

# Understand Cyprus

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Wrangles over reunification continue to bring hope and consternation in equal measure, as Cyprus looks beyond decades of division.

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From the rise of ancient city-states to the squabbles of empires, Cyprus has been one of the most sought-after treasures in the Mediterranean.

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Despite the tensions engendered by recent history, a strong Cypriot national identity still unites people more than it divides.

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Behind the blissful beaches and orange-grove-dotted coastal plain, the land surges up into mighty mountains, providing a haven for rare birds and wildlife.

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Cyprus has rich artistic traditions for a small island, covering everything from shadow puppetry and ceremonial dance to icon-painting, pottery and lace-making.

# Cyprus Today

Peace talks have been front and centre of Cypriot news as negotiations between the Republic and the North reach higher levels than ever before. Away from politics, the preservation of cultural heritage island-wide is receiving much-needed attention, while the prospect of exploratory drilling on the island's offshore gas reserves is both a cause for economic optimism and a major divisive issue on the road to peace.

## Best on Film

**Birds of a Feather** (2012) Documentary exploring the different historical narratives of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.

**Akamas** (2006) Controversial film set in the 1960s about a Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot who fall in love.

## Best in Print

**Gregory and other Stories** (Panos Ioannides; 2014) War, guilt, duplicity and loss are explored in this short-story collection by the island's most lauded living writer.

**Bitter Lemons of Cyprus** (Lawrence Durrell; 1957) Durrell's famous memoir of Cypriot village life at the end of British rule.

**The Sunrise** (Victoria Hislop; 2015) Novel set in Famagusta during the Greek coup and following Turkish invasion in the 1970s.

## Best Music

**Sikoses** (Monsieur Doumani; 2015) This second album from Cyprus' hottest band continues to invent fresh sounds while riffing on folk-music traditions.

**East Meets West** (Oytun Ersan Project; 2015) Funk and fusion jazz from bass player and composer Oytun Ersan.

## Road Blocks on the Way to Reunification

Since Cyprus' division in 1974, talks to reunite it have taken place sporadically with little success. In April 2015 Mustafa Akinci came to power in the North on a pro-reunification platform, reigniting hope on both sides for the revival of talks and direct negotiations between the two leaders of the divided nation.

Talks between Akinci and the Republic's president Nicos Anastasiades began in 2015 and continued with surprising commitment from both sides, despite failures to agree on several complicated issues. In November 2016 the two leaders met in Switzerland, and for the first time, maps of potential territorial boundaries were presented and debated. Twenty months of talks culminated in January 2017's Geneva summit, when Anastasiades and Akinci were joined by representatives of Cyprus' three guarantor powers – Greece, Turkey and Great Britain – to attempt to hammer out a final solution. However, no deal was reached and both sides pledged to continue discussions.

The next round of talks in February 2017 broke down after the Republic's parliament voted to pass a bill on establishing a new annual commemoration for the 1950 *enosis* (union with Greece) referendum. Although negotiations recommenced in April, in the background disagreements flared over the Republic going ahead with its hydrocarbon exploration program without first putting a plan in place to equitably share gas-reserve profits, along with rhetoric from both sides about the other's commitment to a deal. Despite this, both sides signalled their willingness to work towards a new summit in June.

Relations in the run-up to the talks, however, were as fractious as ever, with both Anastasiades and Akinci disagreeing on the agenda for negotiations. Eventually, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres persuaded the