



Famagusta (Gazimağusa) & the Karpas Peninsula

Includes ➔

Famagusta (Gazimağusa)	207
Ancient Salamis	217
Karpas Peninsula	221
Yenierenköy (Yiallousa)	223
Sipahi (Agia Triada)	223
Dipkarpaz (Rizokarpaso)	224
Agios Filon & Afendrika	224

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Othello's Meyhanesi (p215)
- ➔ Alevkayalı Restaurant (p223)
- ➔ Kiyi (p220)
- ➔ Oasis Restaurant (p224)
- ➔ Aspava Restaurant (p215)

Best Reminders of Old Cyprus

- ➔ Ancient Salamis (p217)
- ➔ Petek Confectioner (p214)
- ➔ Kantara Castle (p222)
- ➔ Monastery of Apostolos Andreas (p222)

Why Go?

The thin finger of the Karpas Peninsula (Karpasia in Greek; Karpaz in Turkish) is all rolling meadows, craggy cliffs and wild beaches with a handful of snoozy villages thrown in. It's a taste of old-style Cyprus that can't be beaten. Despite new roads and development, its agrarian soul still feels untouched by modern life.

When you've recharged your batteries with the Karpas' serene wilderness, turn back west to visit Ancient Salamis. This enigmatic window into the Hellenic world is the island's most impressive archaeological site.

Just to the south is the fortified city of Famagusta where you can climb the ramparts to walk the city walls. The city's faded long-lost grandeur can be found in lanes filled with gently dilapidated houses that sit beside crumbling ruins of once-majestic churches.

Brimming with history and full of mesmerising natural beauty, this is by far the island's most rewarding region to explore.

When to Go

- ➔ Wild orchids and flowers bloom on the Karpas Peninsula and bird life can be spotted from March to May.
- ➔ The International Famagusta Art & Culture Festival in July features performances amid the ruins of Salamis.
- ➔ Green and loggerhead turtles nest and hatch eggs on Karpas' wild beaches in August and September.

FAMAGUŠTA (GAZIMAĞUSA)

POP 40,920

The walled city of Famagusta (Gazimağusa) was made for exploration. Winding lanes rimmed with terrace rows of houses suddenly give way to ruined Gothic churches where birds nest between roofless arches and scraps of faded frescos cling to stone walls. From atop the Venetian walls, the shattered shards of these once-grand churches punctuate the skyline of what was Cyprus' most lavish city.

Long since slumped into down-at-heel dilapidation, the area within the walls is endearingly shambolic. For years tourist infrastructure remained poor and most travellers only visited on day trips. Recently over €3 million in funding to preserve the walls and monuments has flooded in under the auspices of the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, the EU and the United Nations Development Programme. This spruce up has led to the opening of a clutch of guest-houses, finally allowing travellers a chance to sleep within the walled city itself.

History

Famagusta and its surroundings have an affluent and complex history. The wide sweep of Famagusta Bay and the sprawling Mesaoria plain was home to three major settlements over the ages: the Bronze Age city of Ancient Enkomi (Alasia), which existed during the 17th century BC; the Mycenaean settlement and tombs from the 9th century BC, described as a flourishing culture in Homer's *Iliad*; and the illustrious kingdom of Salamis, which prospered through the 6th century BC.

Founded by Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt in the 3rd century BC, Famagusta was originally known by its Greek name, Ammochostos, meaning 'buried in the sand'. For many years it was considered the bridesmaid to the famous city kingdom of Salamis, just to its north.

After Salamis was abandoned in AD 648, Famagusta's population greatly increased, but the city didn't truly bloom until the fall of Acre in 1291.

At this point, Christians fleeing the Holy Land took refuge in the city. In the late 13th century it became the region's main shipping stopover, gaining immense wealth almost overnight. A lavish and decadent lifestyle bloomed and more jewels and gold were said to be in Famagusta than in all of Europe's royal courts. This provoked scorn from the pious,

who criticised what they felt were the loose morals of its citizens. To counteract this, a great number of churches were quickly built.

The great city's first decline began when the Genoese took control in the 14th century, prompting an exodus of its wealthiest and most illustrious citizens.

Although the town was recaptured by the Venetians 117 years later, its former fortune and decadence never really returned. During this time the huge walls and bastions were constructed, but this belated measure did little to prevent its capture by the Ottomans in 1571. In the bloody 10-month siege that ensued, an estimated 100,000 cannonballs were fired.

Under the Ottomans, Famagusta rotted like a bad tooth. Its ruined buildings were never repaired, leaving it in an almost Gothic time warp. The Old Town, Kaleici, became a Turkish Cypriot stronghold.

The region flourished again in the early 1960s. The renowned, predominantly Greek Cypriot resort district of Varosia (Maras), just outside the southern side of the Old Town's walls, bloomed as the Mediterranean's new favourite holiday destination, annually pulling thousands of sun-seeking tourists to its stunning beaches. However, communal conflicts in 1964 saw more skirmishes in the area, resulting in the Turks essentially barricading themselves within the Old Town's walls and exiling any Greeks left to the confines of Varosia.

The island's invasion by the Turkish army in 1974 forced Famagusta, and more particularly Varosia, into the restricted border zone. Deserted by its Greek population in anticipation of the fast-approaching Turkish military, Varosia remains part of the large, uninhabited buffer zone and is now a ghost town. Haunting, with its gaping dark windows and abandoned tower blocks, and barricaded by oil drums and barbed wire, it is as it was in 1974, save for a few military outposts and occasional UN patrols.

Sights

The eclectic mix of arched lanes, chapel ruins, Turkish baths, Byzantine and Knights Templar churches, and medieval quarters are best appreciated on foot. Allow the better part of a day to see the city properly.

★ Lala Mustafa Paşa Camii

(St Nicholas Cathedral; Erenler Sokak; ☺ outside prayer times) The former Cathedral of Agios Nikolaos (St Nicholas) is the finest example of

MOSQUE