

TRAVEL + LEISURE



CYPRUS



Cyprus, Greek K  pros, Turkish K  br  s, an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea renowned since ancient times for its mineral wealth, superb wines and produce, and natural beauty.

A “golden-green leaf thrown into the Sea” and a land of “wild weather and volcanoes,” in the words of the Greek Cypriot poet Leonidas Malenis, Cyprus comprises tall mountains, fertile valleys, and wide beaches. Settled for more than 10 millennia, Cyprus stands at a cultural, linguistic, and historic crossroads between Europe and Asia. Its chief cities— the capital of Nicosia, Limassol, Famagusta, and Paphos— have absorbed the influences of generations of conquerors, pilgrims, and travelers and have an air that is both cosmopolitan and provincial. Today Cyprus is a popular tourist destination for visitors from Europe, favoured by honeymooners (as befits the legendary home of Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love), bird-watchers drawn by the island’s diversity of migratory species, and other vacationers.

In 1960 Cyprus became independent of Britain (it had been a crown colony since

1925) as the Republic of Cyprus. The long-standing conflict between the Greek Cypriot majority and the Turkish Cypriot minority and an invasion of the island by Turkish troops in 1974 produced an actual, although internationally unrecognized, partition of the island and led to the establishment in 1975 of a de facto Turkish Cypriot state in the northern third of the country. The Turkish Cypriot state made a unilateral declaration of independence in 1983 and adopted the name Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Its independence was recognized only by Turkey.

Religion

The Greek Cypriots are primarily Eastern Orthodox Christians. Their church, the Church of Cyprus, is autocephalous (not under the authority of any patriarch); this privilege was granted to Archbishop Anthemius in AD 488 by the Byzantine emperor Zeno. Under the Ottoman Empire, the archbishop of the Church of Cyprus was made responsible for the secular as well as the religious behaviour of the Orthodox

community and given the title ethnarch. The Turkish Cypriots are Sunni Muslims. There are also smaller Maronite, Armenian, Roman Catholic, and Anglican Christian communities on the island.

People and Languages

The people of Cyprus represent two main ethnic groups, Greek and Turkish. The Greek Cypriots, who constitute nearly four-fifths of the population, descended from a mixture of aboriginal inhabitants and immigrants from the Peloponnese who colonized Cyprus

starting about 1200 BC and assimilated subsequent settlers up to the 16th century. Roughly one-fifth of the population are Turkish Cypriots, descendants of the soldiers of the Ottoman army that conquered the island in 1571 and of immigrants from Anatolia brought in by the sultan’s government. Since 1974 additional immigrants from Turkey have been brought in to work vacant land and increase the total labour force.

The language of the majority is Greek and of the minority, Turkish. There are

also a small number of Arabic speaking Maronite Christians, as well as a small group who speak Armenian. These groups each total only a few thousand speakers, and they are mostly bilingual, with either Turkish or Greek their second language. English is widely spoken and understood. Illiteracy is extremely low, the result of an excellent educational system. Greek Cypriots speak a dialect of Greek and maintain a somewhat ambivalent attitude about mainland Greeks.

However, most Greek Cypriots who go abroad for their postsecondary education travel to Greece, and these young people share in the popular culture of Greece, which is itself increasingly cosmopolitan. Even so, Greek Cypriots take care to preserve

their traditional culture and to observe such important holidays as Easter (and the pre-Easter Carnival) and Anthestiria, a spring flower festival. Despite years of civil conflict in the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s, the younger generation of Greek Cypriots has grown up in a relatively peaceful, settled, and prosperous society that encompasses aspects of traditional culture while welcoming world trends in dress and entertainment.

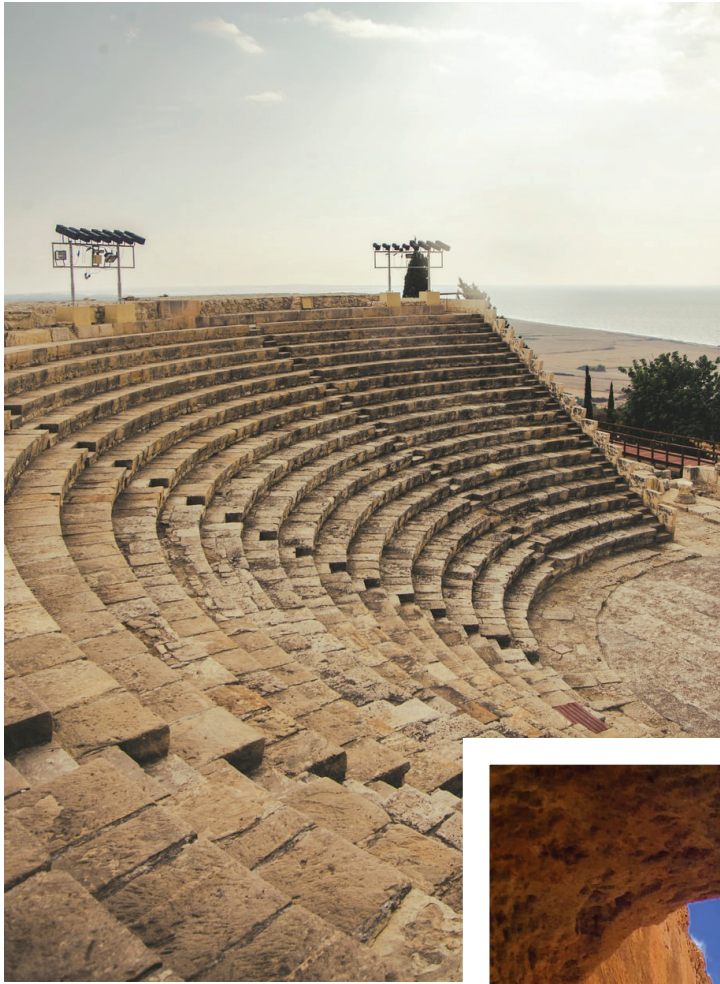
The Island of Love

Cyprus is the third biggest island in the Mediterranean. It’s known as the birthplace of Aphrodite in Greek mythology.

Swimming around her rock is believed to secure an eternal love. It’s also the site of a ship wreck.

“The legendary home of Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love”





Greek Cypriot poets are somewhat better known beyond the island, having been translated into other European languages. Several literary journals are published, and small presses issue hundreds of books in Greek and Turkish each year. Poetry is also an important element in the growing “peace culture” movement, which seeks to forge social and cultural links across the island’s ethnic divide.

Numerous painters and sculptors work in Cyprus, and the Cultural Services office keeps the state’s collection of modern Cypriot art on permanent exhibition and sponsors the annual Kypria International Festival of music and theatrical performances. In the



The Arts

Cyprus has figured in the literature of Europe for thousands of years, from the works of Ionic lyric poets to modern travel memoirs such as Lawrence Durrell’s *Bitter Lemons* (1957). Literary traditions are strong on the island itself. Drawing on oral tradition, on classical forms, such as the *tekerleme* (rigmarole) and *mani* (quatrain), and on contemporary styles, Turkish Cypriot singers such as Acar Akalın and Neşe Yaşın have developed a body of work that is well known on the Turkish mainland though largely untranslated into other languages. Contemporary

village of Lemba, near Paphos, the Cyprus College of Art runs courses for postgraduate art students. The government encourages young composers, musicians, and folk dance groups. Both the Turkish and the Greek Cypriot communities have active film industries, and Cypriot motion pictures have received a number of awards in international competitions. Classical and folk music enjoy a wide following among Cypriots of all ages, and the respective folk music traditions of the Greek and Turkish communities, combined with international styles, have contributed to the development of native Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot popular music styles.

Cultural Institutions

The ancient cultural traditions of Cyprus are maintained partly by private enterprise and partly by government sponsorship, especially through the Cultural Services office of the Republic of Cyprus’s Ministry of Education and Culture, which publishes books, awards prizes for literature, and promotes Cypriot publications. Cities have public libraries, as do many rural communities. The government-sponsored Cyprus Theatre Organization stages plays by contemporary Cypriot dramatists as well as classical works. The ancient theatres of Salamis and Soli in the Turkish sector and Kourion (Curium) in the Greek portion have been restored; a variety of plays are staged at Kourion, and a Greek theatre has been built at Nicosia. Many noteworthy buildings survive from the Lusignan and Venetian periods, in particular the Gothic cathedrals at Nicosia and Famagusta and the Abbey of Bellapais near Kyrenia. There are other Gothic churches throughout the island. Orthodox Christians also built numerous churches in a distinctive style that was often influenced by the Gothic; the interiors of these illustrate the continued development of Byzantine art. Cyprus has notable examples of medieval and Renaissance military architecture, such as the castles of Kyrenia, St. Hilarion, Buffavento, and Kantara

and the elaborate Venetian fortifications of Nicosia and Famagusta.

Additional sites of cultural significance include the town of Paphos, held to be the legendary birthplace of Aphrodite, which houses a temple constructed in her honour dating from the 12th century BC; the painted churches of the Troodos region, a complex of Byzantine churches and monasteries renowned for their display of murals in Byzantine and post-Byzantine styles; and the Neolithic settlements at Choirokotia, inhabited from the 7th to the 4th millennium BC. These sites were designated UNESCO World Heritage sites in 1980, 1985, and 1998, respectively.

Sports and Recreation

Sports play a major role in the Greek Cypriot community, as they have since Classical times, when stadiums stood at the heart of the island’s chief cities. Through the Cyprus Sports Organization, an official body formed in 1969, the government has built stadiums, sports halls, and swimming pools and has subsidized associations and clubs for a wide spectrum of sports; there are a professional football (soccer) league and a semiprofessional basketball league.

Cypriot athletes began to compete in the Olympic Games in 1924 but as members of the Greek national team. In 1978 the Cyprus National Olympic Committee was admitted to the International Olympic Committee, and the Republic of Cyprus has been sending its own national team—consisting of athletes from the Greek Cypriot sector only—to the Games since 1980. There have been unsuccessful attempts at athletic cooperation or contests between the Turkish and Greek communities, and international sports-governing bodies have not recognized the sports associations in the Turkish sector of Cyprus.