



North Nicosia (Lefkoşa)

POP 39,000

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Why Go?

Home to roughly a third of the population of North Cyprus, the northern half of Lefkosia is another world. Approached from the smart boutiques in Ledra St, North Nicosia sees the avenue fracture into a medina-style market of stalls and kebab houses. Thanks to the Nicosia Master Plan, many of the historic buildings are being restored and the area around the Selimiye Mosque has a real sense of heritage. Overall, though, life moves slowly and the dusty streets are lined with ancient mosques and Frankish ruins.

This is essentially a daytime city where the appeal lies in observing daily life and exploring the historic centre's streets. Now, with the relaxing of border restrictions, many people take a day trip from the Republic (and vice versa) via the Ledra Palace or Ledra St checkpoints. Make sure you stay until dusk, when the minarets light up and release their evening call to prayer and the air is scented with smoke from the kebab houses' grills.

When to Go

North Nicosia can be an uncomfortably hot and dusty city in July and August, which is also when many inhabitants leave for cooler coastal climes. Take note of when Ramadan falls, as well, although it's not as strictly observed here as on the Turkish mainland. In September the temperature cools but the action heats up, with the town taking centre stage for the International Cyprus Theatre Festival. The spring and autumn months are pleasantly warm, while December and January see the most rainfall and the temperature at its coolest, hovering around the 15°C mark.

History

Up until 1963, North Nicosia, not surprisingly, shared much of the same history as its dismembered southern sector. For details of this period, see p126.

The capital was effectively divided into Greek and Turkish sectors in 1963, when violence against Turkish Cypriots by insurgents from the Ethniki Organosi tou Kypriakou Agona (EOKA; National Organisation for the Cypriot Struggle) forced them to retreat into safe enclaves or ghettos. The Green Line, as it has become known, was established when a British military commander divided up the city on a map with a green pen. The name has remained ever since.

The Turkish military invasion of 1974, which most Turkish Cypriots saw as a rescue operation, formalised the division between the two halves of the city. A wary truce was brokered by the blue-beretted members of the UN peacekeeping forces, who had been guarding the Green Line since sectarian troubles broke out in 1963. It is now easy for visitors (and Cypriots) to cross over the border but, despite this, the city is still divided and its reunification looks far off.

Sights & Activities

To visit and appreciate the historic renovation that is taking place here, pick up a copy of the *Nicosia Trail* brochure from the tourist office or visit the Nicosia Master Plan headquarters at the Ledra Palace Hotel. The main sights are marked on the North Nicosia map. If you get lost, head for the Venetian walls, which you can easily follow in order to reach a main point of reference. Running south from the Kyrenia Gate is Girne Caddesi, which leads onto Atatürk Meydanı, the main square, surrounded by banks and shops.

Büyük Han & Kumarcılar Han

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

(Great Inn; Araştı Sokak) The **Büyük Han** is both a wonderful example of Ottoman architecture and a rare surviving example of a medieval caravanserai. During the medieval Ottoman period, travellers and traders could find accommodation at these *hans* (inns), as well as a place to stable their horses, trade their goods and socialise with fellow travellers.

The Büyük Han was built in 1572 by the first Ottoman governor of Cyprus, Musafer Pasha. Renovated in the early '90s, it has

once again become the centre of the Old City's bustle, with cafes, shops and traditional craft workshops housed in the small cells that originally served as the inn's sleeping areas. The central courtyard has a *mescit* (Islamic 'chapel') in the centre, which is balanced on six pillars over a *şadırvan* (ablutions fountain). This design is found only in this inn and two others in Turkey.

To the north, on Agah Efendi Sokak, is the **Kumarcılar Han** (Gambler's Inn), a late-17th-century caravanserai, which worked in a similar way to the Büyük Han. It was closed for reconstruction at the time of research, and looks like it might remain closed for some time yet. Rumour has it that once it's been renovated, the building might once again become a place for gamblers. This would be no surprise considering the passion for gambling that grips the North.

Selimiye Mosque

MOSQUE

(Selimiye Camii; Selimiye Meydanı) North Nicosia's most prominent landmark, which is also clearly visible from the southern half of the city, is the Selimiye Mosque. This strange-looking building, a cross between a French Gothic church and a mosque, has an interesting history. Work started on the church in 1209 and progressed slowly. Louis IX of France, on his way to the Crusades, stopped by in 1248 and gave the building process a much-needed shot in the arm by offering the services of his retinue of



CROSSING THE LINE

Border restrictions in Cyprus were relaxed in December 2003, allowing overnight trips across the Green Line. Pedestrian crossings are at Ledra St and Ledra Palace Hotel in Lefkosia; from the latter it's a 10-minute walk to the Kyrenia Gate. There are seven access points linking the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides of Cyprus; the latest is the Limnitis-Yeşilirmak crossing in the northwest of the island, which opened in October 2010. See p2 for more information on crossing the border.

Hire cars can only be taken from South to North, not the other way. See p260, for car-insurance options and advice.

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