

Kyrenia (Girne) & the North Coast



As Northern Cyprus is being touted as 'pure Mediterranean' in tourist brochures, images of Kyrenia (Girne) harbour and castle are flooding the advertising spaces on Europe's urban buses and billboards. So potent is the romantic appeal of Kyrenia's harbour that it ranks as Cyprus' most beautiful vista. And although it's now commercialised and in reality not so romantic, the harbour is the centre of most tourist activity in the North, and the Gothic Kyrenia mountain range and the north coast have a strangely bewitching effect on the visitor.

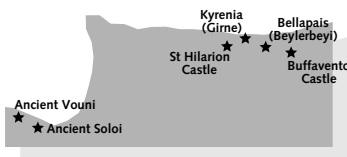
The area was long ago 'discovered' by retired British civil servants, many of whom settled here after years of service in scattered lands throughout the former British Empire, to enjoy the region's mild climate. Kyrenia became a literary starlet in *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*, written by Britain's most famous colonial son, Lawrence Durrell, who lived in Bellapais (Beylerbeyi), where he wrote his slow-paced nostalgic novel.

Bellapais, one of the island's most mesmerising villages, features the fascinating ruins of Bellapais Abbey, built in the 12th century by exiled Augustinian monks. Along the Kyrenia (Girne) Range, a displaced French dynasty left behind three Gothic castles, so dreamlike in appearance that one apparently inspired a fairytale production. The strategic position of the castles on the vertebra of the mountain range was carefully arranged, so that the three forts could communicate and warn each other of dangers by lighting torches.

Driving along the north coast from Kyrenia to Kaplica (Davlos), you can catch the last of 'how Cyprus used to be': green, empty fields and a few village houses; unpicked olives soaking up the sun; the space and solitude of a rural Mediterranean landscape that has ceased to exist on much of the island. Unfortunately, the hollow skeletons of luxury villas are starting to flesh out here too. So hurry, before it's all over.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the nooks and cells of **Kyrenia Castle** and see one of the oldest shipwrecks ever recovered off the coast of Cyprus at the **Shipwreck Museum** (p187)
- Soak up the beauties of **Bellapais** (Beylerbeyi; p193): the abbey, the home of Lawrence Durrell, and the breathtaking views
- Get breathless climbing the many steps of the fairytale ruins of **St Hilarion Castle** (p196); then scale the wind-buffed heights of **Buffavento Castle** (p196) and see Cyprus at your feet
- Drive east along the north coast from **Kyrenia to Kaplica** (p197) and soak up the beauty and silence of the landscape
- Explore the sites of **Ancient Vouni** (p202) and **Ancient Soloi** (p202) on the northwest coast



KYRENIA (GIRNE) KEPYNEIA

pop 22,000

Backed by its wide-bellied sand-coloured castle, Kyrenia's crescent-shaped harbour is like a sacred image among Cypriots. Promoted and praised by the Turkish Cypriots, and remembered in wistful songs and poems by Greek Cypriots, this small town is the centre of the North's tourism and home to the biggest British expat settlement on the island, with its own church and community centre. Perhaps Kyrenia is 'sold' too well to tourists. They are led to believe that the place will look the same as it did on the black-and-white photographs from the '50s, where a barefoot boy helps his fisherman father pull the nets out onto a small, wooden boat, surrounded by a sandy cove, with the burly castle brooding in the background.

Arriving at Kyrenia at midday, one discovers the small harbour that's jam-packed with bars, restaurants, cafés, boat-excursion touters, and waiters beckoning the passers-by in broken English. And not only that. This small town, no more than a 30-minute drive from the centre of the island's capital, is the place where North Nicosians come for the nightlife and good restaurants. Kyrenia (and its coastal surroundings) is lively and busy, with more hotels, restaurants and bars per square kilometre than anywhere else in the North. A picture-postcard, quaint seaside town it's not, but hey, you might have some fun.

HISTORY

Kyrenia's history is closely linked to the fortunes of its castle. Before the building of the castle, little is known about the town. It's thought that it was settled by mainland Greeks around 1000 BC. Kyrenia was certainly one of the city kingdoms of ancient Cyprus, but there is little left to document the town's earlier history. Arab raids of the 7th and 8th centuries AD levelled what there was of the settlement. It was only in the late 12th century, when the Byzantines built the castle, possibly over the remains of an earlier Roman fort, that Kyrenia's fortunes took an upward turn.

The Lusignans had a hand in the development of the castle, and it was used by them both as a residence and as a prison. During the course of their 82-year tenure, the Venetians extended the castle and built the bulbous seaward bulwark that can be seen today. During Ottoman rule, Kyrenia functioned primarily as a port – effectively the only port on the north coast. The harbour has long since ceded its role as the main port of the town; it's now far too small to service any craft other than the tourist boats and small yachts that crowd its cluttered quays. Two kilometres to the east, a large purpose-built harbour now receives commercial and passenger shipping, mainly from Turkey.

During British rule, the town became a favourite place for retiring ex-colonial British civil servants. Almost all Greeks and many British retirees fled in 1974 following the Turkish invasion, when the beaches to the west of Kyrenia were used as the prime beachhead for the landing of Turkish forces.

More than 25 years later, Kyrenia has recovered from the turbulence, and supports a growing tourist influx mainly from Britain, Germany and Turkey.

ORIENTATION

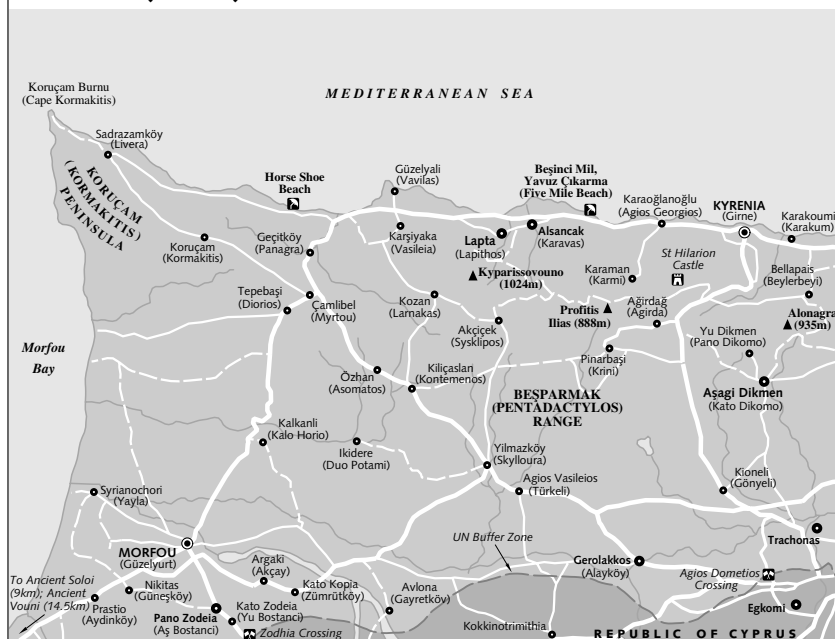
Kyrenia is spread out over a wide area, but the central Old Town – the tourist area – is fairly compact. Taxis and minibuses arrive at and depart from along Ecevit Caddesi and stop near the main square (Belediye Meydanı), which is about 200m immediately south of the Old Harbour. To the west of Belediye Meydanı runs Ziya Rızıkı Caddesi, where you'll find shops and money-exchange offices. To the southeast runs Mustafa Çağatay Caddesi, which takes you to the New Harbour and the ferry to and from Turkey.

Long-distance buses arrive at the station on Bedrettin Demirel Caddesi at the junction with İnönü Caddesi, 1km south of the centre. If you arrive by car, there's a handy free car park immediately east of Belediye Meydanı.

Maps

The North Cyprus Tourism Organisation (NCTO) issues a free city map in English and Turkish. While it is lacking in detail

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for the streets of the Old Town, it does give a good overall view of Kyrenia and most of the main regional destinations on a smaller inset.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Green Jacket Bookshop (☎ /fax 815 7130; Temmuz Caddesi 20) West of the centre near the Astro supermarket, this is the place to go for foreign-language books. There's a varied range of travel and Cyprus-specific books, and a decent selection of LP guides to the region.

Internet Access

Kyrenia has at least two Internet cafés, including the following:

Bati Net Cafe (☎ 0542 873 1047; Ziya Rizki Caddesi; per hr 1.50YTL; ☎ 10am-11pm) West of Belediye Meydanı; this modern centre has 14 terminals.

Cafe Net (☎ 815 9259; Efeler Sokak; per hr 1.50YTL; ☎ 10am-midnight) This is the best place for checking your mail, with 12 terminals. English-speaking owner Mehmet Çavuş serves up hot and cold drinks and jacket potatoes, and runs a small book exchange. Mehmet can also arrange for you to take out an Internet account in Northern Cyprus if you plan to stay any length of time.

Medical Services

Akçiçek Hastahanesi (☎ 815 2254; Mustafa Çağatay Caddesi) Kyrenia's local hospital is about 500m southeast of the post office.

Money

There are a number of ATMs spread along the Ziya Rızki Caddesi, including an HSBK. The **Türk Bankası** (Ziya Rızki Caddesi) is located near Belediye Meydanı, and further west is the **İş Bankası** (cnr Ziya Rızki Caddesi & Atatürk Caddesi).

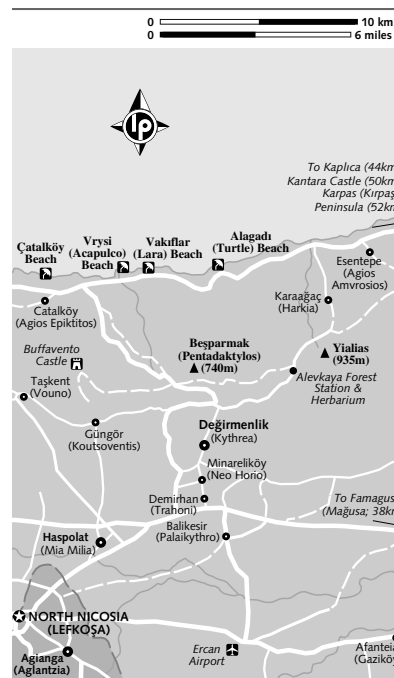
You will also find a couple of efficient money-exchange offices along Ziya Rızki Caddesi, including **Yazgın Döviz** (☎ 228 6673; Ziya Rızki Caddesi), and **Gesfi Exchange** (Kordon Boyu 40), which is situated opposite the Dome Hotel.

Post

Post office (Mustafa Çağatay Caddesi) About 150m southeast of Belediye Meydanı.

Telephone

The telecommunications office is directly opposite the post office.



Toilets

There are public toilets on the breakwater, on the western side of the Old Harbour.

Tourist Information

Kyrenia Society (Mersin Caddesi; ☎ 10am-noon) A good place to drop by to see if there are any worthwhile events taking place. It is behind the post office. If no-one is there, the notice board will display details of upcoming events or excursions.

North Cyprus Tourism Organisation (NCTO; www.tourism.trnc.net; Girne Limanı; ☎ 8am-6pm) At the western end of the Old Harbour.

Travel Agencies

Tickets for ferries to Turkey are issued by two agencies, and also at the New Harbour.

Ertürk Turizm (☎ 815 2308; fax 815 1808; İskenderum Caddesi) Towards the New Harbour.

Fergün Denizcilik Şirketi (☎ 815 3866; Mustafa Çağatay Caddesi 6/2c)

SIGHTS

Kyrenia Castle & Shipwreck Museum

The wide, protective **Kyrenia Castle** (Girne Kalesi; admission 9YTL; ☎ 9am-6.45pm) is a powerful

backdrop to the dainty harbour. It is one of the town's only sights, and inside is an interesting mishmash of various bits of the area's history. The castle was built by the Byzantines and, while it might have staved off the Ottoman invasion of 1570, the Venetians quickly surrendered it when they saw how quickly Lefkosia had been overrun.

The large rectangular structure is guarded by four fortified bastions, one at each corner. You enter the castle via a stone bridge over a moat, which leads you to the small 12th-century **Byzantine Chapel of St George**, to the left of the entrance. The chapel, with its Corinthian columns, stood outside the walls until the Venetians incorporated it into the structure. Parts of its mosaics have survived.

In the northeast bastion, a Venetian tower has a display of eerie reconstructions of various military scenes. Dressed up in military armour and uniforms, the reconstructions (or rather, costumed mannequins) represent aspects of life in the castle's history and cover vast time periods, from the Byzantines to the British. One particularly gruesome reconstruction is in the north room, an infamous torture chamber. This is where King Peter I's mistress, Joanna L'Aleman, was thrown to be tortured by the king's jealous wife, Queen Eleanor, while Joanna was eight months pregnant with the king's child. The 'pregnant' mannequin gawping up at you from the dungeon below is sure to give you the creeps.

BUYER BEWARE

An estimated 4000 Britons live in Northern Cyprus. Low property and land prices in the North are drawing in buyers from abroad, and while this is a beautiful area for a summer home, beware of legal twists. Turkish land-holders have been known to sell Greek-owned land belonging to those displaced after the 1974 partition. There have been cases of buyers having to demolish the houses they built on such land, after the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the favour of the legal owners. So, if you're tempted to buy in the North, check if all the papers are valid and legal, or your foot might get knocked off the property ladder.

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Other locations:

- To Green Jacket Bookshop (200m); Ziya Rıza Cad.
- Scuba Cyprus (2km); Address Restaurant & Brasserie (5km); Beşinci Mil. Yavuz Çıkartma (Five Mile Beach; 8km); Akıncılar (Karavaş; 8km); Altınkaya (10km); Sedat Simavi Cad.
- To Long-Distance Bus Station (900m)
- To Bellapais (Beylerbeyi; 5km); North Nicosia (Lefköşa; 29km)
- To Ertürk Turizm (200m); New Harbour (1km); Ero'l's Bar & Restaurant (4km); Ozanköy (4km); Anı (7km); Octopus Aqua Park (7km); Çatalköy (7km)

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Up along the ramparts, you can move between the four towers via routes marked by handrails. You are advised to stick to the marked routes since some sections are rather precipitous. The views of the harbour are fantastic from here. If you want to take good photographs of the town, climb up here in the early morning for guaranteed good light.

The highlight of the castle is the chamber containing the **Kyrenia Shipwreck**, the oldest shipwreck ever recovered from the waters around Cyprus.

This wooden-hulled cargo boat sank just off Kyrenia around 300 BC and was discovered in 1967 by a local diver. Based on its freight, which consisted mainly of almonds,

grain, wine and millstones from the Greek island of Kos, the crew most likely traded along the coast of Anatolia as far as the islands of the Dodecanese in Greece.

Antechambers display samples of the boat's cargo and photographs detailing the delicate salvage operation that was carried out to prevent the disintegration of the Aleppo pine from which the boat was constructed.

The boat is displayed in a dim chamber where you can examine the structure and layout of this remarkable marine archaeological find in considerable detail. A good reconstruction of the ship sits in Agia Napa's Thalassa Municipal Museum of the Sea (p162).

Folk Art Museum

This small **collection** (Halk Sanatları Müzesi; Girne Limanı; admission 2YTL; ☎ 9am-5pm Jun-mid-Sep), located along the harbourfront, contains a predictable but interesting collection of old household utensils, furniture and fabrics. Look out for the impressive wooden wine press on the ground floor.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

Scuba diving is well organised in Kyrenia. **Scuba Cyprus** (☎ 822 3430; fax 822 3429; Karaoğluoğlu; ☎ 9am-5pm) runs PADI and BSAC diving courses. It is based at Santoria Holiday Village, about 2km west of Kyrenia. **Blue Dolphin Scuba Diving** (☎ 0542 851 5113; www.bluedolphin.4mg.com; ☎ 9am-5pm) is based in the Jasmine Court Hotel on Naci Talat Caddesi, but has a contact stand on the Old Harbour. Try-dives (in a pool) cost UK£20 while two regular dives cost UK£35. The prices also go up and down depending on the size of the group, so check before you go for it.

For information about the best dive spots in the South, see the boxed text Going Under, p86.

Boat Cruises

Kyrenia harbour's boat-cruise scene is like a market where everyone is selling the same thing, but with a detail here and there that differentiates one from the other. The basic formula is that for UK£20 you get cranked-up disco music to cruise by, swimming and snorkelling, followed by an on-board barbecue lunch (drinks extra). Most leave at 10.30am and return at 4.30pm, and take up to 28 passengers.

Aphrodite Boat Tours & Fishing (☎ 0533 868 0943; fantasia@superonline.com; Girne Limanı; UK£25) This outfit gives the passenger a little more intimacy by taking no more than 14 passengers at a time. The fishing trips, where you grill what you catch (but you don't go hungry if you catch nothing), are very successful. There is an option of deep-sea diving and scuba-diving excursions, arranged in advance, and at an extra charge. The friendly owner, Musa Aksoy, speaks four languages and is always around for a chat about his boat.

Hiking

British expat Barry Hurst runs a series of half- and full-day excursions to the Kyrenia

(Girne) Range through **Cyprus Mountaineering Kyrenia** (☎ 0542 859 4542). For UK£25, you can walk, scramble and climb the rocky peaks and crags of the rugged Kyrenia Range. A restaurant lunch is included. Look for him in or near the Boaters Café on the harbour.

Another British expat, Tony Hutchinson, along with a group of other trekking enthusiasts, has pioneered a mountain-trekking trail from Koruçam Burnu (Cape Kormakitis) in the west to Zafer Burnu (Cape Apostolos Andreas) in the far east of Northern Cyprus. This long and challenging trek can be completed in about 10 days, walking around 22km a day. See the website of **Kyrenia Range Walks** (www.kyrenia-range-walks.com) for details.

Flower Walks

Tony & Maureen Hutchinson (☎ 0542 854 4329; www.walksnorchidsnorthcyprus.com; Hisarköy), long-term residents of Northern Cyprus, organise orchid and wild-flower walks during March and April on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The cost is UK£13 and includes lunch.

KYRENIA FOR CHILDREN

It's no wonder that water parks are all the rage in Cyprus, when the junior travellers love them so. **Octopus Aqua Park** (☎ 853 9674; Beparmak Caddesi, Çatalköy; ☎ 8am-5pm), 8km east of Kyrenia, is a haven of water, where the little ones can climb, swing, slide and bounce on watery and dry spaces while the parents can relax at the pool bar or restaurant.

SLEEPING

The town centre has small guesthouses and little hotels, while the outskirts boast star-spangled giants. The following options are central.

Nostalgia Hotel (☎ 815 3079; fax 815 1376; Cafer Paşa Sokak 7; s/d UK£25/40; ☎) A charming and nostalgic clutter of vintage radios, books, typewriters and large iron keys decorates the reception of this lovely hotel, set in an old townhouse. The rooms are decorated in an old-fashioned style, and have individual names. If you are after some luxury, the Venus room, with its four-poster bed, is on the ground floor. All rooms have TV, phone and air-con.

White Pearl Hotel (☎ 815 4677; www.whitepearlhotel.com; Girne Limanı; s/d UK£32/42; ☎) The former Ergenekon Hotel has had a mighty face-lift.

The nine rooms in this boutique hotel have been renovated and decorated in an individual way, and bear the names of Northern Cyprus' towns with a cultural and historical heritage, like Salamis or Bellapais. The décor exudes cleanliness and understated style, and there are lovely views of the harbour. The roof terrace bar is good for late-night cocktails and drinks, even if you're not staying in the hotel.

Dome Hotel (☎ 815 2453; www.domehotelcyprus.com; Kordon Boyu Sokak; s/d UK£69/88; 🏠) Mentioned in Durrell's *Bitter Lemons*, this dinosaur of Kyrenia's hotel scene is still considered the town's best hotel. The comfortable rooms have modern facilities, and there is a large seawater swimming pool to relax in. The Dome is on the seafront.

New Bristol Hotel (☎ 815 6570; fax 815 7365; Ziya Rizki Caddesi 114; s/d UK£21/29; 🏠) The New Bristol is like a faded star, with '70s décor that must have been attractive once upon a time. Now it's reminiscent of a socialist hotel, with slightly worn but tidy rooms, which all have mini bars and TVs.

Sidelya Hotel (☎ 815 6051; fax 815 6052; Nasır Güneş Sokak 7; s/d UK£8.50/17) This is a good budget option, with some spacious basic rooms, with views of the sea and the lighthouse on the pier. The owner, Yusuf Atman, speaks good English and offers endless supplies of black tea, but no breakfast.

Girne Harbour Lodge Motel (☎ 815 7392; fax 815 3744; Canbulat Sokak 46; s/d UK£16/29) Large rooms look onto the harbour, the ceilings are high, you're close to the restaurants and bars, but the unfortunate choice of neon strip-lighting ruins any prospects of cosiness. Only one room has a balcony, but all come with bathrooms.

Bingöl Guest House (☎ 815 2749; Efeler Sokak; r per person UK£10) A pretty dingy place, with a bar in the front and not a very jolly owner. Its saving grace is that it's cheap and on the main roundabout, so it's central. The rooms all have bathrooms.

EATING

Kyrenia's multitude of restaurants on the harbour are best avoided, with the exception of Set Fish Restaurant (right). This area is best for an evening drink, since the food is mainly aimed at the tourists, with a uniform menu of steak, burgers and chips. In any case, don't expect too many locals in any

of the restaurants; they mainly eat simple kebab meals in Turkish-food joints. There are a couple of good restaurants in town, but serious diners tend to head out west towards Karaoğluoğlu (Agius Georgios), or east to Çatalköy. Most places open for dinner only, unless otherwise indicated.

If you're planning a picnic or a mountain walk, grab the necessities at **Öz-Vip Supermarket** (☎ 815 3972; Efeler Sokak). It's well-stocked with all your favourites, including baked beans and Spam.

In Town

Brasserie (☎ 815 9481; Doğan Türk; mains 22-25YTL; 🍴 dinner) A classy restaurant in an old colonial building, with a matching interior: a smoking room with dark wood-panelled walls, Hellenic statues, and a lot of warm brandy swigging. If you like good Italian food, this is the place for you, since it's run by an Italian. The menu has dishes like *risotto al tartufo* (risotto with truffles) and *penne alla vodka* (pasta with vodka; always gets the punters in), as well as meaty delicacies.

Padişah (☎ 815 9763; Ecevit Caddesi; Kleftiko 7YTL; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Run by a London-Cypriot returnee, this place is all about traditional food like *kleftiko* (oven-baked lamb) and meze. The décor is simple and stylish, and there is a nice garden for alfresco eating. It's in a nook, opposite the Colonial Hotel and the petrol station.

İdris ustanın yeri (Ecevit Caddesi; kebab 6YTL; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This is a workers' eatery, with chicken, lamb, doner and shish kebabs, and massive salads and pickles on the side. Delicious, simple, and highly recommended.

Niazi's Restaurant & Bar (☎ 815 2160; Kordon Boyu Sokak; full kebab 10YTL; 🍴 11am-midnight) This place is renowned among kebab munchers, but its reputation seems to have compromised its quality. The jolly waiters will 'jokingly' bring you a large beer even if you've asked for a small one, then seriously charge you for it. The kebabs are plentiful, but the meat is pretty dry and uneventful. Niazi's is very popular with the locals, who flock here in their dozens, so booking is a good idea.

Set Fish Restaurant (☎ 815 2336; Girne Limanı; fish 20-45YTL; 🍴 dinner) Fish, sweet fish. Straight from the sea, and onto your plate, and all while you're watching the boats bobbing in the harbour. This is the one exception among the harbour restaurants. The atmosphere is

good, the fish delicious, and a frosty bottle of white wine will make the evening perfect. There's even lobster, in season.

Set Italian Restaurant (☎ 815 6008; Girne Limanı; pasta & pizzas 8-10YTL; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Sister of Set Fish Restaurant, but with an Italian twist. It features Turkish as well as European dishes, and the food is served in a pleasant, shaded courtyard.

Out of Town

Five Mile Restaurant (☎ 821 8330; www.escapebeachclub.com/5Mile.html; mains 10-30YTL; 🍴 dinner) A modernist cube of a building with a wooden deck terrace and tables just above the sea, each lit by a hanging iron candle lamp. There's an outside bar with a lounge area, and inside are circular leather sofas for winter drinking. The menu encompasses just about everything: fresh fish, seafood, grilled tarragon chicken, Peking duck, noodles and pasta. The bar and club here are popular with nightbirds (right). Five Mile is on the western coastal road out of town, with a visible yellow sign, by Yavuz Çıkarma (Five Mile) Beach.

Address Restaurant & Brasserie (☎ 822 3537; Ali Aktaş Sokak 13; mains 11-16YTL; 🍴 dinner) If you decide to head out towards Karaoğluoğlu, this is the restaurant to look out for, situated on the main road west. It's considered one of Northern Cyprus' best and is situated on a little point overlooking the sea. The menu is European-based and includes mostly fish, pasta and meat. The orange and tarragon chicken (13.50YTL) is a good dish to try.

Altinkaya 1 (☎ 821 8341; Yavuz Çıkarma Plajı; mains 10YTL; 🍴 dinner) Named after the nearby beach, this place is further west on the way to Lapta (Lapithos), around 10km west of town. The food is great value, with good meze and fresh fish main courses.

Erol's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 815 3657; Ozanköy; Kleftiko 10YTL; 🍴 dinner) One of two good restaurants to the east, on the way to Bellapais (the other is Anı). Renowned for its good quality meat and meze, Erol's also serves homemade soup, garnish and pickles, and some good fish dishes. There are great views over the village of Ozanköy. Wednesday is *kleftiko* night.

Anı (☎ 824 4355; Zeka Adil Caddesi, Çatalköy; fish dishes 10-20YTL; 🍴 dinner) A lovely and affordable fish tavern, with fresh home-grown vegetables, and tasty meze. It is about 2.5km further east of Erol's. Many consider it the best fish restaurant in Cyprus.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The bars and cafés on the waterfront are all much of a muchness when it comes to variety, but the following are good fun. All open after 8pm, except where noted.

Cyprian Bar (☎ 0533 863 6899; Cafer Paşa Sokak; 🍴 9pm-2am) A shady, leafy, cool garden bar, opposite the Nostalgia Hotel, popular with youngsters for drinks and rock music.

Ego Bar (☎ 0533 842 9999; Doğan Türk; 🍴 9pm-2am) Another open-air drinking space with a lounge atmosphere, Ego is decked out with hammocks and cow-print tablecloths. Just below the Brasserie (opposite).

Café 34 (☎ 815 3056; Girne Limanı; 🍴 4pm-2am) A bar on the harbour, good for a quiet drink during the day or a busy mishmash of tourists and local youngsters in the evening.

White Pearl Hotel Bar (☎ 815 4677; www.whitepearlhotel.com; Girne Limanı) Great views of the harbour and elaborate cocktails (8YTL to 10YTL), on the roof terrace of the White Pearl Hotel (p189). Drinkers of all ages gather here, but a young crowd lingers after 11pm. Delicious non-alcoholic fruit cocktails are 3.50YTL.

Escape Beach Club (☎ 821 8330; www.escapebeachclub.com) A massive open-air all-night club, with theme parties almost every week, DJs from London, Turkey and Cyprus, and lots and lots of people having fun. The club is just by Yavuz Çıkarma (Five Mile) Beach, overlooking the sea.

Five Mile Bar (☎ 821 8330; www.escapebeachclub.com/5Mile.html) Part of the restaurant of the same name (left), the food ceases around 10pm when the partying starts, and goes on until late. Similar to Escape, and run by the same people, it's also open-air, with a drinking, dancing and relaxing area.

If you really want to dispose of your surplus cash, there's an oversupply of casinos in Kyrenia. They're not necessarily the black-tie-and-tux establishments you might imagine, but glorified gaming-machine, get-rich-quick dens of iniquity for gambling-deprived Turkish mainlanders. Still, if you want to try your luck at blackjack, chemin de fer or roulette, or simply to exercise your fingers on the gaming machines, try **Dome Casino** (☎ 815 9283; www.domehotelcyprus.com; Kordon Boyu Sokak) for starters, or if that doesn't pull you a pile, move on to the **Casino Rocks** (☎ 815 9333; Kordon Boyu Sokak), where a tie and tux are not out of place.

SHOPPING

There is a small shopping mall with boutiques and brand-name imported goods off Ziya Rızıkı Caddesi, as well as a wide range of tourist shops that sell everything from snorkelling gear to leather goods.

Round Tower (☎ 815 6377; Ziya Rızıkı Caddesi; ⌚ 10am–5.30pm) A small art and crafts shop with a selection of tasteful goods such as pottery, rugs and paintings in the restored Lusignan-era Round Tower in the central area of Kyrenia.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The long-distance bus station is on Bedrettin Demirel, in the south of the New Town. *Dolmuş* (minibuses) to Famagusta (Mağusa; 2.50YTL, 1¼ hours) and North Nicosia (Lefkoşa; 2.50YTL, 20 minutes), as well as service taxis to North Nicosia (1.50YTL, 20 minutes). All depart from Belediye Meydanı.

There are express boats to Taşucu in Turkey at 9.30am daily (41.50YTL, three hours) from the New Harbour, east of town. There's also a slower daily ferry that takes about seven hours (33.50YTL). Tickets can be bought from the passenger lounge at the port or from **Fergün Denizcilik Şirketi** (☎ 815 2344; Mustafa Çağatay Caddesi 6/2c). During peak season, there is also a twice-weekly express ferry to Alanya in Turkey (UK£20, 4½ hours).

Cyprus Turkish Airlines (Kıbrıs Türk Hava Yolları, KTHY; ☎ 815 2513; www.kthy.net/kthyen/html; Philecia Ct, Suite 3, Kordon Boyu Sokak) has an office just west of the Old Harbour.

GETTING AROUND

Kyrenia is small enough for visitors to get around on foot. Should you need to travel further afield, there is a large number of car-hire outlets.

Generally, you will find that the prices are the same all over the island, with UK£25 per day being an average price. In Kyrenia, try **Oscar Car Rentals** (☎ 815 2272; Kordon Boyu), a large office based opposite the Dome Hotel. The price per day goes down the longer you have the car.

You can take a service taxis from Kyrenia to various destinations including Ercan airport (20YTL, one hour), Bellapais (7YTL, 20 minutes) and St Hilarion (2.50YTL, 25 minutes).

THE NORTH COAST

Kyrenia is in an ideal position for excursions to other parts of the island, with possibilities for days in the sun lounging on a beach, trekking, visiting castles on mountain tops, and bonding with nature in the region's wonderfully unspoilt northwestern corner. The distances are generally pretty short, so driving is the best option. Most roads have been resurfaced and can be covered easily in a conventional vehicle.

Hiking

The NCTO produces a small *Mountain Trails* brochure, available free from NCTO offices. It describes at least two walks in the Kyrenia Range that you may want to investigate. However, the brochure is not detailed enough for serious hikers, so you are advised to use a good map and join one of the organised local tours (see p189) and let others do the hard work of map reading.

For keen walkers, there is a trek from Ağırdağ (Ağırda) to Geçitköy (Panagra). This is a fairly long hike that would need to be done in sections and perhaps broken over a few days. The hike runs west along the southern flank of the Kyrenia Range, beginning from the village of Ağırdağ on the Kyrenia–North Nicosia road and ending up at Geçitköy on the Kyrenia–Morfou (Güzelyurt) road. The trail can be broken or joined at Lapta. Most sections take two to three hours.

The hiking trail from Kantara to Alevkaya is fairly long (more than 40km), connecting Kantara Castle and the Alevkaya Herbrium and forest station (p197). The hike mainly follows forest trails along the spine of the Beşparmak (Pentadaktylos) Range. It passes through or near a number of villages along the way, and can be walked in sections.

Contact the **Association of Mountaineering** (☎ 0542 851 1800; mustafacemal@hotmail.com) for full details.

Beaches

Kyrenia's top swimming beach is west of the town and is known as **Yavuz Çıkarma (Five Mile) Beach**, which is overlooked by the restaurant of the same name (p191). This

sandy cove has three names in Turkish. Altunkaya, after the rock next to it, is also the name of the recommended restaurant that overlooks the beach (p191). Its two other names are Beşinci Mil (Five Mile), and Yavuz Çıkarma (Resolute Outbreak). This beach was used by the Turkish Army to launch their invasion/rescue operation in 1974. The rather phallic-looking structure on the road overlooking the beach, known locally as 'the Turkish erection', is a monument to this event.

The beach is such a popular spot that on most days there's no room to swing a cat. It is protected from the open sea by a rocky islet, easily reached by paddling. Watch out for tricky currents on the open-water side: a few bathers have been caught out and swept away. There are water sports available, and umbrellas and sun loungers for hire, though there is not much natural shade.

If you fancy quieter and less developed beaches, go east of Kyrenia. With one notable exception, these are better loved by seekers of solitude. The first worth a mention is **Çatalköy Beach**, 7km from Kyrenia. It is reached via a signposted road off the main road. Look for Seamus O'Flynn's pub, turn here and continue for 1.5km; turn right at the junction. The beach is a narrow smile of sand in a pretty little protected bay. There are beach loungers to rent and a diving platform. The beach restaurant, **Körfez** (☎ 824 4354), serves juicy kebabs.

Next along is the private **Vrysi (Acapulco) Beach**, now looked after by the large three-star **Acapulco Holiday Village** (☎ 824 4110; fax 824 4455), which caters for package tourists, but takes in casual guests as well. Admission to the complex is 2.50YTL, and the beach offers many facilities. It's OK if you don't mind paying to park and swim. Popular with expats is **Lara (Vakıflar) Beach**, 3km further along and signposted just before the large power station. There is no charge to park and swim. The somewhat scruffy dark sand beach is nonetheless generally clean, and there are spotless toilets and changing rooms. A small **snack bar** serves beach goers.

Finally, about 19km from Kyrenia is **Turtle (Alagadı) Beach**, where the Society for the Protection of Turtles (SPOT) has a small monitoring station, affectionately called the 'Goat Shed'. The twin sandy beaches here

are generally undeveloped and are strictly speaking total turtle territory. Swim elsewhere if you can. The beach is closed from 8pm to 8am from May to October. For more about Cyprus' turtles, see the boxed text, p216. Have a meal at **St Kathleen's Restaurant** (☎ 0533 861 7640) nearby on the main road, where the meze, grills and fish dishes, such as *tsipura* (bream), are excellent and good value for money.

Getting Around

No public transport serves the area around Kyrenia, so it will have to be service or private taxis, a hire car or pedal power. The area does provide for some of the best cycling in Northern Cyprus. Other than some gradients in the Kyrenia Range escarpment, the east-west routes are generally flat and well serviced by facilities such as places to eat and beaches to swim at. There's a fine place to stay in the village of Kaplıca (Davlos), 63km east of Kyrenia. There are more options available if riding to the west.

BELLAPAIS (BEYLERBEYI)

The vertical road up to the gorgeous Bellapais village will keep you concentrating on the driving, so that when you finally park, inevitably by Bellapais Abbey, you will be stunned by two things: the endless views from the mountain village, and the abbey, which is always more spectacular than expected. Bellapais is the perfect day trip from Kyrenia, but it is even more perfect as a base for exploring the region, if you don't mind the drive to the beach.

The village was made famous by the British writer Lawrence Durrell, who lived here before and during the Ethniki Organosi tou Kypriakou Agona (EOKA; National Organisation for the Cypriot Struggle) uprising against British rule in Cyprus. His immediate and lasting love for the village (and the island) is often hilariously described in *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*.

Drivers should note that there is a large car park just past the monastery, on the left. Try to avoid parking in the already cluttered main street.

Sights

BELLAPAIS ABBEY

This lovely Augustinian **monastery** (admission 6YTL; ⌚ 9am–7pm Jun–mid-Sep, 9am–5pm mid-Sep–May)

A TALE OF TWO TREES

When writer Lawrence Durrell took up residence in Bellapais (Beylerbeyi) between 1953 and 1956, he little realised the minor controversy he would leave behind almost 50 years after he first described life in the then blissfully bucolic mixed community. His famous book *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* describes the trials and tribulations of purchasing and renovating a house in the village, as well as the intrigues and gossip of village life in general. On a more sombre note, he sounded the alarm bell for the troubles that were to ultimately befall Cyprus not too many years later.

Among the villagers' favourite activities was to spend many an hour in idle conversation under the so-called 'Tree of Idleness', which dominated the main square. Throughout the whole book, Durrell never once mentions what kind of tree it was. A plane tree? A mulberry tree? An oak tree?

Today there are two trees that vie for the title of Tree of Idleness. One is a leafy mulberry tree overshadowing the coffee shop next to the monastery ticket office. The other contender, not 20m away, is a Japanese pagoda tree casting shade over the eponymous Huzur Ağaç (Tree of Idleness) Restaurant. In fairness, both trees could qualify for the role pretty well: both have their ardent supporters and draw an idle crowd of onlookers who like to sit and drink coffee or a cold beer, just as the villagers would have done in Durrell's day. So, pick your tree, order a coffee and engage in idle chatter. It's all the same in the end.

is reason enough to drive up to Bellapais. Near the end of the 12th century the Augustinian monks, who had fled Palestine following the fall of Jerusalem to the Saracen Saladin (Selahaddin Eyyubi) in 1187, came here. They established a monastery by the name of Abbaye de la Paix (Abbey of Peace), from which the corrupted version of the name Bellapais evolved. The original structure was built between 1198 and 1205, yet most of what we see today was constructed between 1267 and 1284 during the reign of Hugh III. The cloisters and the large refectory were added during the reign of Hugh IV (1324–59).

When Cyprus was taken by the Ottomans, the monastery was put under the protection of the Orthodox Church. This apparently wasn't enough to prevent villagers and later the British overlords from using the stone from the building for other purposes.

What is left today is a mixture of completion and destruction, with some parts of the monastery in an excellent state of preserve. The **refectory** to the north side of the cloister is frequently used for gatherings and events. From here, there are splendid views across to the sea and the plains below. Less well-preserved is the **kitchen court** on the west side, where all that remains are a few walls; the more daring can scramble onto a rather precarious section of wall for a better view. The now dim and dank church is in gener-

ally good condition, and remains much as it was in 1976 when the last of the Greek Orthodox faithful were obliged to leave.

The cypress-lined 14th-century **cloister** is the monastery's most poignant section, and is almost complete, apart from the western side, where it has fallen down or been pulled apart. This now looks out onto a restaurant (see opposite), where diners can gaze onto the open cloister courtyard over their meze.

Get your entry ticket from the not-so-obvious ticket booth set back a little to the left as you enter. You can exit the way you came in, or directly into the restaurant forecourt.

HOME OF LAWRENCE DURRELL

The second reason to visit Bellapais, but only if you know his work, is to visit the **home of Lawrence Durrell**. The village's only literary son, Durrell lived here in the early 1950s; although the near-idyllic, mixed-community days described in his book *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* have long since gone, the novel remains compulsory reading for visitors to Cyprus. The **Tree of Idleness** (see the boxed text, above) under which Durrell's characters spent many an indolent hour still remains, these days more likely shading tourists clutching cold beers. Durrell's house is still a private residence, but a yellow plaque over the main door marks the spot where he spent his bohemian days.

To reach the house, head inland along the street to the right of the Huzur Ağaç Restaurant and walk about 200m more or less straight and upwards. You will come across the house on your left. Ask if you lose your way – not difficult in the winding, narrow alleyways.

Festivals & Events

Every year during May and June, the **Bellapais Music Festival** (☎ 0542 854 6417; www.cypnet.co.uk/ncyprus/culture/music/agenda/bellapais festival) takes place in and around the abbey. The festival consists of concerts, recitals and even brass-band performances in the refectory. Prominent posters advertising the events are on display around town, in Kyrenia and elsewhere.

Sleeping & Eating

Bellapais has some excellent places to stay. It's close enough to Kyrenia to be easily accessible, but far enough away to feel like somewhere different.

Residence (☎ 815 9296; www.cyprusparadise.com; r per person UK£40; ♻️ 🚰) This hotel is a unique slice of style and comfort pretty much unmatched on the island (among the more affordable choices). The Residence has a colonial décor, with nine rooms named after the various empires that have left their mark on Cyprus, and each is individually and accordingly decorated. The rooms surround a small swimming pool, so silence is almost guaranteed. There is a 'secret garden' where you can chill out among cushions and candles. The power showers are heavenly. If you want to feel a bit pampered, this place breathes quality and care.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Gardens of Irini (☎ 815 2820; www.gardensofirini.com; per person UK£20) Right up at the top of the village, among green shrubbery and close to Lawrence Durrell's house, the Gardens of Irini is a real little paradise. There is one studio and a one-bedroom apartment (Lilly Cottage), both self-catering and adjacent to a traditional village house. Each has a little private courtyard, a kitchen decorated with lovely rustic cupboards and cookers, the main room has a fireplace, lovely rugs and Oriental rice-paper blinds; the beds are comfortable, and the bathrooms have a shower and bath – what more could you want? Food? Worry not. The charming owner Deirdre Guthrie cooks up a kicking breakfast, and for dinner (an extra charge), she prepares scrumptious food (see above). All meals are served in the cool, leafy garden. And if you're really lucky, Deirdre might tell you some great stories from her days as a professional flamenco dancer in Spain. Booking in advance is advisable.

Hotel Bellapais Gardens (☎ 815 6066; www.bellapaisgardens.com; s/d UK£30-45/60-90; ♻️ 🚰) This luxurious resort has self-contained studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments, all with expansive sea views. A lush, almost tropical garden is at the centre, with a swimming pool and a bar to relax in. The abbey is just above you, so you can admire its curves from the pool. Breakfast is UK£4.50.

Abbey Inn (☎ 815 9444; fax 815 9446; r per person UK£30; 🚰) Just off the main street, the Abbey Inn is a small hotel with 10 doubles looking out onto a small swimming pool. The neat rooms are decorated with local antiques, wrought-iron beds and grand wooden wardrobes. It's run by the same owners as the Huzur Ağaç (Tree of Idleness) Restaurant.

Guthrie's Bistro Bar (☎ 815 2820; per person UK£16; 🍷 dinner, drinks all day) Deirdre Guthrie, the owner of Gardens of Irini (see the boxed text, below), runs a small restaurant in her gorgeous garden, serving freshly prepared food. And she cooks up a storm for dinner. The menu is normally a starter of gazpacho (cold tomato soup), or haloumi and tomatoes; the main is a choice of *kleftiko*, garlic and lemon chicken or sweet and sour pork; and for dessert you get ice cream or a fruit compote. Deirdre also serves Italian red and white wine, and makes a great brandy sour (see the boxed text, p105). Always book one day ahead.

Kybele (☎ 815 7531; meals 20YTL; 🍷 dinner) Surrounded by verdant foliage, this place has the best views of the abbey in the village: it's right next door to it. While the food is good and service very attentive, you can also just have a drink in the cool, welcoming gardens and enjoy the soothing music.

Paşa (☎ 815 7586; meals 10YTL; ☺ lunch & dinner) A basic eatery at the end of the main village street, excellent for some *lahmacun* (Turkish pizza) and Turkish ravioli, which comes with a good portion of salad. Most tourists avoid this place for its lack of luxury, but for some homemade, tasty carbohydrates and meat, this is a treat.

Huzur Ağaç (Tree of Idleness) Restaurant (☎ 815 3380; fixed menu 15YTL; ☺ lunch & dinner) This is Durrell's famed Tree of Idleness. An atmospheric place where you can have a drink, but you're advised to avoid the tourist-oriented food.

ST HILARION CASTLE ΑΓΙΟΣ ΗΛΙΑΡΙΟΝ

The outline of the almost magical, fairytale remains of **St Hilarion Castle** (☎ 0533 161 276; admission 6YTL; ☺ 9am-4.45pm) will not become apparent until you are directly beneath it, so blended is the structure with the cliffside. The castle (*kalesi* in Turkish) has just enough hidden rooms, tunnels, overgrown gardens and steep staircases and paths to leave parents gasping for breath and the children asking for more.

Rumour has it that Walt Disney drew inspiration from the jagged contours of St Hilarion when he made *Snow White*. Local legend tells that the castle once had 101 rooms, the last of which was a secret garden belonging to a fairy 'queen'. She apparently used to enchant shepherds and hunters and rob them of their catch, as well as a few years of their lives, which they spent in a deep slumber.

The castle's real history is a bit more based on Planet Earth. This lofty fort is named after a monk called Hilarion, who fled persecution in the Holy Land. He lived and died in a cave on the mountain that overlooks the plain of Kyrenia and protects the pass between Kyrenia and North Nicosia. During the 10th century, the Byzantines built a church and monastery over the tomb of Hilarion. Earlier, the site's strategic position had been used mainly as a watchtower and beacon during the Arab raids of the 7th and 8th centuries. This was an important link in the communication chain between Buffavento and Kantara castles further east. In 1191, Guy de Lusignan decided to take control of St Hilarion by besieging and dislodging the self-styled Byzantine emperor of Cyprus, Isaak Komninos. St Hilarion was then extensively

expanded and used both as a military outpost and a summer residence for the Lusignan court until the arrival of the Venetians.

The Venetians neglected the castle and it fell into disrepair. It only saw practical use again in 1964 when Turkish Cypriot activists from Turk Müdafaa Teskilati (TMT) were able to take control of the castle and fend off EOKA-inspired attacks. It has been in Turkish Cypriot hands ever since; a covetously protected Turkish military base on the ridge below the castle is testament to its ongoing status as a strategic location.

The site consists of three main parts, but this is not immediately obvious to the visitor as the stones and ruined buildings blend so seamlessly into the rocky landscape. Visitors enter by the **barbican** and the main gate into the **lower enceinte**, which was used as the main **garrison** and **stabling area**. A meandering path leads you up to the **middle enceinte**, which was originally protected and sealed off by a drawbridge. Here are the remains of a **church**, more **barrack rooms** and a four-storey **royal apartment**. There is also a large **cistern** for the storage of vital water.

Access to the **upper enceinte** is via a windy and steep track, thankfully paved and renovated in more recent years. You enter the upper castle via a **Lusignan gate** guarded by a **Byzantine tower** and reach an overgrown central courtyard. Around the courtyard are more **royal apartments**, **kitchens** and **ancillary chambers**. A final breath-sapping climb takes you to **Prince John's tower** where, as legend has it, Prince John of Antioch, convinced that his two Bulgarian bodyguards were planning to kill him, had them thrown over the steep cliff to their death.

The view from the top is stunning, and on a clear day you can see the **Taurus Mountains** in Turkey, more than 100km away. To the west, you can look down on the village of Karaman (Karmi). Kyrenia to the north, around 730m lower in elevation and several kilometres away, looks very small and insignificant.

Come early if you can; the climb to the top is tiring and can be quite difficult on a hot day. There is a small snack bar in the car park.

BUFFAVENTO CASTLE

The three castles of the Kyrenia Range are like three beautiful sisters in a folk tale. Each is in competition with the other, trying to

be different in order to draw attention to themselves. Like some sisters, Kantara Castle (p216) is considered the most romantic of the trio and St Hilarion (opposite) the most interesting; but the lofty fortress of **Buffavento Castle** (Buffavento Kalesi; admission free; ☺ dawn-dusk) is the one that plays hard-to-get.

This majestic castle, whose name means 'buffeted by the winds', perches precariously 940m above the sea, overlooking the plain of the Mesarya (from the Greek word *mesoria*, meaning 'between the mountains') to the south. In medieval times, it was called the Castle of the Lion, but little is known about its early history. It dates back at least to 1191 when Richard the Lionheart took it over from the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Isaak Komninos. The Lusignans used it as a prison and beacon tower, as it was in line of sight with both Kantara to the east and St Hilarion to the west.

The attraction of the castle is its remoteness and the views from the ruins, especially on a clear day when the winds aren't buffeting it. While it isn't in the best condition, there are still a couple of covered chambers in the lower castle, and a renovated stairway now allows access to the upper parts. The walkways are well protected and the views from the very top are truly magnificent.

The castle is divided into two main sections, the **lower enceinte** and the **upper enceinte**, which occupy a relatively small area on the rocky peak where it was constructed. The castle was built in such a way that no further fortifications were needed other than the outer walls of the main buildings, since there is no way in other than through the main entrance.

Getting there is half the fun. It is prominently signposted off the Beşparmak (Pentadaktylos) Pass as Buffavento Kalesi. From here, it is a 5km, 15-minute drive along a dirt track to the small parking area below the fortress. The walk up, which is fairly steep but gradual, should take between 30 and 40 minutes. Good footwear is necessary, and a walking stick or trekking poles are useful.

KYRENIA TO KAPLICA (DAVLOS)

ΔΑΥΛΟΣ

This is a wonderful area of Cyprus and most interesting for those who want to see the last untouched parts of the island that has changed so much over the last thirty

years. The meandering, narrow coastal road from Kyrenia to Kaplıca and on towards Kantara Castle runs eastward along plantations of olives and carobs, small village houses, and space and silence that you won't find elsewhere, apart from the Karpas (Kırpaşa) Peninsula. This road can either be a day's excursion on your way to Kantara Castle (see p216), or a long way around to the Karpas Peninsula.

The route passes some beaches (p192) and continues on for some 60km before the turning to Kantara Castle at the village of **Kaplıca**. On the way, you can stop for a swim, check out the deserted ruins of various churches, and closely examine the sand cliffs that look like something out of a lava lamp.

The further you go, the drier and more barren the land becomes. The road passes within metres of the sea for long stretches at a time. Look out for the long-abandoned **carob warehouses**, still standing sentinel from a time when this natural commodity, fairly unknown in the West, was a source of great wealth to Cyprus.

You will see the first sign to Kantara Castle (Kantara Kalesi) about 7km before Kaplıca. Ignore it: it is a longer route, and besides, you will miss out on the opportunity for a pre-castle swim at **Kaplıca Beach** shortly before the junction to Kaplıca village, which lies a kilometre or so up the hillside. The wonderfully sandy strand is the only decent place to swim along this long lonely stretch. The beachside **Kaplıca Beach Restaurant & Hotel** (Kaplıca Plajı; ☎ 387 2032; fax 387 2031; r UK£20) will feed you and give you a place to stay should you wish to break your journey, in simple rooms, but away from the crowds.

Turn right at the signposted junction for Kaplıca village and eventually you will see Kantara Castle perched precipitously high up above the coastline on a rocky spur.

ALEVKAYA HERBARIUM

A worthwhile visit can be made along the back road of the Beşparmak (Pentadaktylos) spur of the Kyrenia Range to see the **Alevkaya Herbarium** (admission free; ☺ 8am-4pm), a forest station on the mountain ridge between Esentepe (Agios Amvrosios) and Değirmenlik (Kythrea). The herbarium is home to samples of most of the endemic

Cypriot flora and it includes some 1250 native-plant species. On display are many dried and preserved specimens, as well as the fresh variety. The display developed out of a collection made by English botanist Deryck Viney, whose book *Illustrated Flora of North Cyprus* documented the country's varied botanical treasure-trove.

If ever you arrive outside opening hours, someone will usually let you in. To get to the herbarium, take a signposted forest road off the southern side of Pentadaktylos Pass, or from the northern coastal road signposted via Karaağaç (Harkia) or Esentepe.

LAPTA (LAPITHOS) ΛΑΠΗΘΟΣ

The village of Lapta is popular as a day trip for its proximity to Kyrenia as well as for its views and cool, leafy atmosphere. Forest fires devastated much of the Kyrenia Range escarpment in the mid-1990s, but fortunately Lapta managed to escape most of the ruination and still retains its old-world charm.

Lapta was one of the original city kingdoms of Cyprus and was a regional capital under Roman rule. Its abundant water and protected position have made it a favourite choice for foreign residents over many years. Greeks and Turks lived here in harmony until 1974. Today it is home to a scattering of expats, mainland Turks and original Turkish Cypriot villagers. The spread-out village is best visited on foot, particularly its leafy lanes.

The splendid former monastery, now the **Ayia Anastasia Resort** (☎ 821 8961; Maresal Fevzi Cakmak Caddesi; r per person UK£21) ripples out around a disused Orthodox church on top of a mountain overlooking Lapta. It caters very much for the rich mainland Turks, who stay here while they gamble down the hill at the casino, managed by the resort's owners. The atmosphere can be a little strange, with men in sharp suits drinking at the bar, and large BMWs parked in the middle of the courtyard as if on display. All rooms are spacious and have great views, telephones and satellite TV, and you can lounge around the two swimming pools, and dine in the two in-house restaurants.

The one other restaurant in the village, the **Hill Top** (☎ 821 8889; mains 15YTL), is open for lunch and serves OK food, although sometimes the chefs can go wild on the oil

in their dishes. The menu has *kleftiko*, liver and onions and (an oily) moussaka on offer. Follow the signs from the village centre.

The better restaurant, Başpınar, was closed at the time of research, but check out whether it has reopened. It's at the top of the village.

KORUÇAM (KORMAKITIS) PENINSULA AKPOTHPI KOPMAKITH

The bare northwestern tip of Northern Cyprus is known as the Koruçam Burnu (Cape Kormakitis) and, apart from being yet another 'land's end' in the same sense as Cape Greco and Cape Arnaoutis in the South, or Zafer Burnu (Cape Apostolos Andreas) in the east, it is also home to one of Cyprus' least-known religious communities (see the boxed text, opposite).

A trip to the cape makes for a pleasant excursion from Lapta. There is at least one decent beach on the way with a popular grill and fish restaurant. Or you can take a picnic and enjoy your solitude at the cape itself.

A decent road now runs almost all the way to the cape. It is best tackled as a loop starting from the northern end of the Kyrenia-Morfou road at the junction just after the village of Karşıyaka (Vasileia). Look for the sign to Sadrazamköy (Livera).

Shortly after the turn-off is the neat little **Horse Shoe Beach**, with its eponymous **Horse-shoe Beach Restaurant** (☎ 851 6664; grills 8YTL), which gets very busy at weekends with locals on a day out for a snorkel or swim followed by a lazy lunch of grilled fish or meats.

The coastal road towards the cape is winding but well maintained. You'll reach the rather scruffy settlement of Sadrazamköy after about 11km. Here, a rather curious boxlike resort in typical mainland-Turkish style has sprung up on the western edge of the village.

The road from here to the cape is a 3.5km dirt track – lumpy in parts, but driveable in a conventional vehicle. There is nothing at the end but bare rocks, a couple of abandoned buildings and a solar-powered shipping beacon. A small rocky islet lies offshore. This is also Cyprus' closest point to Turkey, which lies 60km across the sea.

Head back via the picturesque inland loop road through Koruçam village and

THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS: THE MARONITES OF KORUÇAM (KORMAKITIS)

To make his controversial religious blood'n'gore film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Mel Gibson probably took Aramaic language classes from the Maronites, an ancient Christian sect from the Middle East who still speak the language of Jesus. Along with Latin, Aramaic is the tongue painstakingly used throughout Gibson's film. And here, in the small village of Koruçam (Kormakitis) in Northern Cyprus, a unique dialect of this long-forgotten language is still spoken by 130 wrinkly Maronite Catholics.

Originally, the Maronites split from the prevailing Orthodox theory of Christianity that God was both man and god. In contrast, they followed the Monophysite religious line that states that God could only be viewed as one spiritual persona. Persecuted by Orthodox Christians, they first sought refuge in Lebanon and Syria, and came to Cyprus in the 12th century in the wake of the crusaders, whom they had helped as auxiliaries in the Holy Land campaign.

Aramaic is a Semitic language related to Hebrew and used as the main tongue for commercial dealings in the Middle East during Christ's time. Until the 1950s, it was believed that Aramaic was only spoken in Maaloula and two nearby villages in Syria, north of Damascus. But Koruçam's Maronites kept their Aramaic dialect going over hundreds of years, weaving into it words from Greek, Turkish, French and Italian, thus developing a strand of their own, which some experts have called 'Cypriot Maronite Arabic'. If Christ happened to visit Koruçam today – a village seemingly forgotten by everyone else – he would still be able to get by; the language of the Cypriot Maronites is to Christ's Aramaic what modern Italian is to Latin. The Aramaic verbs have been kept by the Maronites, but many nouns have been replaced by Turkish.

But if Christ decided to visit Koruçam in twenty or thirty years' time, it's likely he would get funny looks from the village's remaining inhabitants, who are predicted to lose the language if no youngsters decide to learn it. Post-1974, the Cypriot Maronites have clung to a tenuous existence in the village, where they still maintain a church. Over the years, the once-vigorous congregation has gradually left, and now barely one hundred remain to keep the old traditions and religion alive. The Maronites, like the Armenians and Latin religious communities, had to choose allegiance with either the Greek or Turkish communities in the 1960s. They chose the Greeks, and since '74 the youth from the village has gradually all but disappeared, crossing over into the South to study in Greek schools. Those who remained in the North have managed to tread the fine line between political and religious allegiances with some degree of success and, pre-2003, their relatives from the South were able to visit them on weekends.

However, there is still hope for Aramaic and its Cypriot speakers. Now that the borders have opened, the South's Maronites can visit for longer periods, although they are still not allowed to live in the North. With a bit of luck, some of them will have been inspired by Mel's passion and learn their ancient language.

take note of the huge Maronite **Church of Agios Georgios**, built in 1940 from funds raised by the villagers.

There's a small **coffee shop** in the village; if you speak Greek, you may get into conversation with the Greek- (and Aramaic-) speaking Maronites here.

The last leg back to the Kyrenia-Morfou road is along a rather poorly maintained road through a military area. There are a couple of prominent checkpoints, and you may be stopped.

Join the main highway at Çamlıbel (Myrtou), from where you can loop back to Kyrenia, cut south to Morfou or veer southeast to North Nicosia.

THE NORTHWEST

The flat and parched landscape stretching east and west of North Nicosia is called the Mesarya, derived from the Greek word *mesaoria*, meaning 'between the mountains'. In its summer guise, it's less than inviting with the shimmer of the roasting soil radiating from the ground, but in winter the area metamorphoses when it comes alive with greenery and wildflowers. It is easy to navigate in a car, since it's quite flat, and the area's western side is more interesting than the east. If you want to get away from the coast and look for something a bit

more alternative, the Mesarya can entertain you for a day or two.

The northwestern quadrant of Northern Cyprus loosely covers the territory south of the Kyrenia Range and westwards to the agricultural town of Morfou, Morfou Bay (Güzelyurt Körfezi), the one-time mining port of Gemikonağı (Karavostasi), the pretty hill village of Lefke (Lefka) and the two obscure but worthwhile archaeological sites of Ancient Soloi and Ancient Vouni in the far west.

Distances are relatively short and the whole excursion can be made into a loop, returning to North Nicosia via the Koruçam Peninsula and Kyrenia, or vice versa. You can now also cross into the South at the Zodhia crossing, near Morfou.

Beaches

A 12km stretch west of Gemikonağı has sandy and pebbly beaches, ending at the border with the Republic. First up is the prominently signposted **Zafer Gazinosu Beach**. It's mainly a pebble beach with some imported sand for those who prefer it. There is a wooden diving and swimming pier, changing rooms and toilets, as well as an attendant bar and restaurant.

From here, you are better advised to ignore the subsequent, rather scrappy beaches to the west and head for **Asmalı Beach**, fronting the border village of Yeşilırmak (Limnitis). This is a clean pebble beach with four restaurants catering to those who make it this far out. Of curious interest is a huge grapevine. Planted in 1947, the enormous vine completely covers the outside dining area of the Asmalı Beach Restaurant at the western end.

Towards the eastern end is **Green River Bar** (☎ 0533 855 8331; meals 8YTL), run by Turkish, Cockney-speaking Erdal (Eddie). Apart from dishing up large meals of kebabs, fish or *kleftiko*, he also offers a small, shaded area with seats and tables (5YTL entry) for independent picnickers.

Getting Around

There are regular daily buses to Morfou from North Nicosia (1YTL, every 30 minutes) and onward bus transport to Gemikonağı and Lefke (5YTL) every 30 minutes from Morfou. You may be able to charter a taxi from North Nicosia or Kyrenia for a round trip,

and this may work out more economical if there are at least two of you. Overall though, getting around is better conducted under your own steam, especially if you want to see Ancient Soloi and Ancient Vouni.

MORFOU (GÜZELYURT) ΜΟΡΦΟΥ

pop 15,000

The quiet and generally uneventful town of Morfou (known as Güzelyurt by Turkish Cypriots) was once the centre for Cyprus' lucrative citrus industry. Sunzest, the company owned by renegade and runaway Cypriot businessman, Asil Nadir, used to produce vast quantities of orange juice for the export market. The factory now languishes in receivership, and the potentially lucrative citrus industry has taken a severe downturn.

This is bittersweet news to the Greek Cypriots, who were particularly aggrieved when the citrus groves were lost to Turkish forces in 1974. Most were proudly owned by Greek Cypriots who, when meeting someone who has been to the North, invariably ask after the health of their beloved groves.

You can hardly miss the citrus groves – they start shortly before the village of Şahinler (Masari) and stretch all the way to the sea. The groves are watered by a series of underground aquifers. However, because of a drop in the level of the aquifer reserves and a rise in the salinity of the underground water, as well as a sometimes less-than-loving approach to cultivation and maintenance, the groves are beginning to feel the pinch. In fairness, this visible degradation is no doubt due, to some degree, to the disruption brought about by Sunzest's demise.

In better days, in the early half of the 20th century, oranges were shipped by train from Morfou to Famagusta for export overseas. It seems odd that facilities were never developed for orange export at the nearer port of Gemikonağı. Incidentally, the train route from Morfou to North Nicosia ceased passenger services in 1932, though it continued to transport freight until 1951. The line has long since fallen into disrepair.

Morfou today is really of no interest to the tourist, apart from a glimpse of a run-down, cluttered agricultural town with a few narrow, winding streets and small

shops, where life is totally unfazed by tourism and independent of it. The bus station is on the south side of town. Follow Ecevit Caddesi from the bus station for 800m to reach the town centre.

By the large roundabout in the town centre, you'll see the Orthodox church of Cyprus' most beloved saint, tax-collector-repelling **Agios Mamas**, which was once the site of a pagan temple. The faithful used to visit this place before 1974 to see the ancient marble tomb of the patron saint, said to have oozed a mysterious liquid when pierced by the Ottomans who were looking for treasure. The liquid, which was supposed to have curing effects on earaches, flowed freely at irregular intervals; this is why ear-shaped offerings surround the tomb. The church, which is normally closed, vies for attention with a splendid-looking new mosque that has been built across the square.

Morfou does however have one of the best meze houses in the North, according to some. The **Şah** (☎ 714 3064; meze 8YTL), south of the north-end roundabout, has quail and lamb sausages included in the meze.

If you choose to stay here, the 13-room **Güzelyurt Otel** (☎ 714 3412; guzelyurt@northcyprus.net; Bahçelievler Bulvarı; s/d UK£33/51; 📶 🚰) is just a little out of town. This basic hotel will only be any good if you're totally stuck for a place to stay, since it's quite overpriced for the run-down look it sports. The rooms have air-con, a phone and TV, and there's a swimming pool, bar and laundry service.

GEMIKONAĞI (KARAVOSTASI)

ΚΑΡΑΒΟΣΤΑΣΗ

More citrus groves stretch westwards from Morfou, towards Morfou Bay. The thin strips of beach are not so great: there's no shade, the pebbles are uncomfortable, and it's all a bit narrow. But there aren't many people about and the sea is pretty calm. The villagers from the Troödos foothills in the South used to make the short trip to Morfou Bay to swim before 1974, but due to the border, they now have to trek over 100km away to Larnaka.

The once-flourishing port of Gemikonağı dominates the bay, and you will spot the long-abandoned and slowly disintegrating jetty before you actually catch sight of the port itself. The town was once home to a large American-run mining enterprise that

for many years mined the now scarred hinterland immediately south and east of town. That industry ceased after 1974, and the place has taken on a backwater appearance, not unlike the town of Kato Pyrgos further along the coast in Tylliria in the Republic.

Nonetheless, the town continues to support a small local tourist industry and a few restaurants. Small beaches to the west of Gemikonağı testify to the area's pull on the few visitors who prefer alternative dining and bathing options to the often crowded and more expensive spots elsewhere in the North. Gemikonağı is one place in the region to base yourself for a day or two.

A former caravanserai, the **Soli Inn Hotel** (☎ 727 7575; solinn@northcyprus.net; s/d UK£31/41; 📶) is a comfortable one-star hotel, sitting by the sea on the west side of the town. There are simple doubles and more elaborate suites, which have bathtubs and showers. All have a TV and a fridge, and there's a pool for guests; rates include breakfast.

The nearby **Mardin Restaurant** (☎ 727 7527; mains 5-6YTL; 🍴 lunch & dinner) has excellent fish and meze, but the *Adana* kebabs are also pretty yummy. There is an artificial beach next door, and the restaurant terrace overlooks the sea.

LEFKE (LEFKA) ΛΕΥΚΑ

From Gemikonağı, a road runs off at right angles to the hillside village of Lefke. The turn-off is not well signposted, but nonetheless it's hard to miss. The village, which is an easy 10-minute drive along a fast, straight road, is bizarrely the home of a hardy bunch of British expats. The village derives its name from the Greek word *lefka* (meaning 'popular'). There are seemingly more palm trees than poplars these days, and Lefke's position amid riotous greenery and rolling hills gives the place a pleasant, fresh feel.

The years of Lefke's isolation on the country's western corner are almost over, with a new border crossing at Zodhia, which can be reached by the road going to Morfou. The vast hinterland of Tylliria and Pafos Forest, which is in reality no more than 2km away, can now be reached faster from here, although the roads are quite windy going through the mountains. There has been some debate about opening a border crossing near Ancient Vouni in the future, which would open up this region even more.

ANCIENT SOLOI

A good reason for venturing further west is to visit two archaeological sites. The first, **Ancient Soloi** (Soli Harabeleri; admission 6YTL; ☎ 9am-7pm), one of the ancient city kingdoms of Cyprus. Soloi traces its origin back to an Assyrian tribute list (700 BC) where the original city was referred to as Si-il-lu. In 580 BC, King Philokyprios moved his capital from Aepia to Si-il-lu on the advice of his mentor, the Athenian philosopher Solon. Philokyprios promptly renamed the citadel Soloi in honour of Solon. In 498 BC, Soloi, along with most of the other city kingdoms of Cyprus (Amathous being the exception), rose up against the Persians but was ultimately defeated. It languished until Roman times, when it flourished once again, thanks to the rich copper mines nearby. As happened in other parts of Cyprus, Soloi suffered looting and sacking at the hands of Arab raiders in the 7th century AD.

The site consists of two main parts: the basilica nearest the entrance to the site, and the theatre along a short path up a hill south of the basilica. The remains of a royal palace can also be found on the acropolis next to the theatre, though it is believed that this dates from a later period.

The **basilica** is now covered with a large, open-walled, tin-roofed structure that protects the remains and the archaeologists who are still working sporadically on the excavations. St Mark was baptised here by St Auxibius, and the first church is thought to have been built in the second half of the 4th century. As is the case with most archaeological remains, it is difficult to imagine the size and extent of the church, which by all accounts was an impressive structure. The remains of the **decorated floors**, on the other hand, are immediately obvious. Notable among them is a mosaic of a swan surrounded by floral patterns, and four small dolphins nearby. The heavy roof over the

sanctuary has spoiled the view of the mosaics as the light has been reduced.

The **Roman theatre** has been restored considerably. As much of its original stonework was carted away by the British to rebuild the dockside of Port Said in the late 19th century, the restoration does little for the imagination, but in its time the theatre could accommodate up to 4000 spectators. The famous Roman statuette of **Aphrodite of Soli** was discovered nearby. This is now in the Cyprus Museum in Lefkosia (p63).

ANCIENT VOUNI

Viewed in the early morning or late afternoon, this rather surreal and ‘what’s-it-doing-here?’ site is a bit of a mystery. The hilltop location of **Ancient Vouni** (Vouni Sarayı Kalıntıları; admission 6YTL; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) is simply superb, and is reached along a narrow road off the main highway. Look for the black-and-yellow Vouni Sarayı sign pointing north and up the hill. Go up to the car park and the ticket office at the very top.

The site, which originally housed a palace or large complex of buildings, dates back to the 5th century BC. The palace was built by the leaders of the pro-Persian city of Marion (today’s Polis) following the failed revolt by the Ionian Greeks against the Persians. The details of this incident were described by Herodotus in Book V of his *Histories*. Built to keep watch over the activities of nearby pro-Greek Soloi, the palace consisted of a discernible megaron (a three-part rectangular room with a central hearth and throne), private rooms and steps leading down to a courtyard under which is a cistern. A curious guitar-shaped stone seen there probably supported a windlass (a machine for raising weights). The palace was burned down in 380 BC and never re-established. Today the site stands forlornly on its magnificent hilltop, commanding some of the best views of the region.

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