



# CULTURAL GUIDE TO CYPRUS

Transition Center  
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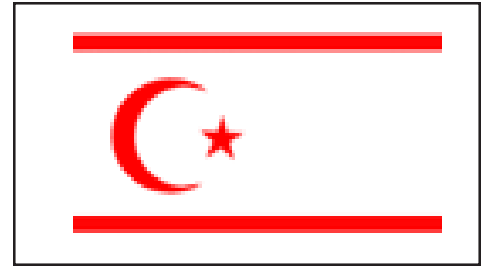
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## INTRODUCTION

**C**YPRUS, an island nation in the eastern Mediterranean with an area of 3,572 square miles, is half the size of New Jersey and twice the size of Rhode Island, lying only 40 miles from Turkey at the nearest point, 500 miles east of mainland Greece, and 100 miles west of Syria.

At the present time, Cyprus is divided into two areas. The southern part of the island is controlled by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and is populated largely by Greek Cypriots who comprise approximately 80 percent of the island's population. The northern part of the island, where there is a visible Turkish military presence, is inhabited mostly by Turkish Cypriots and controlled by the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC"), an entity recognized only by Turkey. Between the two areas is a buffer zone informally called the "Green Line," which is patrolled by the United Nations Forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The Green Line runs through the capital, Nicosia, dividing it between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. From July 1974, when the island was divided following the Turkish military intervention, until April 23, 2003, when the Turkish Cypriot authorities relaxed crossing restrictions, the two communities had little contact with each other, but since that date there have been over 3 million crossings of the Green Line in both directions without serious incident.

About 540 Greek Cypriots still live in northern Cyprus, and approximately 1,300 Turkish Cypriots

live in the south. Since the relaxing of crossing restrictions in 2003, a sizable population of laborers has crossed from the north to work in the more highly developed south. There are also small communities of Maronites on the island, as well as members of the Latin (Roman Catholic) and Armenian minorities residing in the south. A number of British retirees also live throughout the island, mainly near the north and south coasts. In recent years, significant numbers of Turks have moved from Anatolia and other parts of Turkey to northern Cyprus, and large numbers of Russians have settled in the south. Significant numbers of students and some asylum seekers, mostly from South Asia, have also begun living on the island.

Despite its Middle Eastern location, Cyprus is in many ways oriented toward the West. It has been a crossroads of diverse civilizations and cultures throughout its history. Many educated Cypriots speak excellent English. They are used to meeting people from other countries and take pleasure in talking with them. Few cultural surprises await the newcomer. Cypriots are very hospitable and enjoy friendship, talk, and laughter; the island is steeped in history and bathed in sunshine. With little effort, Cyprus can become a very pleasant home away from home. Cypriots love to hear compliments about their country, and you should find that soon after you arrive, it will be easy to offer such compliments with enthusiasm and sincerity. Cypriots place great significance on their intercommunal differences (referred to as the Cyprus "problem").

# HISTORY

Cyprus has a culturally rich and historically complicated heritage. Several excellent books, some listed at the back of this guide, have been written about the history of Cyprus, and they are worth reading. The following paragraphs give only a brief summary of a complex subject.

The oldest known settlements on the island belong to the Neolithic age and date from 7,000 BC, but recent archaeological research indicates there was a hunter-gatherer Paleolithic community dating back to about 12,000 BC. With the discovery of copper in 2500 BC, the island acquired wealth and established commercial ties with countries to the east and west. The Achaean Greeks were especially attracted to Cyprus, and through the introduction of their language, customs, and religion, they had a lasting influence on the culture of the island. Homer mentions Cyprus frequently in both the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey,” and he cites Paphos in southwest Cyprus as the birthplace of the goddess Aphrodite.

In the pre-Christian period, Cyprus was occupied in succession by the Phoenicians, Assyrians, Egyptians, and Persians. Each culture left its mark. In subsequent years, Cyprus was held by Alexander the Great and then by Ptolemy, the first Greek Pharaoh of Egypt. (As Egypt’s queen, Cleopatra offered Cyprus to her lover, Mark Anthony.) For

the next thousand years, the island was ruled by first the Roman and then the Byzantine empires. The outstanding event of the early Roman period was the establishment of Christianity in Cyprus under the Apostles Paul and Barnabas.

In 1191, sailing for Jerusalem in the Third Crusade, England’s King Richard the Lion Hearted met violent storms and was forced to land on Cyprus. He was enraged by the ill-treatment of his fiancée, Berengaria, by Isaac Comnenos, the self-styled “emperor” of Cyprus, and he proceeded to conquer the whole island. Following his marriage to Berengaria and finding himself short of funds for the continuation of his crusade, Richard sold

Cyprus to the Knights Templar. Soon after, the Templars resold the island to Guy de Lusignan, titular King of Jerusalem, and thus began a 300-year domination of Cyprus by the Lusignans (Franks). During this period, several fine medieval castles and churches were built which, fortunately for the tourist, still stand today. Although few native Cypriots rose above the status of serf, for the most part

this was a time of prosperity, stability, and even progress. Suppression of the Cypriot Church was policy, but did not succeed. Venetians replaced Franks in 1489, and the Cypriots truly suffered until the Turkish period began in 1571. Shakespeare’s tragedy “Othello” is set in Venetian Cyprus. The tragedy is said to have taken place in Famagusta; there one finds “Othello’s Tower” where, it is claimed, Othello murdered Desdemona.

Cyprus was conquered by forces of the Ottoman Empire in 1571. For the next three centuries, until



**The island was governed by the Ottoman Empire for three centuries from 1571 to 1878.**

1878, the island was governed by the Empire, which at its greatest reach stretched into Western Europe and comprised much of the present-day Middle East. Under a system of local self-rule known as the “millet,” each subject nationality in the Empire had extensive powers of local self-administration. The Hellenic community of the island was headed by the *Ethnarch*, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus.

In 1878 Turkey transferred administration of Cyprus to Great Britain in return for a promise of any needed help against the Russians. Turkey still claimed “rent,” however, which the British collected and paid to British holders of Ottoman bonds. When Turkey entered World War I on the side of the Germans in 1914, the British formally annexed the island. Cypriots look upon the British period with mixed emotions. British colonial policy did little to unite the Greek and Turkish Cypriots into one community, and Cyprus did not gain independence until 1960, after a bloody four-year liberation struggle between British and Greek Cypriot (EOKA) forces. However, British democratic traditions and administrative institutions have proved beneficial. Vestiges of colonial rule are multitudinous, but of special mention are the judicial system and widespread use of the English language. Large colonies of Cypriots live in the United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries, and the British retain two (military) sovereign base areas (SBAs) in Cyprus.

In 1960, Cyprus became an independent sovereign republic, and Archbishop Makarios became the

country’s first president. From the beginning, the republic was wrought with communal differences and problems. The fact that most Greek Cypriots had wished for *Enosis* (union with Greece) rather than independence, and most Turkish Cypriots would have preferred a continuation of British rule, or *Taksim* (partition of the island), was not helpful in preserving peace. The 1960 constitution was intended to promote a political compromise between the Greek and Turkish communities, including political safeguards for the Turkish Cypriots (18 percent of the island’s population).

The constitution failed to work, and intercommunal fighting broke out in late 1963. Turkish Cypriot officials withdrew from political participation, and United Nations troops were invited to police parts of the island to prevent further intercommunal strife. The Turkish Cypriots were isolated into several enclaves. There was intense sporadic fighting in 1964 and again in 1967. In 1968 a period of relative calm in intercommunal relations began and endured until 1974. Intercommunal talks aimed at finding a lasting settlement began in June 1968 but proved unsuccessful.

The Turks saw the Greek-inspired coup in 1974, which temporarily overthrew President Makarios, as the final step toward *Enosis* and as a threat to their security, as well as to the existence of the Turkish Cypriot community. As a result, the Turkish Army intervened in Cyprus in July, and again in August 1974. Since then, Cyprus has been divided into the Greek Cypriot-controlled Republic of Cyprus in the south and the unrecognized “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) in the



**Cyprus joined the European Union on May 1, 2004.**



north, with almost complete separation of the two communities until 2003. Although the refugees on both sides were resettled, they have endured great emotional losses and financial hardships. Economic conditions in the territory controlled by the Government of Cyprus have progressed remarkably. By contrast, the Turkish Cypriots have made much less economic progress. Most Greek Cypriot refugees yearn to return to their villages and homes.

Although members of both communities appear to desire a solution, their respective leaders were unable to agree on the necessary concessions and compromises enabling a sort of federalism to work, thus prompting U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to exercise his Good Offices in an attempt to broker a settlement. The basic structure of the Annan Plan is a bizonal, bicomunal federation. Under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary General, intercommunal talks were held in 2002-2004, and a settlement plan (the “Annan Plan”) was put to voters of both sides in parallel referenda on April 24, 2004. The Greek Cypriot community rejected the plan while the Turkish Cypriots accepted it. As a result, the Cyprus problem remains unresolved and Cyprus joined the European Union on May 1, 2004, a divided country, and Nicosia stands today as Europe’s only divided capital.

The Cyprus problem dominates the emotions and thinking of most Cypriots. Its political, international, economic, and personal ramifications are always at the forefront of the Cypriot mind. All Americans serving in Cyprus, on arrival and constantly during their stay, whether riding in a taxi or at a cocktail party, have been drawn into conversations on this subject. An understanding of the history and political situation is essential for Americans serving in Cyprus. There is also considerable potential for unintended offense. Americans serving on the island who meet members of both communities should be prepared to engage in lengthy conversations on the Cyprus problem, evincing sincere interest in a sympathetic but dispassionate manner.

# SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

## Language

English is widely spoken in Cyprus. Many Greek Cypriots study (British) English in school in preparation for university studies abroad, and the majority of Cypriots whom Americans are likely to meet in social and work-related situations are fluent in English, often with a British accent. Many cab drivers, shop assistants, policemen, and people who deal with tourists and foreign residents have a working command of the language. Turkish Cypriots have traditionally spoken excellent English, and, before the advent of intercommunal problems, could also speak Greek. Since 1974, however, fewer Turkish Cypriots have been learning English; it is common now in Northern Cyprus to meet individuals who speak no English..

Armenians, a small minority group in Cyprus, speak Greek and usually English. Americans and Cypriots alike may find that although they both speak English, they occasionally have difficulty understanding each other, as British and American accents and vocabulary differ. It is not necessary that you learn Turkish or Greek, but your efforts in the local tongues will be appreciated and will give you an insight into the people and their rich heritage. Cypriots will overlook your mistakes and almost intuitively understand what you are trying to say and help you say it. It is helpful to learn a few basic greetings and phrases. Cypriots will usually smile with pleasure and congratulate you on your effort. It is extremely helpful, and not too difficult, to learn the Greek alphabet, as many street signs are written in Greek only.

## Greetings

As you will learn if you study Greek, the language has a polite and a familiar “you” form. Most exchanges between Americans and Cypriots are in English, so you do not need to worry too much about which form to use. As a general rule, however, use the familiar with children and the polite with all adults. If and when they switch to the familiar, follow their lead. If you accompany your greeting with a warm smile, you will show the Cypriot you are talking to that you are not trying to put a social distance between you by your formal usage.

When Greek Cypriots meet, they use the greeting *Ya sas* (polite) or *Ya su* (familiar). In more formal settings or when greeting elders, *Herete* should be used. All three greetings are used interchangeably for hello and goodbye. Turkish Cypriots usually say *Merhaba* (hello), *Iyi gunler* (have a good day—said when parting company during the day)

or *Iyi aksamlar* (have a good evening—said when parting company from late afternoon to late evening.) Two women will often give each other a kiss on each cheek (air kiss) upon meeting, and sometimes men and women will do the same. Kissing man to man in the same fashion is only done between very close friends who have not seen each other for a long time. (If a male foreigner finds himself becoming close friends with Turkish Cypriot men, particularly older men, he should be prepared to receive and return this greeting.) Otherwise, men will shake hands and occasionally pat each other on the back. Children will always shake hands when greeting adults

formally. Office greetings are confined to a handshake.

When Americans are introduced to Cypriots, they should always be prepared to shake hands. Occasionally, a Cypriot woman will kiss an American woman on first meeting, and Cypriot hostesses will frequently kiss their female guests on both cheeks upon their arrival and departure. The Cypriot man will usually shake the American woman’s hand, but may occasionally kiss her on the cheeks.

Be prepared and follow the lead of those around you. Upon entering a room, greet each person individually and also say goodbye to each person when leaving.

**Cypriots are very animated speakers, using many gestures, but keeping actual physical touching to back patting and hand shaking or air kissing when greeting.**

At formal social gatherings, men and women are introduced by the polite “Mr. Jones” and “Mrs. Christodoulides” and so forth. When Cypriots get to know you they will call you by your first name or sometimes by the slightly more formal “Mr. Paul” or “Miss Vicki,” for example.

Cypriots are very polite and when talking to you on the phone, at the supermarket, or at a party, they will usually inquire about your family members and ask to be remembered to them.

The Greek word for “yes” is *Nai* (pronounced *Nay*) and “no” is *Oxi* (pronounced *O’hee*). This is at first confusing because these terms sound very similar to the words no and okay but have opposite meanings. In Turkish, it is *Evet* (yes) and *Hayir* (no). For all Cypriots, it is important to understand the body language used to denote yes and no. Yes is often expressed by a vertical tip of the head downward, while no is an upward movement of the head and eyebrows. This is often





### **Cypriots respect the hierarchy at the office.**

accompanied by a click of the tongue sounding like “tsk.”

Cypriots like to talk with their hands and eyes as well as their mouths. They love to give advice and to express their opinions. Occasionally the decibel level and gesticulations of a conversation might lead the unsuspecting foreigner to conclude that a major argument is in process. That is not usually the case. Such an animated exchange is just normal, spirited conversation.

Although gestures are an important part of Cypriot speech, actual physical touching is usually restricted to back patting and hand shaking or air kissing when greeting.

## **At the Office**

**F**or the American working with or supervising Cypriots, it is essential to remember that almost without exception they are well-educated, proud, hardworking, and loyal. Although they accept and defer to authority, they expect their employer or supervisor to treat them with respect.

Office relationships are informal but always courteous. Cypriots in the office usually dress very

well but conduct business in a relaxed manner. Depending on the lead set by the supervisor, employees may address him or her on a first name or more formal basis.

Employers have certain obligations to their employees. The outstanding explicit obligation is payment of the “13th month” salary, which almost all employees in Cyprus are given at Christmas, or half at Christmas and half at Easter. Implicit obligations basically involve demonstrations of concern for the employees’ welfare. For example, the employer should entertain employees at dinner or cocktails at special times of the year or to mark special events. The employer should accept invitations, if at all possible, to employees’ homes. The employer should recognize important events such as name days (the feast day of the saint after whom they were named), births, christenings, weddings, or deaths in the family with a handshake, congratulations, gift, or condolences.

The employer should follow the lead of Cypriots who in times of trouble help each other and, in times of happiness, celebrate together.

Because Cypriots are proud, Americans should try not to embarrass them in front of others. Unsatisfactory work should be corrected tactfully and in private. Those working in a hierarchy are conscious of their position and the status and prerogatives attached to that position. Unless it is absolutely necessary, avoid the American tendency to shortcut established channels to get something done more quickly. Such shortcuts will inevitably offend the Cypriots with whom you are dealing. To avoid offense, go through the established hierarchy. Sudden changes of direction, especially when made to long-established procedures, are hard for employees to accept. Changes made by consensus are more palatable.

When dealing with Cypriots in government ministries, Americans should acquaint themselves

with official protocol. Although protocol conscious, government officials are responsive to a personal touch. For example, an American may receive a call from a Cypriot counterpart through the secretary; although it is perfectly acceptable for the American to return the call in the same way, “points” can be made by calling back directly. Similarly, a work-related gift, albeit a token, becomes more significant when given or received in person.

Cypriots enjoy giving and receiving gifts. Whenever they celebrate, they will share their happiness, in the form of a gift, with others. Americans receiving gifts should be grateful, and if the gift is edible, eat it. Also, they should, as much as possible, reciprocate. For example, an American officer when celebrating a birthday will please colleagues if a cake is brought to share with everyone in the office. The American habit of gleefully and immediately opening gifts seems strange to Cypriots; they receive presents rather matter of factly and open them in private. Thank you letters for gifts are not customary. Do not be deceived by this habit. Your gift is appreciated.

## Getting Things Done

Officers and spouses running households sometimes run across misunderstandings when attempting to get things done in Cyprus. For the most part, Cypriots are efficient and reliable, but they are also reluctant to disappoint or to lose status in the eyes of others. Consequently, they will not always admit to being unable to do something when or as requested. Generally, if a workman or tradesman is able to fulfill an obligation or promise, he will do so promptly. If deadlines pass or excuses mount, it is best to find another person to do the job.

In the same way that Cypriots are reluctant to say they cannot do something they also dislike being

given a categorical “no” in answer to a question or to a certain request. Therefore, it can be helpful in dealing with them to qualify and/or dilute any kind of negative reaction with some helpful suggestions or alternatives.

Since Cyprus is a small place and everyone knows everyone else or

someone who does, the traditional way to get things done is through connections. Thus, if you have a problem, you will most certainly find friends or associates willing and able to help you—both because this is the natural way of doing business and because Cypriots are friendly and anxious to make foreigners feel at home. There is sometimes a third factor involved, however. When someone does a favor for another person, they have put that other person in their debt. Cypriots help others when they can and, in return, hope that they will be helped when in need themselves. This can be awkward when filling job vacancies, selecting candidates for travel grants or scholarships, etc., and it may be necessary to explain very clearly the application process and make sure that it is transparent.

Occasionally, information is passed in a roundabout way. For example, if Takis is displeased with Costas, he may tell Yiannis who is a friend of Costas’ colleague. Costas will get the message. If a family is concerned about something their son’s teacher has done at school, they may mention it to their cousin who happens to be a friend of a member of the school board. It



**Workmen, tradesmen, and other help are generally reliable and efficient**

will eventually get back to the teacher. If Eleni is bothered by her American neighbor who plays the piano during Eleni's siesta, she will probably telephone Mary, a friend of the American neighbor and, in the course of conversation, complain that she has a headache because she has not been able to sleep in the afternoon. Once again, the message is delivered with, from the Cypriot point of view, reduced embarrassment.

## Cypriot Hospitality

**H**ospitable and gregarious by nature, Cypriots enjoy meeting with friends over food and drink both in restaurants and in their homes. Cypriot hospitality is marked by warmth and plenty, and any invitation from a Cypriot, be it to the Hilton, to a small taverna, or to his home, will be marked by friendliness and generosity. Casual invitations are extended by telephone, sometimes with a reminder card to follow; more formal invitations may be issued by written or printed card.

When visiting a Cypriot's home for the first time, it is nice, but not essential, to bring a bouquet of flowers (roses are a favorite), a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates, or some other small gift.



**Moussaka is a favorite dish at dinner parties.**

Although Cypriots are not as punctual as Americans, they are used to American ways and usually will arrive at your home more or less on time. You will be expected to do the same, and while arriving 15 minutes late is acceptable, arriving more than half an hour late could be considered rude. Telephone in advance if you expect to be very late. When you arrive, you will probably be ushered into a living room displaying many of your host's most expensive and prized possessions; if you feel like looking at them closely and admiring them, by all means, do so. If a handsome library is in sight, this too can deserve attention.

At this point, you may be introduced to your host's children who, invariably, will be charming and polite.

Dinner parties at home are usually large. In most cases, the cocktail hour is short (one drink), and the dinner is elaborate and long.

Formal parties are seated, but many dinners are served buffetstyle. Hostesses take great pains over their house and food, and guests dress with care (dark suits for men and nice dresses for women). Despite this formality of food and dress, the atmosphere is usually casual and friendly. A buffet dinner may include cold fish, several hot meat dishes, casseroles such as *moussaka* or *pastitsio*, potatoes, vegetables, salads, and bread. Dessert may include two or three cakes or sweets, fruit, and coffee. You will soon notice that many Cypriot hostesses seem to be friendly rivals and maintain a competition on how many different and unusual types of food they can present.

Drinking is of secondary importance at a dinner of this sort, and wine, while appreciated, is sipped. It is polite to follow a dinner invitation with a thank you note or phone call. If possible, invitations should be reciprocated.

Toasting is an integral part of most dinners. Standard Greek Cypriot toasts are: the British

## Entertaining

“cheers”; *Stin iya sas*, a formal toast meaning to your health; *Ya su*, a friendly abbreviation of the former; and *Ya mas*, a jovial “to our health.” Glasses are clinked around the table, and wine is sipped. Toasting is an expression of good spirits and can continue throughout a meal.

The traditional Turkish toasts are *Serefe*—meaning to your honor—or *Sagliginiza*—meaning to your health. Turkish is rich in expressions for every occasion; one may use *Kesenize bereket* (May your purse be plentiful) on being treated to dinner and *Elinize saglik* (May your hands be healthy) to the hostess.

At some parties, the women tend to gather in one corner or room and the men in another. You may find yourself with a group speaking Greek. Invariably they will politely switch to English, but if you are studying Greek, this would be a good opportunity for you to practice your new language skills, however minimal they may be.

### Roses are a favorite for the hostess of a dinner party.



The traditional cocktail party belongs to the realm of diplomatic and big business affairs. Rules of reciprocity do not apply to such functions, but if you invite a Cypriot to cocktails in your home, he or she will remember the invitation as a gesture of hospitality. Many Cypriot government employees or businessmen find it more convenient to give cocktail parties in a restaurant or hotel.

Women are sometimes invited to morning coffees and afternoon teas. At either occasion, you will be offered large amounts of food and may be seated around the dining room table.

It is wise to plan your parties bearing local custom in mind. Dinner invitations are usually for 8:00 p.m. or 8:30 p.m. (or even 9:00 p.m. in the hot summer period), and cocktail parties last for one and a half to two hours starting between 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Types of invitations can vary in formality according to the guests and the various occasion. Cocktails, dinners, and business lunches are the standard ways of entertaining, but informal invitations can also be extended for

picnics, beach trips, and Sunday lunches in the mountains or at popular seaside *tavernas*. You will find your invitations welcomed, accepted if possible, and usually reciprocated by the appreciative guest.

Whatever the occasion, it is wise to bear a few points in mind. Cypriots generally do not drink much alcohol, and prefer to combine drinking with eating. Always have soft drinks

and fruit juice on hand and be prepared to mix brandy sours, a delicious mixture of Cypriot brandy, lemon squash, soda water, and bitters. Cypriots do not share the American appreciation of rare roast beef and steaks; they enjoy beef medium or even well done. Remember, Turkish Cypriots are Muslims, and do not usually eat pork. It is not necessary to plan an elaborate meal, but good food, including American specialties, is always enjoyed. Cypriots like sweets very much, even after a big meal. Lots of good food, a little wine, and a leisurely atmosphere are conducive to relaxation and the free flow of animated conversation.



Take advantage of this hospitable country where it is fun to entertain since guests are so ready to enjoy themselves and where, with a little effort, any American can get to know many of the local people.

## IMPORTANT OCCASIONS

### Turkish Cypriot Religious Holidays

Turkish Cypriots have traditionally been more secular than Turks; do not attend Friday prayers at the mosque regularly, and only a small percentage fast during the month of fasting, or “*Ramadan*.”

#### RAMADAN BAYRAM

Turkish Cypriots, together with the Muslim world, have a three-day celebration of the religious holiday known as “*Ramadan Bayram*,” which follows 30 days of fasting. This *Bayram* moves up approximately 10 days each year according to the Muslim lunar calendar. It is believed that the divine revelation of the Koran, the sacred book of Islam, to Prophet Mohammed through Gavriel started during *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar. Every Muslim who is not poor is expected to give *Fitre* (a special amount of money announced by Religious Affairs) to poor people. Following the early morning prayer in the mosque, celebrations begin with visits to close relatives and friends; younger family members visit their elders. Sweets are offered to guests. In Turkey as well as in northern Cyprus, this *Bayram* is often referred to as *Seker Bayram*, or “Sugar Holiday,” given the

tradition of offering sweets. This is also a time to renew friendships and forgive.

#### KURBAN BAYRAM

Another important religious holiday for the Turkish Cypriots is the *Kurban Bayram*, or “Festival of the Sacrifices.” This custom is based on the dictates of the Koran. During this holiday, Muslims are expected to offer a sacrifice—generally a sheep—and distribute a large portion of it to the poor. (In some countries, the sacrifice may be a camel.) The meat is barbecued and eaten. There are different interpretations of this dictate: some Muslims believe that it applies only to the wealthy, others that it applies to every follower of Islam. In general, the wealthier the individual the bigger the sacrifice. During the four-day holiday, all government and bank offices and most businesses are closed. Many Islam adherents use this opportunity to make their pilgrimage of *haj* to Mecca.

### Greek Cypriot Special Holidays

#### EASTER

By far the most important time of the year of the Orthodox world is the coming of Easter. The date may or may not coincide with the western calendar.

Carnival, the period of 10 days and 11 nights preceding Lent, is for eating and celebrating. An atmosphere of festivity prevails. Children seem almost continually dressed in costume. Many parties for children and adults are held either at hotels or in people’s homes. Limassol is Cyprus’s Carnival capital. The entrance of “King Carnival” into the city marks the beginning of festivities, including a children’s costume parade at *Tsirion* Stadium, a cantata concert performed by choirs and guitar, and finally a grand costume parade.

The beginning of Lent is marked by Clean Monday, a national holiday when many go to the fields for a picnic. On this day, many Cypriots start their fast or abstention from eating certain foods such as meat or anything that contains fat.

Special Lenten foods are prepared, such as shellfish, olives, *halvas*, and capers. A special unleavened bread called *Lagana* is prepared in the bakeries.

The first major service of Holy Week takes place on the Thursday before Easter. All the icons are covered with black cloth. The crucifixion of Christ is then reenacted. At noon on Good Friday, the priest takes the *Epitafio*, a hand-embroidered picture of Christ on an icon, and places it in the bier or tomb, which is filled with freshly cut flowers. Later that night, a procession of mourners led by men carrying the bier winds through the streets of the city. Everyone carries lighted candles.

Easter Saturday is spent in anticipation of midnight and the spiritual reenactment of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Bearing unlit white candles, people arrive at church a little before midnight and await the priest who will emerge from the holy doors of the *iconostasi*. He announces, *Christos anesti*, or "Christ has risen." The flame from the priest's lighted candle is passed from candle to candle. This is a time of intense joy and people turn to each other and repeat *Christos anesti*, to which is replied, *Alithos anesti*, or "Truly, He has risen." Everyone walks home with his or her candles still burning and takes them around the entire house so that the holy light will bless their dwellings until the next year.

Families return home for a meal that begins with a game involving dyed red Easter eggs. The object is to tap one's egg against another person's egg to crack it without cracking his or her own. The traditional meal is egg and lemon soup followed by a special dish made from lamb tripe. Easter Sunday follows with family gatherings and a delicious meal of lamb roasted over charcoal. Eating and celebrating continue throughout the day.

## CHRISTMAS

Traditionally Christmas has not been as widely observed by the Greek Orthodox Church as it is by western Christianity. The British influence in Cyprus has resulted, however, in Christmas becoming a more celebrated holiday. Christmas trees are available, and are richly decorated. Christmas cards are exchanged between business associates and among Cypriots and foreign friends. They are not widely sent between Cypriots themselves.

Some families exchange gifts at Christmas, but many wait until New Year's, an equally important holiday. Both Christmas and New Year's are family occasions and are celebrated with relatives, usually at home. Holiday celebrations continue through Epiphany Day (January 6).

One or two days preceding Christmas, be prepared to have your doorbell ring. Cypriot children may appear at your door playing the triangle and singing the *Kalanda*, a pretty song that tells the Christmas story and conveys good wishes for the New Year. You should give them some small change and perhaps some wrapped cookies or sweets.



**The Tsirion Stadium in Limassol is home to a children's costume parade during Carnival,**



Traditionally, the *Kalanda* is sung at homes, offices, and shops before Christmas, New Year's, and Epiphany, but most singers make their rounds either at Christmas or New Year's.

Your garbage men (or "dustmen") will probably ring your doorbell as well. They will wish you a *Hronia polla* and expect a small present of cash in return. Domestic employees should be given their prescribed Christmas bonus and possibly a modest gift as well. Presents in the way of liquor, candy, cakes, and so forth, will be generally circulated among business associates.

Being Muslims, Turkish Cypriots do not celebrate Christmas. During the holidays, they do exchange New Year's gifts of food and drink, and other items, with their friends and business associates.

## Orthodox Weddings

Certainly your stay in Cyprus will not be complete without having attended a village or town wedding. Wedding bells ring every Sunday afternoon all year round (except during Lent) and even on Saturdays in the fall and spring.

Invitations are either hand delivered or sent through the mail. They are also occasionally printed in the newspaper.

The Orthodox Church ceremony is colorful and meaningful even for those who do not understand the Ecclesiastic Greek used by the church. Participants and guests all stand throughout the church ceremony. The bride and groom and the principals encircle the central table. A memorable moment in the ceremony occurs when the priest exchanges crowns over the heads of the bride and groom; this is done three times. These crowns of *stefania* are joined by a ribbon, which the best men and bridesmaids sign as a keepsake for the couple. The ceremony does not require the taking

of vows; the very presence of the couple implies a marriage agreement. When the happy couple is finally pronounced husband and wife, they walk around the altar three times with the priest, the best man, and the best woman. In the villages the guests throw rose petals and rice at the couple. Sugar-coated almonds called *koufeta* or powdered sugar cookies, *loukoumia*, are given to the guests at the end of the ceremony.

In many places, a reception at a hotel is becoming common. A receiving line forms to congratulate the pair and their parents. Cake and a beverage are served. An evening dinner is held for close friends and relatives and may last into the night. In some places, old traditions are still observed, like the shaving of the groom, dancing about a mattress, and pinning money to the bride's gown.

Most foreigners only attend weddings in cases of close business or social ties. You may show your interest by attending only the reception, and it is customary to bring a gift (money is acceptable).

Dress for weddings is usually semi-formal to formal. A woman should wear a dress when attending a Greek Orthodox church. Men usually wear a suit and tie.

The Greek Orthodox Church does not recognize civil marriages. Most Greek Cypriots get married in the church. Divorces are not numerous, but are more common now than in the past. According to church law, a person may be divorced three times and married four. All Turkish Cypriot weddings are civil ceremonies.

## Baptisms

In the Greek Orthodox Church, a baby is usually baptized in its first year. During the ceremony, the baby is immersed in a water font, and a lock of its hair is cut as a gift for the Christ Child.

## NAME DAYS

The Greek Cypriot's name day, the feast of the saint after whom they were named, is often celebrated rather than their birthday. On someone's name day, it is proper to wish them *Hronia polla*, or literally, "Many years." If a person's name day falls during Lent, it is usually celebrated the day after Easter. Some people receive visitors at home on their name day. If you wish to visit someone, you should call ahead to inquire if they are celebrating. When visiting, a small gift is appropriate. It is now a custom for children and young adults to have parties on their birthdays.

### JANUARY

1 *Vassilis, Basil, Vassiliki, Vasso*  
6 *Theofania, Fotis, Fotini, Fofo, Fani, Fanos*  
7 *Ioannis, Ioanna, John, Yianoula*  
17 *Antonios, Anthony, Antonia, Tony*  
25 *Grigoris, Gregory*

### FEBRUARY

10 *Haralambos, Hariklia, Haris, Harry, Hara*  
26 *Theodoros, Theodore, Theodora*

### MARCH

25 *Evangelos, Vangelis, Evangelia, Vangelio, Maro, Maria*

### APRIL

23 *Yiorgos, George, Georgia*  
25 *Markos, Mark, Lambros, Lambrini (celebrated on Easter day)*

### MAY

5 *Irini, Irene, Rena*  
9 *Christoforos, Christopher*  
21 *Constantine, Costas, Gus, Helen, Eleni, Lena*

### JUNE

4 *Martha*  
29 *Petros, Peter, Pavlos, Paul*  
30 *Apostolos*

### JULY

17 *Marina*  
25 *Anne, Anna, Ann*  
26 *Paraskevi, Paraskevas, Skevi*

### August

6 *Sotir, Sotiris, Sotiria*  
15 *Mary, Maria, Marika, Panayiotis, Panayiota, Despina*  
30 *Alexander, Aleka, Alec, Alexis, Alexandra, Alike, Alice, Sandra*

### SEPTEMBER

14 *Stavros, Stavroulla*  
17 *Sofia, Foula*

### OCTOBER

3 *Dionyssos, Dennis, Denise*  
18 *Lukas, Luke, Lucy, Lukia*  
20 *Gerasimos, Gerald*  
23 *Iakovos, Jacob*  
26 *Demetrios, Demetra, Mimis, Jimmy*

### NOVEMBER

1 *Kosmas, Damianos*  
8 *Michalis, Michael, Michelle, Gabriel, Angelos, Angela, Stamatis, Stamatina*  
11 *Victor, Victoria*  
13 *Chrysostomos*  
14 *Phillip*  
16 *Mattheios, Matthew*  
21 *Maria, Mary, Panayiotis, Panayiota*  
25 *Katerina, Catherine, Katy*  
26 *Stylios, Stelios, Stella*  
30 *Andreas, Andriana, Andrew, Androula*

### DECEMBER

4 *Barbara*  
5 *Savvas*  
6 *Nicholas, Nikos, Nicole, Niki*  
9 *Anna, Anne, Ann*  
12 *Spyridon, Spyros*  
15 *Eleftherios, Eleftheria, Theros*  
17 *Dionysios, Denis, Denise*  
22 *Anastassios, Anastassia, Natassa, Tasoula*  
24 *Eugene, Evgenia*  
25 *Christos, Christina*  
26 *Emmanuel, Emmanuela, Manolis, Manos*  
27 *Stafanos, Stephen, Stephanie, Stephi*

Traditionally, the name of the first son is the same as his paternal grandfather's; the first daughter bears her maternal grandmother's name. The second son and daughter are named for the maternal and paternal grandparents. As a result, many first cousins have the same names. This tradition, like many others in Cyprus, is slowly fading away.

After the baptism, there is usually a gathering that varies from a simple party with informal snacks to a formal dinnerdance. If you are invited to a baptism and have not already given a baby gift, you may bring one with you to the party following the church ceremony.

## Funerals

Notice of a death often appears in the newspaper. Funeral services are usually held the day after the death in a parish church or one located at the cemetery. It is customary to send flowers or a wreath to the church if there is time. If not, they may be sent to the family of the

deceased at their home. The florist will be able to advise you about what kind of flowers you should send and where. Many mourners attending the funeral actually take wreaths to the church with them. The wreaths are stacked near the body during the



Funeral wreaths are common signs of mourning.

service. Toward the end of the service the cards from certain wreaths are read aloud.

If the service is held at the cemetery, those attending usually follow the casket to the grave site out of respect for the deceased. Often, before leaving the cemetery, those in attendance will be offered bread, cheese, and olives; it is polite to accept and eat this token offering. After the service, close friends and relatives may be asked to go to someone's home for coffee.

Men and women attending a funeral should wear conservative clothing in somber colors. Men should wear a dark tie. Family members will dress in black.

A family actively mourns the death of a loved one for 40 days. During this period the women wear black and the men wear black ties or armbands. In practice, however, this custom is not always observed.

## Sunnet

All Turkish Cypriot Muslim males undergo a *Sunnet* or "circumcision" operation and ceremony. Boys are usually circumcised between the ages of 5 and 11. In the past, this surgical procedure was performed at home by a circumciser or barber. Odd-numbered ages were chosen as a rule since they were thought to be luckier. Those who were well-off frequently arranged for the circumcision of the sons of local poor families along with that of their own offspring.

A boy who is to be circumcised would be dressed in a costume whose two most distinctive elements are a cap or crown and a double transverse sash worn over the chest and inscribed with the formula *Mashallah* ("May God protect him"). In Cyprus boys are usually placed on horseback and

paraded around the neighborhood accompanied by musicians.

The circumcision bed would be set up in the main room of the house or, weather permitting, in the garden. This bed would be decorated with embroideries. The bed and walls would be draped with embroidered coverings and flags. Guests would visit the boy and would give him gifts or money.

## GETTING AROUND

### Transportation

Facilities for transport between the main cities are adequate. Not only are there several bus lines, but also scores of communal taxis, including those that go from Nicosia to Larnaca Airport. When you use the group taxis, you can be picked up at your home or office and delivered to wherever you wish in the other town. A phone call does it.

Traveling to any place other than the larger towns is more of a problem. Most villages have their own buses that take their residents to the nearest large city in the morning and return them to the village at night.

Urban bus service in the Greater Nicosia area is well organized. Most routes are served every 15 to 20 minutes. Smoking is not permitted on buses.

Taxis are numerous, and in Nicosia fares are supposed to be metered. It is customary to give a small tip. Taxis do not cruise, so one should become familiar with the location or phone number of the various taxi stands.

## Driving

Driving in Cyprus can be hectic, but for the most part, drivers are more courteous here than in other Mediterranean countries. Many Americans are intimidated at first by driving on the left-hand side of the street with a right-hand drive car, but in fact, the practice is easy to acquire.

The speed limit on the well-maintained motorways between the major cities is about 65 miles (100 kilometers) per hour. Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit is 30 miles (50 kilometers) per hour on other roads. This is hard to believe when another car zips by at 80 miles (135 kilometers) per hour. There are many serious accidents, so drive defensively.

The major roads in the larger cities are kept in good condition, and the street signs are usually in both English and Greek, but you will not always be able to find them. The secondary roads are narrow two lane strips with little or no shoulder. Make sure you have good city and national maps in your car.

A large "L" on the back of a car indicates a learner. Left-hand-drive cars are required to have a special sticker to alert other drivers. This is placed in the right rear window.

Pedestrians cross at intersections or at areas designated by zebra stripes and yellow lights that are often hard to see. The pedestrian always has the right-of-way, and drivers should be prepared for sudden stops, but pedestrians should always be aware that many Cypriot drivers do not stop for pedestrians as required.

Traffic in Nicosia is affected by the opening and closing of businesses and schools. In the summer there is siesta, so there are four rush hours instead of two. Even in the winter when shops are open

until 6:00 p.m., many stores will break in the afternoon for one to two hours for lunch, causing heavier traffic. Nonetheless, within Nicosia it is very unusual to have to drive more than 30 minutes to reach your destination. Many shops and government offices close on Wednesday afternoons.

Should you ever be involved in an accident, do not move your car. Stay on the scene until the police arrive. Also telephone the Embassy duty officer if the accident is serious or if there are injuries.

## Shopping

In south Cyprus, the shops close at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and are closed all day on Sundays. The only stores open on Sundays are a number of the bakeries, where one can find sundries and other food items. In north Cyprus, stores do not close on Wednesday afternoons, and supermarkets are open all day on Sunday. There are a variety of shops in Cyprus ranging from small family-run specialty stores to large western-style department store. The larger stores handle a combination of clothing, house wares, electrical appliances, sports equipment, toys, and food.

Butcher shops, bakeries, pharmacies, stationery shops, florists and sweet shops crop up at every turn. Most people find a favorite butcher or neighborhood store that they patronize regularly. Once you know the shopkeeper, he will take care of you, even to the extent of saving or special ordering certain items for you. If you are short of cash, he will tell you to pay next time. Major stores all accept credit cards and checks from local banks are also acceptable. Cyprus pounds are used in the southern part of the island. The Turkish lira is circulated in northern Cyprus, but almost all establishments accept international currencies, including the Cyprus pound.

If you like a special product and use it regularly, it is best to buy it in large quantities, especially if it is an imported item. Shopkeepers do not always reorder stock before it runs out, and it can be months before it reappears on the shelves.

A special note to those parents of young children: most grocery stores carry one or two American brands of baby food in jars along with instant formula at reasonable prices. It is best to buy these in larger stores where the stock rotates more quickly. There are also many brands of disposable diapers (nappies).

Most of the people one deals with in stores are very courteous to foreigners, and most of them can speak some English. In larger shops the assistants may follow you around while you contemplate your purchase. It is not because they suspect that you might steal something; rather, it conveys attentiveness to your needs. They sincerely want to help if they can. It is quite acceptable to browse at length without buying anything.

## TRAVEL IN CYPRUS

Travel in Cyprus is limited by the Buffer Zone, the demilitarized U.N.-patrolled neutral zone that divides the island, and by various military areas. The United Nations forces now control the site of Cyprus's former International Airport, a large land area in western Nicosia. Americans, Cypriots and others may cross the Buffer Zone into northern Cyprus through one of four checkpoints: Nicosia at Ayios Dometios/Metehan, at the Ledra Palace checkpoint, and east of Nicosia in Strovilia village and at Pyla. Embassy Americans may cross by displaying only their U.S. Embassy ID cards. Pedestrians, embassy Americans, and others traveling in cars with



diplomatic license plates may cross by car at Ledra Palace. Pedestrians may also cross at Ledra.

If you are not a U.S. Embassy employee, you will show your passport to the Turkish Cypriot guards and fill in a form when you enter the northern part, even if you arrive by diplomatic vehicle at Ledra Palace. The form is stamped and returned to you. You must return the form on exiting the northern part.

All others who wish to cross by car must use one of the other checkpoints. Please check with the embassy upon arrival for the latest situation, as the practices and regulations are very susceptible to change.

Under all circumstances, be patient and courteous.

Be aware that the internationally recognized government of the Republic of Cyprus has designated Larnaca and Paphos International Airports and the seaports of Limassol, Larnaca, and Paphos as the only legal ports of entry into and exit from Cyprus. All of these ports are in the southern, Greek Cypriot-controlled part of the island. Entry or exit through any other air or sea port is not authorized by the government of the Republic of Cyprus and is not condoned by the U.S. Embassy. Thus, Americans and other non-EU foreigners may not be allowed to cross from north to south if they entered the island through a port of entry in the north. According to current Republic of Cyprus policy,

they are liable to be fined or deported if they attempt to cross under these circumstances.

Tourist facilities in the northern part of Cyprus vary from acceptable to excellent and are somewhat scattered. In many cases road signs indicate towns by their Turkish names. For example: Kyrenia is *Girne*, Famagusta is *Gazi Magusa* or *Magusa*, and Morphou is *Guzelyurt*. As much of the Turkish Cypriot area is under military control, there are numerous restricted and closed areas, and it is advisable not to venture too close to or to stop to take pictures in border

areas or military zones. The words *Yasak bolge* mean forbidden area and should be taken seriously.

Travelers in both areas can almost always count on a warm reception wherever they go. Cypriots are friendly and helpful to foreigners, and it is reassuring to know that if you get lost, have trouble with your car, or need assistance of any

kind, you need only to ask for help to get it. Village people, especially in the north, do not always speak English, but they will usually find someone who can within a few minutes. Hotels are reasonably priced and standard in their layout and services. Children are welcome, and the management will take special pains to make arrangements for them. Special equipment for children may not be available and if required should be brought along. To be on the safe side, particularly during the summer, hotel reservations should be made in advance.



**Informally known as the Green Line, the UN Buffer Zone dividing Greek from Turkish Cyprus limits travel**



When traveling in the country throughout Cyprus it is still possible in some rural areas to see herds of sheep and goats, often in the middle of the road. (According to an old tradition, if a motorist hits one animal it is his fault, but if he hits two or more, the shepherd has been negligent for not controlling his flock.) When on side roads, be prepared for stray animals and farm machinery, and, at night, for pedestrians dressed in black plus slow farm vehicles without tail lights or reflectors.

The more you travel and explore Cyprus, the larger the island will become for you and the greater your enjoyment of this pleasant and sometimes surprising country. Adventures abound if you keep your eyes open for them.

## RECREATION

### Cultural Life

**T**he cultural environment in Cyprus is somewhat limited. However, dance troupes, operas, and other cultural events come to Cyprus fairly regularly. Cypriots, as well as foreigners, appreciate cultural events, and anytime a good traveling performer or troupe comes, the show is quickly sold out.

The Cyprus Theatrical Organization produces several plays in Greek each year that are performed in the major cities. The ancient theater at Curium has been fully reconstructed and hosts yearly theatrical performances including concerts, ancient Greek drama, and Shakespearian plays. The theater has fine acoustics and a glorious view, but the seats are stone; you should bring along a well-padded cushion. An annual event worth

seeing is the Shakespearian production at Curium organized each June by the amateur actors among service personnel in the British Base area. The Greek Cypriots in the Limassol area also assist in the production. There is also a community group in Nicosia called A.C.T. that produces several plays in English a year. For a modest membership fee, which goes toward play production costs, you can be anything from director to usher. There are also several singing groups one can join. They give performances throughout the year. Though the island is small, one can be involved in many different activities. The Turkish Cypriot Municipal theater generally chooses plays by Turkish playwrights. The theater stages two different plays a year.

There are numerous small private art galleries where individual artists display and sell their work. Gallery openings are announced in the newspapers. There are also some small but very good museums throughout Cyprus.

There are classical music performances ranging from international class to amateurish on both sides of the island.

### Cinema

**T**here are many cinemas in Cyprus that show American films with Greek or Turkish subtitles. There is sometimes an intermission during the film. No smoking is allowed in the theater.

The Cyprus film clubs feature some interesting material, and the various foreign cultural centers show a good selection of their country's cinema. News of such showings is well covered in the local press.

There are many "video clubs" where one can rent DVDs and tapes for a modest fee. Local

videotapes are VHS and are in the Pal/Secam systems only. DVDs are supposed to be limited to the European system (Region 2 encoding), so make sure your DVD player accommodates these products.

## Eating Out

**D**ining out is a very popular form of recreation in Cyprus. Restaurants range from inexpensive and simple to high priced and ostentatious. A service charge and VAT is included in all restaurant bills. Nonetheless it is customary to leave a tip, the size of which will depend on the degree of formality of the place. Restaurant food in the south is considerably more expensive than in the United States.

Ready-to-eat food is available at numerous kebab stands, pizza parlors, and rotisseries that feature delicious roast chicken to go. *Kebab* stands and pizza parlors usually have tables and chairs for dining on the premises as well. The atmosphere is informal, and it is perfectly acceptable for children to wander around freely. The bill will be low, and only a small tip is expected.

Small *tavernas*, a feature of every Cypriot village and town, are numerous in the cities. Frequently they are family businesses and everyone from grandparents to grandchildren may be involved in the preparation and serving of your meal. The menu may be limited, but the food is usually good

and plentiful. Standards of cleanliness and hygiene are generally high, and one is just as “safe” in a small taverna as in a big hotel. Once again, only a minimal tip is expected.

Seafood restaurants abound, serving fish, octopus and squid. Fresh shellfish is hard to find. The very best fish restaurants, although still maintaining a simple style, are very expensive.

When you arrive in Cyprus you will probably be invited out for *meze*, a favorite Cypriot meal and a specialty of many *tavernas*. *Meze* is an entire dinner of tidbits served on small communal dishes that follow each other in rapid succession. A standard *meze* includes a large variety of Cypriot dishes—cold, hot, vegetable, meat, cheese,

casserole, and so on. Everyone helps himself from the small serving saucers. There are *tavernas* that specialize in fish *meze* as well.

A hearty appetite shows enjoyment of the meal, but it is not necessary or possible to sample everything, and your Cypriot friends will not insist that you do; a seasoned *meze* eater will leave some dishes untouched to save room for their favorites. Beer,

brandy (*zivanja*, an *eau de vie* of grapes served very cold), or wine are typical accompaniments to *meze*. Everyone, it seems, has a favorite *meze* place that he claims is “the best in Cyprus.” When you find your own favorite *meze* spot, you will know that you are at home in Cyprus.

Most Cypriot towns have European-style restaurants that are popular as places to entertain and impress special guests, and to meet with groups of friends. They can be very expensive



**This taverna in the village of Vresta represents a favorite venue for a night out of good, local**



**The ski area at the Troodos mountain range is a popular site for winter outings.**

(as much as \$100 per person if you're not careful in ordering). For Cypriots, such an evening presents a welcome opportunity to dress up in their newest and best clothes, to see people, and to be seen. Tips in fancy restaurants, when given in view of others, are usually large, although service is included in the bill.

In first-class restaurants, a waiter will take you to your table. Meals are leisurely, and service is not always as prompt as Americans expect. If you have difficulty getting your bill, try catching the waiter's eye and make a gesture of signing an imaginary credit card slip in the air; this usually works.

## Outings

Popular out-of-town activities include hunting, skiing, hiking, picnicking, visiting archaeological sites, and going to the sea. Archaeological and historical sites of interest range from pre-historic through Greek, Roman, and Byzantine to still-standing Venetian, Ottoman, and British colonial buildings. Ten

Byzantine era churches as an ensemble are UNESCO World Heritage sites, and repay repeated visits for their simplicity and the beauty of their frescoes.

Hunting was traditionally a favorite sport among Cypriot men, but it is less evident today. Small birds and wild hare are the main game. Hunters equipped with a licensed shotgun (12-gauge single shot or double barrel) and a hunting permit drive as long as three hours to reach their preferred grounds during the official season. Hunting is an exclusively male sport; perhaps that is one reason why it is valued so highly by many Cypriot men. Contact the embassy in advance if you wish to import your own firearms.

There are several health clubs with modern facilities. For a large part of the year Cypriots and members of the foreign community may choose to spend many leisure hours at one of the numerous swimming and tennis clubs in Nicosia. Most clubs accept non-members for a reasonable entrance fee, and all welcome families. Tennis and swimming coaches are available and most pools have lifeguards of varying degrees of diligence.

Skiing is also popular, but the facilities and degree of difficulty are not in the alpine class. The *Troodos* Mountain range has a ski area with three slopes that vary in difficulty. The ski area, run by the Cyprus Ski Club, is usually open from January to mid-April. All necessary equipment is available for rent, and good instructors are at hand. (There are T-bar lifts only.) Although efforts are made to keep roads clear of snow, chains are often needed. Several hotels offer comfortable rooms and hot meals. The atmosphere at the slopes is friendly and inviting, but Sundays can be very crowded. Also, while many Cypriot doctors and British and U.N. military officers are enthusiastic skiers and always ready to help in case of an accident, there is no ski patrol and no hospital facility in the mountains. Several trails are available for cross-country skiers.

A favorite year-round activity of all residents and visitors in Cyprus is picnicking in the mountains, in the countryside, and at the beaches. Cypriots enjoy hearty picnics, and meat grilled on a spit is an essential ingredient of a successful outdoor meal. Organizing the fire, turning the meat as it cooks, and engaging in animated conversation are all part of the fun of a holiday or weekend outing. Americans tend to be more casual and to combine a sandwich with a hike in the mountains, a trip to the beach, or a visit to one of Cyprus's many ancient sites.

A warning to hikers and picnickers who like out-of-the-way places: poisonous snakes are sometimes encountered in overgrown areas during the spring, summer, and fall.

A number of archaeological excavations are currently in progress. Cyprus is very proud of its antiquities; it is a serious offense to remove any relics from the ground or from the country.

The beach has in recent years become a popular recreation spot for Cypriots. Americans sometimes swim as early as April, but few Cypriots consider it safe (i.e., warm) enough to swim before late June. From then on, the beaches are packed on Sundays and are crowded every day during the entire month of August. A growing group of foreigners and Cypriots own small boats, and many enjoy snorkeling along the rocky stretches that form a large part of the coastline. Those who just enjoy lolling in the sun should exercise caution as the summer sun is extremely powerful and overexposure can result in serious burns. Dress on the beach is relaxed and casual. With the recent influx of tourists from Germany, Scandinavia and the UK, the degree of undress has changed rapidly. Topless bathers are a familiar sight in the Ayia Napa area.

Houses and apartments in resort areas in both the north and south are available for rent. Some families take advantage of these facilities for weekends or vacations.



**The beach has in recent years become a popular recreation stop for Cypriots.**

There are numerous enjoyable and interesting places to visit in Cyprus that are well described in the guidebooks listed in the bibliography. If you plan to explore these places on Sunday, however, you will probably run into some traffic, as Sunday is family day out. When visiting churches and monasteries women should be modestly dressed. Shoes should be removed before entering a mosque.

## DAILY LIFE

### Education

Cypriots place a high value on education, and families will make great sacrifices to send their children abroad to obtain a college degree, even though Cyprus has its own institutions of higher education. Greek Cypriot schools follow the European system and place a heavy emphasis



on examinations. From an early age, students study long hours. Elementary students spend their afternoons taking extra lessons, and secondary students frequently prepare for external examinations at private tutorial institutes.

Turkish Cypriot schools follow a largely Turkish mainland curriculum, which also emphasizes examinations. Turkish Cypriot schools finish at 1:00 p.m. each day and often devote their afternoons to private lessons.

Because of ethnic bonds and colonial tradition, Cypriots have traditionally gone to Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom for university education. In recent years, however, increasing numbers of students are also attending universities in the United States and other European countries. With EU accession on May 1, 2004, Cypriots are eligible for the same tuition and fees as any other European in European universities. This advantage is expected to sharply reduce the attraction to Cypriots of studying in the USA.

The Fulbright Commission and the Cyprus America Scholarship Program award scholarships to the United States annually. These scholarships are highly prized and generally sought after by both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots attend schools modeled after the Turkish educational system that prepare them for a higher education on the Turkish mainland. Many Turkish Cypriot students would like to go to England or the United States for their studies, but it is usually impossible for them without a scholarship.



**Cyprus' vegetation reflects the Mediterranean climate.**

studying in the United States. This frequently presents an opportunity to form a strong bond of friendship and interest between Cypriots and Americans.

## Climate

Cyprus enjoys a Mediterranean climate with short, somewhat wet winters, delightful springs, and dry, very hot summers. Daytime temperatures above 100° Fahrenheit may be expected anytime between May and October, but merciful winds cool the evenings pleasantly in Nicosia. Life rhythms adjust to the weather, and in the hot summer all activity (except in the American Embassy) stops from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. This is siesta time. Do not telephone or otherwise disturb those who are lucky enough to be at home resting during siesta. July and August are vacation months for Cypriots. All who can go abroad or retreat to the mountains or sea stay for as long as possible. Formal social activity slows to a near halt and cultural events are at a minimum. The middle two weeks in August mark the peak of the vacation period; it is a mistake to attempt to schedule any activity or try to get much work done during that time.

If you arrive in Cyprus during the summer, you will probably be struck by the heat and dryness. If you find a nearby swimming club and learn to slow down during the heat of the day, adjustment will be easier for you.

## Health

Cyprus is a very healthy place to live, and there are no major diseases present on the island. With the exception of common colds in the winter and some allergies, people have few health

problems. There are many doctors and dentists; those on the embassy list are well qualified and not expensive by U.S. standards. The same applies to optometrists. The government hospitals are often crowded and lacking in good nursing care, but adequate private clinics are available.

## Water

**W**ater from the city mains (the “third” faucet in most kitchen sinks) is safe to drink. Houses have holding tanks on the roof that are automatically filled from the city mains. The water from the holding tanks sometimes has too high a bacteria count for drinking but is fine for washing dishes and bathing. During very dry years, these tanks are the source for household water during the alternate days when the main is off. Several brands of bottled drinking water have been tested and proven safe. In addition many people buy drinking water from *Nepo* dispensers found in connection with filling stations, supermarkets, etc.

## Communications

### Telephones

**P**ay phones require a 10-cent coin or the use of a phone card that can be purchased at most places selling newspapers and magazines. International direct dial calls from Cyprus are the cheapest in Europe. Cell phones are very popular, and you will see many locals take calls no matter whom they are with or what is going on—even at tables in a restaurant!

### Television

Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC) has two television stations, RIK1 and RIK2. These

stations broadcast mainly in Greek; however, there are a variety of features and movies in English and the CyBC is building up a Turkish language service. The local news in English is broadcast every night on RIK2 at 8 or 9:00 p.m., on Bayrak TV at about 6:15 p.m., and on Turkish TRT2 at about

10:30 p.m. The BRT-2 broadcasts programs (usually good feature films) including news (at 20:00) in English between 18:00-22:00. There are three independent television stations, MEGA, ANT1, and SIGMA that also broadcast a variety of English features. There is one pay television station, LTV, which broadcasts most programs in English. There are several Turkish language channels that can be received if you have the proper antenna. Armed Forces Network (AFN), with U.S. entertainment programming and sports events, is available in Cyprus, and there are numerous other satellite services, which are considerably more expensive than cable TV in the USA. The embassy subscribes to AFN and CNN International, and transmits the signals to the embassy cafeteria and office television sets.



**The Cyprus Weekly is an English-language newspaper published in the south.**

### Radio

CyBC radio broadcasts on two channels and has several programs in English, including news three times a day. Bayrak Radio also broadcasts on two channels and has news three times a day in English. BBC World Service is audible for most of the day (AM) as is the British Forces radio, BFBS (FM). Programs in many languages, including VOA, may be picked up on even small transistor radios. Schedules of television and radio



programs are listed in the Englishlanguage newspapers. NPR is available on AFN and through tabletop satellite radios (Information on NPR service is found at [www.npr.org/worldwide](http://www.npr.org/worldwide).)

## Newspapers and Periodicals

There are many daily and weekly newspapers in Greek and Turkish. Most newspapers in Cyprus do not have sufficient advertising or circulation to be self-supporting in the American sense. Journalistic styles vary, and editorial content is not clearly separate. Many Cypriots will read only the newspaper of their political party, not reading views of the opposition.

There is one English-language weekly, *Cyprus Today*, in the Turkish Cypriot area. In the south, two English-language newspapers are widely read by the foreign community: the daily *Cyprus Mail* and the Friday paper, *The Cyprus Weekly*. They contain local news, wire service reports, and features and cultural news and schedules for the island.

Many Americans receive the *International Herald Tribune*, which usually arrives before the end of the day of publication. *Time* and *Newsweek* are also available. There are numerous British newspapers and magazines as well.

## Personal Security

Cyprus, generally speaking, is a safe place, but crime rates are rising, especially for household burglary and minor street crime. Respect for other people's possessions is deeply ingrained in the Cypriot mentality. The streets of the towns are safe at any hour. Although women may be subjected to remarks and looks, they are always treated with extreme courtesy.

The crime rate remains low despite the adverse influences of urbanization. Houses and automobiles should be kept locked. Crimes in Cyprus are generally of passion or relate to political or interfamily disputes.

Drug dealing is becoming a serious problem, but is restricted primarily to major cities and tourist areas.

There have been a few cases where terrorism associated with IsraeliArab and intra-Arab disputes has spilled over into Cyprus. In times of high intercommunal tensions in the past, there have been security threats to

American personnel on Cyprus and bombs thrown by Greek Cypriots at the American Embassy in Athens. On August 19, 1974, Ambassador Roger Davies and an FSN assistant were killed by gunfire when a Greek Cypriot mob stormed the Embassy. In recent times, there have been no serious incidents involving the Mission or its personnel.



**Crime is almost non-existent, especially in small villages like this one.**

Cyprus is probably one of the safest places in the world for children to be out on their own. Molestation of children is virtually unheard of, and your only risk is that your offspring may receive an excess of sweets and *pagoto* (ice cream) from well-meaning Cypriots.

## BITS OF WISDOM

The following proverbs give the American a small glimpse into the mind of the Cypriot villager. These sayings have been selected from the excellent guidebook, *Romantic Cyprus*, with the kind permission of its author, Kevork Keshishian:

I tell it to you, mother-in-law, so that your daughter may hear of it. (Indirect way of passing a remark to a third person.)

For the prosperous person, even the cock lays eggs.

They told me it was a holiday and my heart was cured. (When lazy people hear of work they do not feel well, but when there is no work they feel all right.)

Be content with your lot, even though you be a priest.

Once for a friend, twice for a friend, but the third time is insufferable.

A rich man is like a lemon, the more you squeeze him, the more you get out of him.

He went to be engaged and he got married. (For those who are sent somewhere and fail to return soon.)

He who falls into mud is eaten up by the pigs.

Send a fool and go after him.

Buy a shoe from your own country, even though it may be mended. (Advice to marry a girl from one's own village.)

The walls have ears and the fences eyes.

If I knew the stone on which I would stumble I would avoid it by a mile.

## CONCLUSION

We hope that this paper will assist Americans assigned to Cyprus in making an easy adjustment to their new posting. We have only touched upon many areas of interest concerning this small but complicated island. We hope that what we have written will encourage you to read further and, when you arrive, to explore Cyprus with confidence and enjoyment.

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