

Getting Started

Travelling to and through Cyprus is pretty effortless. Most people visit the island on package tours; it's also easy to get an independent flight, although these tend to get sold out and pricey in the peak summer months of June to September. Once there, you'll find everything that you can find at home and, particularly for Brits, there is a strange air of familiarity: apart from the fact that the island caters for swarms of British tourists, there are a number of colonial leftovers, like driving on the left. There is plenty of accommodation and, although package tours prevail, Cyprus works well for those who want to seek out lesser-known, quieter places. Getting yourself around this small island is easy by public transport or with your own wheels. Read up on Cyprus' history, pick up a couple phrases in Greek and Turkish, and your trip will be a fantastic treat that will stay with you for years.

WHEN TO GO

The best time to go to Cyprus depends on the kind of experience you wish to have. With its intense Mediterranean climate, the island's weather is easy to predict. The summer months of June to September are hot and action-packed. August in particular is the peak of Cyprus' tourist season, when the locals squeeze up next to the tourists on beaches and restaurant benches. Kids are on school holidays and things can get a bit raucous. Accommodation prices go up quite a lot during these months, so if you're on a budget, avoid the height of summer.

October to May are the quiet months of autumn, winter and spring, when the landscape is covered with wildflowers that seem to encompass every colour in the rainbow. Walking either the Troödos Massif or the Akamas Peninsula, or cycling the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula in the North is most enjoyable in the autumn and spring months. Autumn in October and spring in April and May are short and the transition between winter and summer is rapid. Rain falls mainly in autumn and winter, and outside these months precipitation is rare. Water shortages can be a real problem in Cyprus.

Winters are changeable, with cold and warmer weather alternating. Conditions also vary with elevation. The Troödos Massif usually gets some snow in winter and you can ski on Mt Olympus in the South from early January to mid-March.

See Climate Charts (p224) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Clothes made from light-coloured and lightweight fabrics – you won't need heavier clothing or footwear unless you come in winter, or you plan to do some bushbashing in the Troödos Massif or Kyrenia (Girne) Range.
- A warm jacket if you plan to visit in winter. It can still get chilly, despite the country's Mediterranean climate.
- A good sunscreen, hat, sunglasses and mosquito repellent for the summer.
- The latest information on visas and travel between the Republic and the North (see the boxed text, p235).
- Your passport (which you'll have to flash if you intend to cross between the South and the North).
- Alka-Seltzers, if you're planning on partying in Agia Napa, that is.

Average daily summer temperatures in Lefkosia/North Nicosia are between 22°C and 37°C but often reach 40°C or more. From December to March the night temperature in the Troödos Massif is often below freezing.

COSTS & MONEY

Prices in Cyprus are reasonable in comparison to most Western European countries. The cost of tourist commodities in the North and the South tends to be similar, though the North is better value when it comes to eating out and also at the budget end of accommodation options. Items in supermarkets are probably more expensive than you will be used to paying. However, fruit and vegetables in local markets can be considerably cheaper than at home.

Accommodation in agrotourism houses in the South is usually around CY£30 for a double, and a meal with wine or beer in a local restaurant is around CY£12 to CY£15. In the North, bank on around UK£20 for a double room in a budget hotel and around 15YTL for a filling meal. Accommodation and general tourist services on both sides of the Green Line increase in price in July and August.

Prices quoted in this book are for the high season, unless otherwise stated.

In the South, costs for public transport – bus and service taxis – are low, though taxis are not such a bargain. Access to museums and archaeological sites never exceeds CY£1.50. However, entrance to such sites in the North is comparatively more expensive, with the average museum admission fee ranging from 4YTL to 6YTL.

Cyprus, in both the North and the South, has a 15% value-added tax (VAT), which is automatically added to the cost of more or less all services. An additional tax rate of between 2% and 10% is added to goods and services in Northern Cyprus. This tax and the VAT are not refundable to travellers upon departure.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* is a charming, funny and touching account of a Greek-speaking Englishman coming to live in Cyprus in the mid-1950s. The political tensions of the time serve as a backdrop to this classic of travel writing on Cyprus. Durrell lived in the village of Bellapais (Beylerbeyi) in Northern Cyprus and describes, in his inimitable style, life in Cyprus from the local point of view and from that of a willing expat colonial administrator.

Colin Thubron's *Journey Into Cyprus* was the last significant travelogue of the unified Cyprus, written following an amazing, almost 1000km walk undertaken in the spring and summer of 1972. Sprinkled with stories from the road and historical insight, this book is a must for anyone contemplating an extended visit to Cyprus.

Seamus MacHugh's *Cyprus: An Island Apart* is a modern travel memoir designed to give the short-term visitor a concise background to the island's history and culture, its archaeological treasures and its two religious contexts, together with the divisive politics of the island. Amusing anecdotes fill the pages and describe the quirks and foibles of Cyprus today.

If you want to know more about colonial Cyprus, read *My Old Acquaintance: Yesterday in Cyprus* by Barbara Cornwall. Cornwall recounts the customs of this bygone era drawn from the experiences and impressions of colonisers, pilgrims, churchmen, adventurers, military men, travellers and scholars who have visited the island over the centuries.

HOW MUCH?

Republic of Cyprus

Frappé CY£2

A feast of meze CY£6 to CY£10

Internet CY£1 per hour

Small-car hire CY£25

Museum ticket CY£0.50 to CY£1.50

Northern Cyprus

Two strong black Turkish coffees 5YTL

A meal 12YTL to 15YTL

Internet 1YTL per hour

Small-car hire UK£25

Museum ticket 4YTL to 6YTL

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

TOP FIVES

Festivals & Events

Cyprus has some diverse and fun festivals all year round, with the locals gathering to drink, dance and have a good time. Religious festivals are important, particularly in the South. For more information on festivals and events in Cyprus, see p226.

- Carnival in Lemesos (February/March; p87)
- Lemesos Wine Festival (30 August–11 September; p87)
- Easter Celebrations (March/April; p226)
- Pafos Aphrodite Festival (2–4 September; p124)
- Bellapais Music Festival (May & June; p195)

Beaches

Whether you like it hot and crowded or hot and deserted, Cyprus has plenty of pebbles and sand to stretch out on.

- Golden Beach (Nangomi Bay; p215)
- Petra tou Romiou (Aphrodite's Rock & Beach; p93)
- The beach at Agios Filon (p215)
- Lara Beach (p131)
- Konnos Beach (p170)

Ancient Sites

With a history like this, the island of Cyprus has more ancient sites than you can shake an archaeology buff at.

- Ancient Kourion (p94), west of Lemesos
- Pafos mosaics (p121), Pafos
- Ancient Salamis (p211), northwest of Famagusta (Mağusa)
- Tombs of the Kings (p120), Pafos
- Choirokioita (p152), northeast of Lemesos

INTERNET RESOURCES

Cypnet (www.cypnet.com) One of the more useful sites on the North with information on history, accommodation, restaurants and more.

Cyprus Mail (www.cyprus-mail.com) An English-language daily, excellent for keeping up with news and features about the Republic of Cyprus.

Cyprus Tourism Organisation (www.visitcyprus.org.cy) The official website of the Republic's Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO), useful for general tourist information and basic government data.

GoNorthCyprus (www.gonorthcyprus.com) This site is handy for finding your flights, hotels and package holidays online, and offers 'email deals'.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Succinct summaries on travelling to most places on earth; the Thorn Tree bulletin board is great for exchanging up-to-date information with other travellers.

Ministry of Economy & Tourism (www.holidayinnorthcyprus.com) Good for updates on events and festivals in Northern Cyprus.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

Explore the beauties of the coast and inland terrains of the Republic of Cyprus. Experience ancient sights, mountain trekking and the life of exciting cities and traditional villages, before cooling off in the waters of the Mediterranean.

GEMS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

10 to 14 Days

Fly into **Larnaka** (p142) and dip your feet into the Mediterranean at the beaches around the nightlife centre of **Agia Napa** (p161) for a day, before taking a bus or taxi for the short trip to the capital, **Lefkosia** (South Nicosia; p56). Spend a couple of days exploring the city's walled old section and the modern streets that spill out from the ancient confines. From the capital, head up into the mountains for some trekking and cycling at **Troödos** (p100), and admire the divine images at the many **Byzantine churches** (p100). If hiking's not your thing, you can explore the mountain villages, and get tipsy on wine from the region's **krasohoria** (wine villages; p107).

From the Troödos Massif, roll down to **Lemesos** (p82) and enjoy the city's crazy nightlife and sample its varied cuisine, but spend most of your time exploring **Ancient Kourion** (p94), outside the city. Don't miss the excellent beaches, and make sure you bathe at the divine **Petra tou Romiou** (Aphrodite's Rock & Beach; p93), and perhaps catch some of the goddess' amorous powers.

Head west to **Pafos** (p118), where you can enjoy more ancient remains by viewing the **Pafos mosaics** (p121) and the mysterious **Tombs of the Kings** (p120). Base yourself in any one of the wonderful traditional restored houses in the **Akamas Peninsula** (p131), from where you can enjoy days of trekking and swimming at some of the most wonderful beaches in the South, such as **Lara Beach** (p131). The Akamas Peninsula is also the best place to glimpse traditional Cypriot life. Fly home either from Larnaka or Pafos.



NORTHERN LIGHTS: A JOURNEY THROUGH NORTHERN CYPRUS

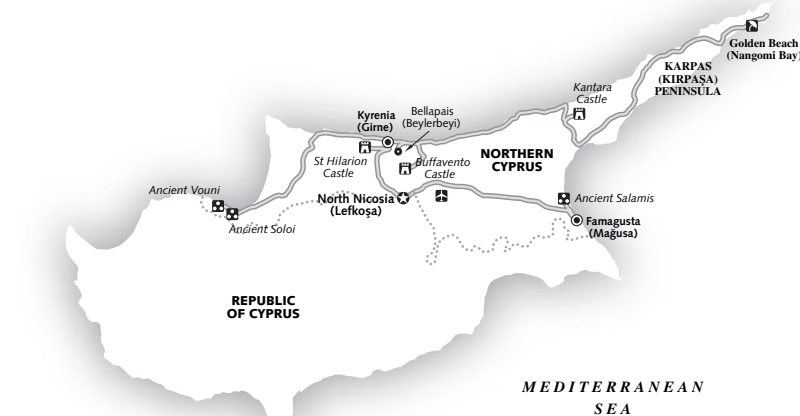
10 to 14 Days

Providing you fly into Ercan airport, your first port of call will be **Famagusta** (Mağusa; p204). And a wonderful first stop it is, with its **Venetian walls** (p206) and the gorgeous **Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque** (p207), originally a Lusignan Gothic church. From Famagusta, head straight to **Ancient Salamis** (p211), the island's most spectacular ancient site, with elaborate remains from the 6th century BC city kingdom.

Follow the highway to the capital, **North Nicosia** (Lefkoşa; p172), and spend a day or two exploring its **Old City** (p174), the **Büyük Han** (Great Inn; p176) and the **Selimiye Mosque** (p176). For all this, base yourself in **Kyrenia** (Girne; p185), only a short drive away from the capital. In Kyrenia, visit the dark caves of **Kyrenia Castle** (p187) and see the oldest shipwreck in Cyprus. Head up to **Bellapais** (Beylerbeyi; p193), and admire the ruins of **Bellapais Abbey** (p193), founded by Augustinian priests in the 12th century. Nearby, visit the dreamy **St Hilarion Castle** (p196), the place that is supposed to have inspired Disney's *Snow White*.

Head west to **Ancient Soloi** (p202) and **Ancient Vouni** (p202). Return to Kyrenia and drive east, following the spectacular road along the **north coast** (p197), forgotten by time and untouched by tourist development. Hike up to **Buffavento Castle** (p196), one of the three Lusignan castles perched on top of the Kyrenia Range, and then drive further east down the coast. Take the windy road up to **Kantara Castle** (p216) from where you can see Cyprus in its entirety. Drive down to the most beautiful part of the island, the **Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula** (p214), ideal for lovers of nature, and for untouched landscapes. This area has the island's best beaches, such as **Golden Beach** (Nangomi Bay; p215) where turtles come to hatch. Fly home from Ercan airport.

A journey through Northern Cyprus, the island's lesser-known part, is a dizzying mix of Lusignan, Gothic and Islamic architecture, half-forgotten ancient sites and wild, unexplored nature. Take your time, indulge yourself and relax on golden beaches.



TAILORED TRIPS

ANCIENT TOURISM

Cyprus is a delight for travellers with a penchant for ancient sites and remains from the numerous empires that once ruled the island.

Ancient Kourion (p94) is regarded by many as one of the most spectacular ancient sites in the Republic, and it's certainly the most important.

Ancient Salamis (p211), the North's archaeological treasure, dates back to the 7th century BC, and bears the title of being one of the first cities in Cyprus.

Choirokoitia (p152), a Unesco World Heritage site since 1998, is the oldest archaeological site in the country. It dates from 6800 BC, when it housed more than 2000 people in the characteristic round houses that the inhabitants usually built over the graves of their dead.

The large **Pafos Archaeological Site** (Nea Pafos; p120) has been a Unesco World Heritage site since 1980. It holds the fascinating **Pafos mosaics** (p121), the most impressive being the House of Dionysus, a rich man's mansion with floors covered in intricate mosaics based on Greek mythology. Also part of the archaeological site, the morbid **Tombs of The Kings** (p120) has 100 tombs that were used to bury the town's wealthy population in the 3rd century BC.

The **Sanctuary of Apollon Yiatis** (p96) was a gathering place for pilgrims in 8th century BC, but was destroyed by an earthquake. Subsequently rebuilt, the present ruins date back to AD 365.

The North's two sites of **Ancient Soloi** (p202) and **Ancient Vouni** (p202) played a major role in the island's struggle against the Persians, in the 5th century BC. Soloi, a city loyal to the Greeks, struggled against the Persians, and Vouni was built by a Persian-supporting king from Marion (now Polis).

The frescoed **Byzantine churches** (p100) at Troödos are not to be missed, with their vivid images of scenes from the Bible. Ten of the churches are listed as Unesco World Heritage sites.

Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque (p207) in Famagusta, is an exquisite piece of Gothic architecture.

Bellapais Abbey (p193), founded by exiled Augustinian monks in the 12th century, was an important spiritual centre for 300 years.



CYPRUS, NATURALLY

The island, although small and largely overbuilt, still has some stunning untouched nature.

The deserted and protected **Karpas Peninsula** (p214) will linger in your memory for years to come. This 'tail end' of the island positively has the best beaches, deserted and clean, with soft golden sand. Turtles hatch at **Golden Beach** (p215), where there is an official turtle-hatching protection programme. Wild donkeys, once Cyprus' equivalent of a lorry and even a currency, roam the endless fields undisturbed and none too friendly.

The **Akamas Peninsula** (p131) is the South's answer to the Karpas Peninsula. The Akamas Peninsula is ideal for trekking, swimming and getting to know the island's traditional villages. The rocky Mediterranean landscape has the region's typical juniper bushes and low pines, and the South's best beach, **Lara Beach** (p131), is a turtle-hatching zone. The **Tyllirian wilderness** (p136) has the lovely **Cedar Valley** (p139), bearing thousands of *Cedrus brevifolia*, an aromatic cedar type indigenous to Cyprus.

The **Troödos Massif** (p101) offers some of the island's best hiking opportunities, with four marked trails: the Artemis Trail, beneath Mt Olympus, the Troödos' tallest peak; the Atalanti Trail, leading you to a clear spring; the Caledonia Trail, where you follow the song of the nightingales; and the Persephone Trail, with nothing but amazing scenery.

Larnaka's salt lake (p151) is a magnet for migrant birds, including flamingos.



Snapshot

Since the one-legged entry into the EU in May 2004 of the internationally recognised Greek part of Cyprus, and the victory of moderate leader Mehmet Ali Talat in the Turkish Cypriot North the following year, the state of Cyprus' bi-communal relations is the hottest topic on the country's news agenda.

A month before the EU entry, Kofi Annan's reunification plan was rejected by nearly 76% of the Greek Cypriot population and, in contrast, endorsed by 65% of Turkish Cypriots. The 'Annan plan' envisaged a loose federal structure for the island, where many Greek Cypriots could return and recover some of the land they lost in the 1974 partition. Greek Cypriots were unhappy that the plan limited their right to return, while allowing tens of thousands of Turkish settlers, introduced since 1974, to remain.

Feelings ran high during this period as both the Greek Cypriot president Tassos Papadopoulos and the then Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş urged a 'no' vote. (For more on Denktaş, see the boxed text, p29.) With the spectacular failure to reach agreement, the Republic of Cyprus entered the EU on its own, and Turkish Cypriots, much congratulated on their positive vote for the plan, were promised financial rewards by the EU.

The second most important change in the country is the present-day ease of crossing the once-menacing Green Line (part of the Attila Line that divides Cyprus).

In the past, crossing the border was permitted only for diplomats, and under extreme circumstances (such as medical emergencies) for Greek and Turkish Cypriots. However, following a sudden and controversial decision by Denktaş in April 2003, it has become possible to cross to either side by car or on foot and to stay on the other side for up to three months.

When the Green Line first opened, hundreds of Cypriots, both Turkish and Greek, made the emotionally charged trip to the opposing side to visit their former homes, friends and, for some, family they hadn't seen for more than three decades. (For more background on the situation, see the boxed text, p30; for border-crossing information for travellers, see the boxed text, p235.)

April 2005 saw a historic change in the leadership of Northern Cyprus. Rauf Denktaş, who had lead the Turkish Cypriots since the 1974 partition, was replaced by the more moderate Mehmet Ali Talat, who had served as prime minister under Denktaş and was openly supportive of the 'Annan plan'.

Perhaps Turkey's EU entry talks, which are predicted to last until 2015, and its agreement to recognise the government of the Republic of Cyprus for the duration of the talks, will set the wheels in motion for resolution.

Meanwhile, the checkpoints continue to open across the island. Many tourists visiting the North fly directly to Larnaka in the Republic of Cyprus, and catch a taxi across the border. Crossing the border is easier for locals too. Turkish Cypriots have applied for Republic of Cyprus passports in their thousands, and many go to work on the other side of the border every day. In turn, Greek Cypriots drive to the North to gamble in the ubiquitous casinos.

FAST FACTS

Population: 780,133

GDP per capita: Republic of Cyprus US\$20,300; Northern Cyprus US\$7135

Inflation: Republic of Cyprus 2.4%; Northern Cyprus 12.6%

Unemployment: Republic of Cyprus 3.2%; Northern Cyprus 5.6%

Alleged number of eating and drinking spots: 4000 (that's roughly one for every five people)

Number of appearances at the Eurovision Song Contest: 25 (including one last place)

Third most important industry: cement production and export (after tourism, and food and beverage production). Could this explain the detrimental building frenzy across the island?

The accession of the Republic of Cyprus' to the EU means that the Cyprus pound (CY£) will be no more by 2007 to 2008; instead there will be the euro to spend.

The tragic events of 14 August 2005 saw Cyprus' biggest peacetime death toll, when a Helios Airways aeroplane plunged into a hill near Athens, killing all of its 121 passengers, most of them Greek Cypriots.

The Author



VESNA MARIC

Vesna had her first taste of Cyprus when she visited a friend in the small village of Dhrouisia on the Akamas Peninsula. Visiting Cyprus is always a different experience, as the country's changes are so rapid, and Vesna's curiosity about the island has never ceased. Cyprus' political troubles remind Vesna of the problems in her native Bosnia and Hercegovina, and she has always felt an affinity with the Cypriots from both sides of the Green Line. The landscape, beaches, fresh figs and haloumi (helimi) all lure her back for more.

My Favourite Trip

Starting from the crazy streets of North Nicosia (Lefkoşa; p172), I love the drive down to Kyrenia (Girne; p185), where a peek at the harbour is always a joy, before driving along the quiet north coast. Stopping off at beautiful Bellapais (Beylerbeyi) village (p193), and clambering up to St Hilarion and Buffavento Castles (p196) is a must. Further east Kantara Castle (p216) awaits, from where you can sigh over the beautiful views. It's Famagusta (Mağusa; p204) and Ancient Salamis (p211) next, and then relaxing at Golden Beach (Nangomi Bay; p215) on the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula, Cyprus' natural treasure.

From Lefkosia (South Nicosia; p56), I travel across the Troödos Massif (p99), visiting the area's frescoed Byzantine churches (p100), and then pay a visit to Lemesos (p82). I drive down the old B6 road to Pafos (p118) where I have some meze, and then it's up to Polis and the Akamas Peninsula (p131), with its beautiful villages. Finally, I settle down in the sun, at the amazing Lara Beach (p131).



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