raison d'être* for Kykkos Monastery, which has guarded it, sealed in a silver-encased box, for more than four centuries.

However, history is one thing. At present, this imposing, modern-looking monastery structure dating from around 1831 is swarming with tourists eager to go inside.

ARCHBISHOP MAKARIOS – PRIEST & POLITICIAN

Archbishop Makarios III, ethnarch and religious leader of Cyprus for its brief period of independence as a united island, was born Michael Hristodoulou Mouskos on 13 August 1913 in Pano Panagia, a small village in the western foothills of the Troödos Massif. He studied in Cyprus and at Athens University, and graduated from the School of Theology at Boston University. In 1946 he was ordained the Bishop of Kition, and in 1950 he became archbishop.

It may seem strange that a religious leader could also be the political leader of a nation, but Makarios was only carrying on a tradition that had begun long ago during Cyprus' domination by foreign powers. In those dark times, Greek Orthodox Cypriots looked to their clergy for leadership and guidance. Makarios represented the culmination of the people's aspirations for independence and identity.

Makarios was initially associated with the movement for enosis (union with Greece). He was opposed to the idea of independence, or Commonwealth status for Cyprus, as well as *taksim* (the Turkish demand for separation). During the three-year uprising of the 1950s, the British suspected him of collaboration with the terrorist pro-enosis movement Ethniki Organosi tou Kypriakou Agonia (EOKA; the National Organisation for the Cypriot Struggle), and he was exiled in the Seychelles. However, Makarios was a politician, not a terrorist, and was brought back to Cyprus in 1959. He negotiated an independence agreement with the British and was elected president of the newly independent state of Cyprus on 13 December 1959.

Distancing himself from the extremes of the enosis movement, Makarios tried to appease the Turkish Cypriot minority in Cyprus and forge a foreign policy of nonalignment. However, he was seen by the Turkish Cypriots as being anti-Turkish, and serious sectarian violence broke out in 1963, leading to the ultimate division of Cyprus 11 years later.

The Americans and the West saw him as being too accommodating to Communism and feared another Cuba crisis, this time in the Mediterranean. The Greek junta, abetted by the CIA and pro-enosis EOKA-B (the postindependence version of EOKA) activists in Cyprus, launched a coup in 1974 with a view to assassinating him and installing a new government. The coup backfired; Makarios escaped, the Turks invaded the north of Cyprus, the junta fell and Makarios returned to preside over a now-truncated state.

He died on 3 August 1977 and is buried in a site of his own choosing on a hill top close to the Kykkos Monastery. He is still remembered fondly as Cyprus' greatest leader and statesman.

They are often turned away by bored guards for wearing short sleeves and above-the-knee shorts (men and women). The visitors then go to the stalls outside where clever entrepreneurs hire (yes, hire) long trousers and shawls.

This is an unattractive place, especially compared with the exquisite architecture and peace of the small churches and monasteries in the surrounding villages. But the importance of Kykkos in the island's Orthodox hierarchy cannot be underestimated.

The fabulous wealth of the monastery is displayed in the **Byzantine Museum** (☎ 2294 2736; admission CY£1.50; ☞ 10am–6pm Jun–Sep, 10am–4pm Nov–May), along with an extensive collection of Byzantine and ecclesiastical artefacts. There is a small antiquities display, on the left after you enter; a large ecclesiastical gallery with early-Christian, Byzantine and post-Byzantine church vestments, vessels and jewels; a small circular room with manuscripts, documents and books; and a rich display of icons, wall paintings and carvings in a larger circular chamber.

A comprehensive visitors guide in English and other languages is available from the ticket office for CY£3.

Tomb of Archbishop Makarios III

If you have made the trip out to Kykkos and have a little extra time on your hands, visit the tomb of Archbishop Makarios III (see the boxed text, opposite) on Throni Hill, 2km beyond the monastery.

Follow the road past the main entrance of the monastery until it bends right and heads upwards. There is a little parking area at the top with a mobile cafeteria. Take the road to the right to reach the tomb by a shortcut.

The tomb, which is rather unimpressive and was apparently prepared in haste due to Makarios' sudden death, is a stone sepulchre overlaid with a black-marble slab and covered by a round stone-inlaid dome.

Further up the hill is the **Throni Shrine** to the Virgin Mary, which in itself is not particularly attractive. However, it has some great, endless views, and you can clearly see the long serpentine road leading to Kykkos from the east snaking over the ridge tops. A touching detail is the wish tree, where the pious have tied little bits of tissue, paper and cloth to mark their wishes to the Virgin.

SOLEA VALLEY

ΚΟΙΛΑΔΑ ΣΟΛΕΑΣ

This sunnily named valley has a revolutionary past: it served as the prime hide-out area for EOKA insurgents during the anti-British campaign of the 1950s, mainly because of its proximity to Lefkosia. Now it's packed with less dangerous visitors – weekend tourists from the capital, and foreign visitors looking for a bit of rural character.

The Solea Valley, bisected by the Karyiotis river, has some lovely frescoed churches, having been an important stronghold of the late-Byzantines. The main village here is Kakopetria, which has the best hotel in the Troödos Massif and good tourist facilities. It's possible to exit the valley via picturesque mountain roads to both the east and west.

KAKOPETRIA ΚΑΚΟΠΕΤΡΙΑ

pop 1200

Kakopetria, or *kaki petra* (meaning wicked stone), gets its name, according to legend, from a line of stones along the ridge above the village, which brought good luck to newlyweds. Then, one day, perhaps during an earthquake, some of the stones fell onto a hapless couple and killed them, and the village's name was born. A bizarre and morbid story.

But nowadays life is safe for newlyweds in this village, which sits on two banks of the Karyiotis river. There is a constant flow of visitors here, especially during the summer. The main village of the Solea Valley, Kakopetria has two wonderful hotels and a couple of good restaurants, banks (with ATMs), petrol stations, and a small old quarter, which retains its charm despite the tourists. It is a good place from which to explore the area and see the Byzantine churches.

Sunday picnickers often stop here for a coffee and a stroll on their way between the Troödos and Lefkosia.

Sleeping

Kakopetria is the only place in the mountains with two excellent hotels right opposite each other.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Linus Inn (☎ 2292 3161; www.linus-inn.com.cy; Palea Kakopetria 34; per person d/studio/ste CY£22/27/32, villa per day CY£160-260; 🍷 🍷) Stay here, if you possibly can, just to experience the wonderful combination of a rustic room laden with antique furniture, four-poster beds covered in woven white linen, fireplaces, old wooden radios and heavy black telephones that remind you of those in films about the Gestapo. In suites and studios, you get plasma-screen TVs and Jacuzzis; the villas have swimming pools. This is the most tasteful and most comfortable place of its kind in the country, and you will have to book in advance if you are visiting on a weekend. The original architecture has been retained wherever possible. The restaurant serves quality Cypriot food (see below).

Mill Hotel (☎ 2292 2536; www.cymillhotel.com; Mylou 8; per person r/junior ste/ste from CY£23/29/39.50; 🍷 closed 20 Nov-20 Dec) Perched high up on the hillside overlooking the village, opposite the Linus Inn, this stylish hotel is situated in a tall wooden building where a lift will take you to the reception from the leafy ground floor. The hotel is decorated in plush, neo-colonial style, with plenty of wood everywhere. The large rooms are exceptionally comfortable, and have views across the valley. The restaurant is good.

Ekali (☎ 2292 2501; www.ekali-hotel.com; Grigorou Digeni 22; s/d CY£29/47) A renovated three-star place that has decent rooms decorated in dark-red hues, and laminated-wood flooring. The rooms also have baby-monitoring facilities. Out of high season (July and August) the prices go down considerably.

Eating

As with sleeping, the eating choices are good, but almost limited to the two main hotels.

Linus Inn Taverna (☎ 2292 3161; www.linus-inn.com.cy; Palea Kakopetria 34; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The most atmospheric, best-quality place to eat in the village, so book your table in advance. Cypriot food is good here, and the Cyprus plate (CY£2.75), consisting of taramasalata (dip made of fish roe), cured ham, haloumi, smoked pork slices, *koupepia*, cucumber, tomatoes and olives, is a good starter. The os-

trich stir-fry is a speciality (CY£8.50) and the mixed grill has a good reputation (CY£7.50). The wine list here has one of Cyprus' best reds, Ktima Malia (CY£12), a rich, red Cabernet from the Lefkada grape, and a choice of Italian, Argentine, Chilean and Greek wines. There is also a café and bar, where nargileh (Middle Eastern water pipes) are smoked.

Mill Restaurant (☎ 2292 2536; www.cymillhotel.com; Mylou 8; mains CY£3.50-7.50; 🍷 lunch & dinner, closed 20 Nov-20 Dec) The large terrace is shady and cool, and the little river trickles past, barely turning the once-functioning mill wheel below. In the winter, you eat by the fireplace, which is just as good. Trout is a big thing here, and it comes in two forms: grilled and 'special'. The chefs won't reveal the secret of the 'special' but its tastiness speaks for itself. As with the Linus Inn, it's good to reserve a table on weekends.

Village Pub (mains CY£4-6) When all you want is a simple summer meal, this is a great place for a plate of white beans or some lentils. The trout is recommended.

Getting There & Away

The valley is served by **Clarios Bus Co** (☎ 2245 3234) buses, which run up to nine times daily between Lefkosia and Kakopetria (CY£1.10) in summer, the first bus leaving Lefkosia at 6.10am and the last one at 7pm. There are two buses on Sunday (CY£1.90) in July and August, leaving at 8am and 6pm. Seven buses leave Kakopetria for Lefkosia between 4.30am and 8am on weekdays, with two later services at 1.30pm and 2.30pm. In July and August there are departures on Sunday at 6am and 4.30pm only. The 11.30am service from Lefkosia continues to Troödos village except on weekends. It returns from Troödos at 6.30pm.

There's no public transport to the lovely Unesco-listed churches in the valley.

AROUND KAKOPETRIA Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis

Αγιος Νικόλαος της Στέγης
This church (donations welcome; 🍷 9am-4pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) is the more easily accessible (with road signs) and interesting of the two Unesco-listed churches close to Kakopetria. Known as St Nicholas of the Roof in English, this tall, barnlike church, founded in the 11th century, was named for its large, heavy roof. The dome and narthex came later, and the characteristic

Troödos pitched roof was added in the 15th century as protection against the heavy snows that sometimes fall in the area.

As in other Troödos churches, the art of icon and fresco painting flourished here in the Middle Ages, when Orthodoxy sought refuge from Cyprus' then-dominant Latin church administration. The **frescoes** at Agios Nikolaos are the usual convolution of images and styles, but among those worth seeking out is a depiction of the **Virgin Mary breastfeeding Jesus**. Look out also for images of the **Crucifixion**, the **Nativity** and the **Myrrh Carriers**, which shows an angel on top of Christ's empty tomb. Photos (without flash) may be allowed, but the fussy caretaker may subtly suggest you make a donation to the collection box.

The church is prominently signposted from Kakopetria and lies about 3km southwest of the village on the Pedoulas mountain road.

Panagia tis Podythou

Παναγία της Ποδύθου

One less commonly visited Unesco-listed church (or rather duo of churches) is this rather charming pair, made up of **Panagia tis Podythou** (☎ 2292 2393; 🍷 upon request) and **Panagia Theotokou (Arhangelou)**, a few kilometres north of Kakopetria (the signpost is easy to miss). The main church was established in 1502 by Dimitrios de Coron, a Greek military officer in the service of James II, the king of Cyprus at the time. Up to the 1950s, the building was occupied by monks. The church itself is rectangular, with a semi-circular apse at the eastern end. A portico, built at a later date, surrounds the church on three sides. Again, you'll see the characteristic pitched roof with flat tiles, and the floor inside is covered with baked terracotta tiles. The church's interior was never completed, yet **frescoes** cover the pediments of both the east and west wall. Two 17th-century frescoes on the north and south wall depicting the **Apostles Peter & Paul** were never completed. The fresco style is of a Renaissance-influenced Italo-Byzantine painter, who used vivid colours and a three-dimensional treatment of the subject matter.

The smaller and often overlooked Panagia Theotokou nearby is in fact more impressive, with vivid didactic-style panels, quite striking in their freshness even today.

Dating from around 1514, the interior frescoes depict a rather fascinating panoply of images from the **life of Christ**.

Seek out the caretaker of both churches at the *kafeneio* next to the Lambrou supermarket in Kakopetria. Bring a torch as neither of the churches has electric lighting.

Panagia Forviotissa (Asinou)

Παναγία Φορβιωτίτσα (Ασίνου)

This beautiful Unesco-listed church (☎ 9983 0329; donations welcome; 🍷 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Sun) on the perimeter of the Adelfi Forest, 10km northeast as the crow flies from Kakopetria, is easily accessible from Kakopetria or Lefkosia. It has arguably the finest set of Byzantine **frescoes** in the Troödos and, if you feel that you have overdosed elsewhere, its calm rural setting makes for a delightful day out. A visit to the church could also be combined with a picnic in the adjoining forest.

The styles and motifs of the frescoed interior cross several artistic generations and are quite arresting. Most of the interior images date from the 14th and 15th centuries, and portray themes found elsewhere in the Troödos Byzantine churches. However, it's the sheer vibrancy of the colours that make the Asinou frescoes so appealing.

Father Kyriakos of nearby village of **Nikitari** (population 430) is the priest and caretaker of the church and, if he is not already tending to groups of Cypriot pilgrims at the church, he can be found in the village itself; ask at the *kafeneio*.

The Panagia Forviotissa is reached by a circuitous route over the mountain ridge east of Kakopetria, or by a well-signposted fast route off the B9 from Lefkosia, via Vyzakia. If you would prefer to walk here, there is a pleasant forest hike from the village of Agios Theodoros to the west, off the B9. There's no public transport.

PITSYLIA ΠΙΤΣΥΛΙΑ

The wide-reaching region of Pitsylia is the least visited and most remote part of the Troödos Massif. It stretches from the start of the E909, north of Troödos village, to the Maheras Monastery in the east. The northern slopes of Pitsylia are covered in tall, aromatic pines to the north, and vines grow here too.

A number of frescoed Byzantine churches are dotted around the region, and there are challenging walks for longer-distance hikers.

Pitsylia's de facto centre is the sprawling, amphitheatrical village of **Agros**. Other villages are **Kyperounda** (population 1500), **Platanistasa** (population 170), **Alona** (population 130) and **Palehori** (population 410).

Hiking

The CTO has created marked hiking trails in the Pitsylia region. Except for two short circular trails, they generally require an out-and-back approach, unless you're prepared to keep hiking to the next village or transport link. Most are about 6km or less, so require a few hours trekking to complete. Trails take hikers through forests, orchards, villages and mountain peaks, and offer some of the best recreational hiking in Cyprus.

A short description of the trails in the region follows:

Trail 1: Doxasi o Theos to Madari Fire Station

(3.75km, two hours) A panoramic ridge-top hike with excellent views. It begins about 2km from Kyperounda.

Trail 2: Teisia tis Madaris

(3km, 1½ hours, circular) A continuation of the above trail, it involves a circular cliff-top hike around Mt Madari (Adelfi; 1613m) with excellent views.

Trail 3: Lagoudera to Agros

(6km, 2½ hours) A longish hike through vineyards and orchards, with spectacular views from the Madari–Papoutsas ridge.

Trail 4: Panagia tou Araka (Lagoudera) to Stavros tou Agiasmati

(7km, three hours) The longest hike, it links two of the most important Troödos Byzantine churches via a forest, vineyards and stone terraces.

Trail 5: Agros to Kato Mylos

(5km, two hours, circular) An easy hike through cherry and pear orchards, vineyards and rose gardens.

Trail 6: Petros Vanezis to Alona

(1.5km, 30 minutes, circular) Involves a short hike around the village of Alona, passing through hazelnut plantations.

Trail 7: Agia Irini to Spilies tou Digeni

(3.2km, 1½ hours) An easy out-and-back hike to the secret caves of Digenis, where EOKA resistance fighters hid during the insurgency of 1955–59.

The CTO pamphlet *Cyprus: Nature Trails* describes these hikes in some detail and provides basic maps, but hikers would be advised to take along a more detailed map of the region.

Getting There & Away

Public transport into and out of the region is strictly functional, designed to get people

to and from Lefkosia for work or business. There is a Monday to Saturday bus from Agros to Lefkosia (CY£1), via Lagoudera, at 7am, which returns from Lefkosia at midday. Other colourful, old-fashioned local buses link most major Pitsylia villages with Lefkosia, but usually leave early in the morning and return to the villages in the early afternoon. Seats need to be booked, and visitors should not rely on these services for planned day trips to the region.

This is an area where you need time and energy; hiking from one village to another or perhaps hitching to a better-served transport artery are probably your best bets. For more information on hitching in Cyprus, see p242.

AGROS AFPOΣ

pop 840

Poised high on the mountains (1000m), Agros is a breezy, largish village, convenient for hiking or driving forays into the surrounding hills. While not a particularly beautiful place to spend your holidays, it is an alternative to the better-known village of Platres to the west. The less-frequented surrounding villages and Byzantine churches make it a good base for discovering the island away from the rest of the mountain visitors.

Sights

Agros is known across the island for its cottage industries that make rose products, bottled fruit, and sausages. Local entrepreneur Chris Isolakakis runs an unusual yet thriving industry in the village: **CNT** (☎ 2552 1893; www.rose-isolakakis.com; Anapafseos 12; ☎ 8am–7pm) is a rose-product and pottery business. Visit the workshop and learn what can be made out of roses: rose- and flower-water, rose brandy, skin cleansers, candles, rose liqueur and even a rose-infused Cabernet Sauvignon wine. Decorative ceramic bottles and other pottery items are also made in the workshop.

A wonderful Mediterranean way to put some sweetness into your life is preserving fruit, so that in winter when, for example, figs are but a distant dream, you can dip into a jar of fig preserve and beat the winter blues. **Niki's Sweet Factory** (☎ 2552 1400; prices CY£0.70–3) dedicates its entire business to this tasty therapy, and sells products like

orange marmalade, fig preserve and diabetic walnut sweets. Ask about the healing properties of some of the preserves. Niki sells her products all over Cyprus and even exports as far as Australia.

Less glamorous perhaps but no less tasty are the products made by the **Kafkalia Sausage Factory** (☎ 2552 1426; prices according to weight CY£4.50–11). All products, including *lountza*, *hiromeri* (traditional smoked ham), *loukanika* (village sausages), *pastourmas* (spicy smoked beef) and bacon, are made on the premises. Ask to see the dark and hot smoke room next to the busy little shop.

Sleeping & Eating

Rodon (☎ 2552 1201; fax 2552 1235; www.swaypage.com/rodon; Agros; s/d CY£32/50; ☎) This is a gigantic three-star hotel, communally owned and run. Its unconventional manager, Lefkos Christodoulou, is a keen advocate of green tourism and has worked hard to promote Agros as an alternative tourist destination. The Rodon's rooms have seen a little wear and tear, thanks to catering to large groups of package tourists, but guest facilities include a good restaurant, a bar, two pools and tennis courts. Mr Christodoulou has revived many of the area's walking paths, and he has maps detailing walks around Agros, which he happily hands out to interested guests.

Two places at the northeastern end of the long, snaking main village drag vie for lunchtime and evening customers. The **Agros Village Restaurant & Pub** (☎ 2552 1558; mains CY£3–4; ☎ Mon–Sat) is probably marginally better than the nearby **Kilada Restaurant** (☎ 2552 1303; grills CY£3.50–4.50).

STAVROS TOU AGIASMATI

ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΑΣΜΑΤΗ

This Unesco-listed Byzantine **church** (admission free but donations welcome) is famous for the **frescoes**, painted by Filippos Goul in 1494, that decorate its gable roof. Access to the church requires some forethought; you must obtain the key from the priest at Platanistasa village 5km away and, of course, return it. The church is somewhat remote, hidden along a sealed side road off the Orounda–Platanistasa (E906) route, though it can also be approached by a signposted but unsealed road from the next valley to the west through which the Polystypos–Xyliatos (E907) road runs.

PANAGIA TOU ARAKA

ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΑΚΑ

This more accessible and more frequently visited Unesco-listed **church** (donations welcome; ☎ 9am–6pm) looks, from the outside, more like a Swiss cattle stable than a place of worship. Its enormous all-encompassing snowproof roof and surrounding wooden trellis all but conceal the church within. The paintings inside are a wide selection of neoclassical works by artists from Constantinople.

The vivid images on display run the usual thematic range, with the impressive Pantokrator in the domed tholos taking pride of place. Look out also for the **Annunciation**, the **Four Evangelists**, the **Archangel Michael** and the **Panagia Arakiotissa**, the patron of the church.

The unusual name of the church (*arakiotissa* means 'of the wild pea') owes its origin to the vegetable that grows in profusion in the district. If things are quiet here, it might be possible to take nonflash photos, but only if the watchful caretaker approves.

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