Whether you know it as the ‘island of sin’ (or ‘fun’) thanks to wild stories from Agia Napa or, as the tourist brochures love to point out, ‘the island of Aphrodite’, Cyprus confirms and confounds the stereotypes. It is a place that can be both rewarding and repelling, and a visitor needs to exercise discernment in order to get the best out of the island. Furthermore, getting away from the resorts and exploring the whole of the island will give you a better, more rounded understanding of Cyprus as a country.

Work is once again being done to repair the sense of division that permeates Cyprus: a four-year stalemate on peace and unification talks was revived when the Republic’s left-wing president Demetris Christofias (elected in February 2008) met with the Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat in September 2008 for new peace talks. It is unclear how long the talks will go on for since no time limit was imposed, but it’s likely they will continue well into 2009. The most difficult, pressing and perennial issues for the two leaders to resolve are power sharing and land ownership.

A good indicator of how hard the two leaders will have to work to devise a peace proposal that’s acceptable to the general (especially Greek Cypriot) public is the reaction that followed Christofias’ introduction of unbiased history books to the South. Teachers, right-wing politicians and church officials were outraged by the suggestion of introducing ‘both sides of the story’ (as opposed to only blaming one side for the conflict and subsequent atrocities), claiming that such a move would promote an ‘oblivion’ of Greek Cypriot history. Christofias has also called for the abolition of annual military exercises on the island and a complete demilitarisation of Lefkosia/North Nicosia. Each proposal, according to Christofias, is designed to nurture a sense of tolerance and open-mindedness that would help bring about the bicomunal society that Cyprus is hoping to become. If a peace agreement is proving difficult to reach, the Cypriots are already united in one thing: a recent poll showed that less than 20% of Greek and Turkish Cypriots are optimistic that there will be a solution at the end of the current talks.

January 2008 saw the Republic adopt the euro and say goodbye to the Cypriot pound, while the pedestrian crossing at Ledra St, once Lefkosia/North Nicosia’s main shopping street, was opened in April of the same year. Cyprus also suffered one of the worst water shortages in its history during the summer of 2008, following three years of low rainfall (see p56). The crisis has kick-started the building of several desalination plants, which should rescue the island’s depleted water resources. The North’s rampant building boom, especially on the lower end of the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula, has also seen press coverage, with environmental activists calling for more efficient and practical protection of Cyprus’ last true virgin landscape.

When visiting the island, avoid overdeveloped, tourist-swamped places such as Kato Pafos, Agia Napa, and the tourist strips of Lemesos, Larnaka and Protaras. Concentrate instead on exploring agrotourism and eco options in the villages on the Akamas and Karpas peninsulas, while taking advantage of their lovely beaches. Alternatively, head for the peaks of the Troödos – where more wonderful agrotourism accommodation awaits – and Kyrenia (Girne), for medieval churches, castles and hiking, or dive into the urbanity of Lefkosia/North Nicosia where you can see the merging of modern and traditional Cyprus. But most importantly, if time allows, visit both sides of the island – you’ll get a fuller picture of the complex and fractured Cypriot identity.
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 here, 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, such as 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 of 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, April and May see the landscape covered with wildflowers that seem to encompass every colour in the rainbow. Hiking and cycling are most enjoyable during these months. Rain falls mainly in autumn and winter, and outside these months precipitation is rare. Winters are changeable, with cold and warmer weather alternating. Conditions also vary with elevation. The Troodos Massif usually gets some snow in winter and you can ski on Mt Olympus in the South from early January to mid-March.

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 Troodos Massif is often below freezing.

COSTS & MONEY

Prices all over Cyprus have rocketed since the introduction of the euro; one Cyprus pound was converted to €1.68 on 1 January 2008. You might still see prices listed in Cypriot pounds alongside euro prices on restaurant menus, but the exchange from pound to euro is ‘frozen’. 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.

Accommodation in agrotourism houses in the South starts at €50 for a double, and a meal with wine or beer in a local restaurant is around €20. In the North, bank on around UK£30 for a double room in a budget hotel (British pounds have been used for accommodation prices in this guide, as that’s the currency most likely to be quoted to travellers in the North) and around 25YTL for a filling meal. Accommodation and general tourist services on both sides of the Green Line increase in price in July and August.
Accommodation prices quoted in this book are for the low (winter) and high (summer) seasons, in places where such a range exists.

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 €2.50. However, entrance to such sites in the North is comparatively more expensive, with the average museum admission fee ranging from 5YTL to 12YTL.

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.

**TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY**

Overdevelopment is the bane of Cyprus’ ecology, so make a difference by staying in one of the old village houses, renovated as part of the Cyprus Agrotourism Company ([www.agrotourism.com.cy](http://www.agrotourism.com.cy)). This way, you get to be in a rural environment, inside individual, stylish and high quality accommodation, while helping out the local economy and the environment.

Water supplies have been at an all-time low in recent years (see p56), so use water sparingly, wherever you’re staying. This means that baths are a strict no-no, as are long showers or any other unnecessary water usage.

Having a car in Cyprus is certainly useful for getting to off-the-beaten-track parts of the island, but a judicious choice of location can see the need for driving drop significantly in favour of hiking and cycling around. Equally, you can get between most big towns and cities on public transport, so you’ll have a chance to save your pennies and the environment.

Eat locally. The best food in Cyprus is in the small tavernas, mostly away from tourist strips. Seek out restaurants and tavernas that use fresh local produce and cook dishes daily. The eating options in this guide have been picked with these criteria in mind.

Take your rubbish with you when you have finished hiking the Troödos Massif or the Akamas and Karpas (Kırpşa) Peninsulas. If diving, take care not to disturb the seabed, coral and marine life. If you’re going out on a boat trip, make sure rubbish isn’t tipped into the sea but disposed of properly when back on land.

Don’t pick the wildflowers in spring; others may want to enjoy them, too. Support small businesses and local artists when looking for souvenirs.

**DONT’ 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 bush bashing 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 high SPF sunscreen, hat, sunglasses and mosquito repellent for the summer.
- The latest information on visas and travel between the Republic and the North (see boxed text, p236).
- Your passport (which you’ll have to flash if you intend to cross between the South and the North).

**HOW MUCH?**

**Republic of Cyprus**

- Frappé €5-8
- A feast of meze €12-20
- Internet €2.50 per hour
- Small-car hire €25-30 per day
- Museum ticket €1-2.50

**Northern Cyprus**

- Two strong black Turkish coffees 7YTL
- A meal 15-25YTL
- Internet 3YTL per hour
- Small-car hire UK£25
- Museum ticket 5-12YTL

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.
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 quirkiness 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.

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.

North Cyprus Tourism Centre (www.northcyprus.cc) Good for updates on events, festivals and outdoor activities in Northern Cyprus.
All year round in Cyprus there’s a range of diverse and fun festivals which give the locals a chance to gather up their culture stakes or simply drink, dance and have fun. The diary of the South’s events is available from any Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO) office. The North has fewer festivals, though the ones that it does host are varied and of good quality.

**FEBRUARY**

**LEMELOS CARNIVAL**
This 11-day party starts 50 days before Easter, with the ‘King of the Carnival’ leading the parade. See p95 for more.

**CHILDREN’S CARNIVAL PARADE**
Three days after the start of the Lemesos Carnival, the little ones have their chance to get into fancy dress and parade along the Lemesos seafront.

**GREEN MONDAY**
The first day of Lent is marked throughout the South by Greek Cypriots taking the day off and flocking to the countryside for a meat-free picnic – an unusual feast for an island of carnivores.

**MARCH**

**NICOSIA INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL** 23-28 Mar
One great idea is to spend four spring days in Lefkosia viewing the cherry-picked international documentaries at this excellent film festival (www.cyprusdocfest.org). You’ll find it especially good for getting a perspective on Cypriot issues.

**APRIL**

**EASTER**
The most important religious festival for Greek Cypriots, during which just about everything grinds to a halt in the South.

**MAY & JUNE**

**EU ACCESSION DAY** 1 May
The most important day in modern Cypriot history is celebrated with a party in all of the Republic’s towns.

**BELLAPAIS MUSIC FESTIVAL** 21 May-24 Jun
Taking place in and around Bellapais Abbey (p198), this festival (www.bellapaisfestival.com) consists of concerts, recitals and even brass-band performances within the refectory of the abbey.

**JUNE & JULY**

**INTERNATIONAL FAMAGUSTA ART & CULTURE FESTIVAL** 21 Jun-12 Jul
The North’s biggest festival (www.magusa.org/festival), with music, theatre and arts taking place in Famagusta’s Othello’s Tower (p211) and town square, and at Ancient Salamis (p215). For more information, see p213.

**GÜZELYURT ORANGE FESTIVAL** 27 Jun-13 Jul
Running since 1977, this festival brims with local food, drinks, song and dance, as well as various tournaments for junior Güzelyurtians.

**INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL IN LEMESOS** 11, 12 & 18 Jul
Ethnic, classical, jazz and experimental music fest in the stunning Ancient Kourion amphitheatre (p102).

**PARADISE JAZZ FESTIVAL** last weekend in Jul
A fabulous location along with excellent music and atmosphere mark this weekend jazz festival in Pomos (p150).

**JULY & AUGUST**

**ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA FESTIVAL** 4 Jul-2 Aug
A fantastic opportunity to see ancient Greek theatre under the stars in the Ancient Kourion amphitheatre (p102) and at venues in Pafos. See www.cyprus-theatre-iti.org for more information.

**COUNTRYSIDE DOCUMENTARY & ANIMATED FILM FESTIVAL** 30 Jul-3 Aug
An excellent film festival (www.cyprusanimafest.org) in the picturesque village of Plataniskia, in the Lemesos district. The village is a stone-house idyll, with around 30 inhabitants. The five days are dedicated to animation, documentary film, workshops and open-air concerts.
LEMESOS DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL 6-10 Aug
A great little festival for film-lovers, with the latest documentaries and a chance at a masterclass with a guest director.

MEHMETCIK GRAPE FESTIVAL 6-15 Aug
Wine and food tasting galore in this small village on the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula. Join in the ‘King and Queen of Grape’ contest and partake in plenty of folk dancing.

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER

LEMESOS WINE FESTIVAL 30 Aug-11 Sep
Held inside the Municipal Gardens, locals and tourists alike celebrate this festival with, obviously, wine (and lots of it). See p94 for more.

PAFOS APHRODITE FESTIVAL 2-4 Sep
Opera performances are staged under the stars at Pafos Fort (see p132).

RAMADAN
The most important Muslim celebration of the year sees some locals in the North fasting. Eid, the last day of Ramadan, is a time for food and festivities. Ramadan does not always fall in September; for future dates check www.when-is.com.

OCTOBER

KYRENA OLIVE FESTIVAL 10-17 Oct
Held in Kyrenia and the nearby village of Zeytinlik, this festival has folkloric dancing, shadow theatre and other eclectic performances. You can also taste local olive oil and olives, plus help plant olive trees.

CYPRUS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 20-25 Oct
This film festival (www.cyprusfilmfestival.org), held in Lefkosia, offers the public free film screenings, which include a good selection of new documentaries, shorts and features from international directors.

DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS 25 Dec
A big day in the South, Cypriots gather around the family table for plenty of food and presents from Christmas eve through to 26 December.

NEW YEAR’S EVE 31 Dec
Fireworks and music into the night on Lefkosia’s Plateia Eleftherias and in other towns around the island.
Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

GEMS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS 10 to 14 Days/Larnaka to the Akamas Peninsula

Fly into Larnaka (p155) and dip your feet into the Mediterranean at the local beaches for a day. Take a bus or taxi to the capital, Lefkosia (p64), and spend a couple of days exploring the city’s walled Old Town. Head up into the mountains for some trekking and cycling at Troödos (p106), and admire the divine images at the many Byzantine churches (p112).

From the Troödos Massif, roll down to Lemesos (p89), enjoying the city’s varied cuisine, and explore nearby Ancient Kourion (p101). Make sure you bathe at the divine Petra tou Romiou (Aphrodite’s Rock & Beach; p100).

Head west to Paños (p124) for the Pafos mosaics (p128) and the mysterious Tombs of the Kings (p126). Base yourself in a traditional restored house on the Akamas Peninsula (p146), from where you can enjoy some of the most wonderful beaches in the South, such as Lara Beach (p145). Fly home from either Larnaka or Pafos.

Explore the beauty of the Republic of Cyprus on this 220km route. Experience ancient sights, mountain trekking and the life of exciting cities and traditional villages, before cooling off in the waters of the Mediterranean.
NORTHERN LIGHTS: A JOURNEY THROUGH NORTHERN CYPRUS

10 to 14 Days/Famagusta to the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula

Providing you fly into Ercan airport, your first port of call will be Famagusta (Mağusa; p209). And a wonderful first stop it is, with its Venetian walls and the gorgeous Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque (p212), originally a Lusignan Gothic church. From Famagusta, head straight to Ancient Salamis (p215), among the island’s most spectacular ancient sites.

Follow the highway to the capital, North Nicosia (Lefkoşa; p178), spending a day or two exploring its Old City (p179). Next, base yourself in Bellapais (Beylerbeyi; p198) and admire the ruins of Bellapais Abbey (p198). Nearby, visit the dreamy St Hilarion Castle (p201). Spend a day or two in Kyrenia (Girne; p190) visiting the dark caves of Kyrenia Castle (p193) and seeing the oldest shipwreck in Cyprus.

Head west to Ancient Soloi (p206) and Ancient Vouni (p207). Return to Kyrenia and drive east, hiking up to Buffavento Castle (p201), one of the three Lusignan castles perched on top of the Kyrenia Range. Drive east down the coast and take the winding road up to Kantara Castle (p221), from where you can see Cyprus in its entirety. Drive down to the most beautiful part of the island, the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula (p219), ideal for lovers of nature and wild landscapes. This area has the island’s best beaches, such as Golden Beach (Nangomi Bay; p220), where turtles come to hatch. Fly home from Ercan airport.

This 70km 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 gorgeous beaches.
TAILORED TRIPS

ANCIENT TOURISM
Cyprus is a delight for travellers with a penchant for ancient sites and remains.

Ancient Kourion (p101) is the most spectacular ancient site in the whole of Cyprus, as well as the most important.

Ancient Salamis (p215), the North’s archaeological treasure and one of Cyprus’ first cities, dates back to the 7th century BC.

Choirokoitia (p165), a Unesco World Heritage site, dates from 6800 BC, when it housed more than 2000 people in the characteristic round houses.

Pafos Archaeological Site (Nea Pafos; p126), another Unesco World Heritage site, holds the fascinating Pafos mosaics (p128) and the morbid Tombs of the Kings (p126).

The Sanctuary of Apollon Ylatis (p102) was a gathering place for pilgrims in the 8th century BC. Destroyed by an earthquake and subsequently rebuilt, the present ruins date back to AD 365.

Ancient Soloi (p206) and Ancient Vouni (p207) played a major role in the island’s struggle against the Persians in the 5th century BC.

The frescoed Byzantine churches (p112) at Troödos are not to be missed. Ten are listed as Unesco World Heritage sites.

Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque (p212) in Famagusta is an exquisite piece of Gothic architecture.

Bellapais Abbey (p198), founded in the 12th century, was an important spiritual centre for 300 years.

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

The Karpas Peninsula (p219) will linger in your memory for years to come. This ‘tail end’ of the island has positively the best beaches, deserted and clean, with soft golden sand. Turtles hatch at Golden Beach (p220), where there is an official turtle-hatching protection program. Wild donkeys, once Cyprus’ equivalent of a lorry and even a currency, roam the endless fields.

The Akamas Peninsula (p146) 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 (p145), is a turtle-hatching zone. The Tyllirian wilderness (p150) has the lovely Cedar Valley (p153), bearing thousands of Cédrus brevifo- lia, an aromatic cedar indigenous to Cyprus.

The Troödos Massif (p106) 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 (p164) is a magnet for migrant birds, including flamingos.
**On the Road**

**VESNA MARIĆ** Coordinating Author

I am standing at Kantara Castle; it’s hot and sunny and Cyprus is spread out beautifully before me. I’d just come back from the Karpas (Kirpaşa) Peninsula, my favourite part of the island, and seeing the coast and the sea here was an extra treat.

**DON’T MISS**

Starting from the crazy streets of Lefkosia (p64) and the Old Town of North Nicosia (Lefkoşa; p178), I love driving to Kyrenia (Girne; p190), where a peek at the harbour is always a joy, before heading along the quiet north coast. Stopping off at beautiful Bellapais (Beylerbeyi) village (p198) and clambering up to St Hilarion (p201) and Buffavento Castles (p201) is a must. Further east, Kantara Castle (p221) awaits, from where you can sigh over the beautiful views. It’s Famagusta (Mağusa; p209) and Ancient Salamis (p215) next, and then relaxing at Golden Beach (Nangomi Bay; p220) on the Karpas Peninsula, Cyprus’ natural treasure.

Another special route I follow from Lefkosia is across the Troödos Massif (p105), visiting the area’s frescoed Byzantine churches (p112), and then pay a visit to Lemesos (Limasol; p89). I drive down the old B6 road to Pafos (p124), where I have some meze, and then it’s up to Polis and the Akamas Peninsula (p146), with its beautiful villages. Finally, I settle down in the sun at the amazing Lara Beach (p145).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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. 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.