

## By Libby Fisk (Oct'2019)

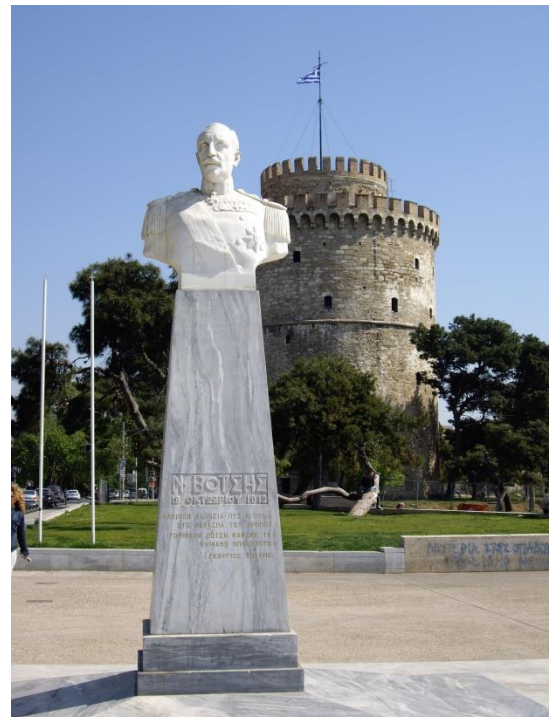
Having been to several other Mediterranean countries, my husband and I decided to go a little off the beaten path for our trip last October, and travel to Cyprus. A land filled with historic churches, ancient ruins, picturesque beaches, and breathtakingly beautiful mountain ranges, this island did not disappoint.



After transport to the hotel in Limassol, we met the rest of the tour group and our guide over dinner then went back to our room to rest up for the next day. The following morning, we headed out to our first stop: a view of the famous Ghost Town of Varosha. We looked out over the haunting sight of what used to be a tourist haven, but was abandoned in the 1970s when the Turks invaded. Later, we roamed through Famagusta, taking in the centuries-old churches, palaces, and towers. It is a beautiful quaint town that is abundant with old sites and is imbued with the aromas of the past.

Next, we visited Bellapais Abbey, the ruins of a 13th century gothic-style monastery. The monastery, offset by the surrounding Kyrenia mountain range and greenery, is just stunning. Once we left the monastery, we took a short break to stroll through the charming nearby village and its shops. Picking a few cheeses and olives and some wine, we sat in a lovely park to have a brunch while watching the local families with their children and pets.

My favorite part of our first day was the visit to Kyrenia Castle. Overlooking a gorgeous harbor, most of the castle is around 500 years old, though it contains remnants of Roman and Byzantine eras. Here, we wandered through this historic structure, passing ancient tombs, royal apartments, servants' living quarters, and dungeons.



The next morning began with a visit to Lefkara Village, where we learned about the intricate art of Cypriot embroidery. We went on to take a drive through the countryside before stopping in Astromeritis Village, a quaint little town with cobblestone streets dotted with fountains and statues.

We then proceeded to the Troodos Mountains, by far the most memorable stop of the day. This region is famous for its ten painted churches, some dating as far back as the 12th century. The frescoes, murals, and Byzantine-style architecture were gorgeous, and no pictures could do them justice. These structures are wonderfully preserved, ranging from rural decor in the small chapels like the Archangel Michael, to the more ornate architecture of the larger Kykkos Monastery, which contains several religious relics.



We left the churches and went on a scenic drive to Mount Olympus, the highest point on Cyprus. We stopped here for lunch, dining on the traditional dish of Meze, and gazing out over the miles and miles of incredible landscapes beneath us. Later, we visited a winery, sampling some of the region's local wines.

We left the winery in a jovial mood and headed on to our last stop of the day, the Timios Stavros Monastery, in Omodos. The monastery's décor is elaborate, with its gold plate embellishments, stained glass windows, and ancient frescoes. It also houses a few religious relics, including a piece of the True Cross. Outside, the courtyard, with its pretty arches, is a lovely place to just sit and enjoy the scenery.

The next morning, we visited the ancient city of Kourion. Located on a bluff overlooking the majestic waters of the Mediterranean, the once important city was destroyed nearly 1,700 years ago by an earthquake. Remnants of Kourion's past can be found among the restoration efforts. We saw beautiful mosaics, including one of gladiators, and another one that was inscribed as depicting Ktsisis, and explored the Roman amphitheater.



Next, we toured the Catacombs of St. Solomoni, a series of interconnected caves in Kato Paphos. At the entrance, there's a tree covered with colorful pieces of rags and fabric left by visitors. It's believed that if you hang a piece of fabric on one of the tree's branches, your ailments will magically be cured.

After leaving the catacombs, we toured the rest of Kato Paphos, a resort town and UNESCO World Heritage Site that has everything from great food, to nice shops, to ancient ruins. Here, we discovered Roman era mosaics depicting mythological scenes, like Dionysus on a chariot, or wooing Ariadne, and Apollo condemning Marsyas to be flayed. On the way back to our hotel, we stopped in the village of Geroskipou, where we sampled some Loukoumia (a sweet known as Cyprus or Turkish delight) from a local bakery.

Early the following morning, we began our day with a visit to a sweets workshop, and learned how the local desserts are made. Later, we toured the Church of Agios Nicolaos tis Stegis. This 11th century Byzantine monastery is the only one of its kind left on Cyprus. Its walls are covered in frescoes, some nearly 1,000 years old. For lunch, we stopped in Kakopetria, where we feasted on Koupepia (stuffed grape leaves). After we ate, we spent some time wandering the charming village and admiring its lovely scenery.

Next, we visited the impressive Milomery Falls, the largest waterfall in Cyprus. We stopped at a local winery for some wine tasting before heading back to our hotel for the night.

We made our way to Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, the next morning. Here, we toured the Archbishop's Palace. The mid-20th century Venetian-style palace is an elegant building with large windows and high arches. Within the palace's courtyard is St. John's Cathedral, a small but lovely 14th century building. Its vaulted ceiling, covered in frescoes, is reminiscent of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.



Later, we explored the Leventis Municipal Museum, where we saw Cypriot art, costumes, pottery, and artifacts dating back from around 3000 BCE up to present time. The Museum also features works by impressionists such as Monet, Boudin, Pissarro, and more. Its Greek collection includes pieces like The Orphan Girl ( by Lytras), and the landscapes of Konstantino Maleas.

After leaving the museum, we did a little shopping on Ledras Street, and then proceeded to Larnaca. Here, we visited Ayios Lazarus Church. Built in the 9th century in the Byzantine style, it was later restored with Orthodox influences in the 17th century. The intricate woodcarvings and gold iconography are spectacular. It is believed that the tomb of Lazarus is located here.

We used our free time that night to wander the Finikoudes Promenade, which overlooks the sea. My husband and I broke from the group and dined at one of the seaside restaurants, where we had a delicious meal of fresh fish, and watched the waves of the sparkling blue Mediterranean wash over each other.

Our last day on Cyprus began with a Jeep Safari and a tour of Akamas National Park. We first visited the legendary birthplace of Aphrodite, and then continued on to the Akamas Peninsula, stopping at the natural wonder of Avakas Gorge. We hiked a bit through the gorge, admiring the magnificent rock formations, and the endangered plant species. We had a quick but tasty lunch at a local tavern, and then proceeded to the Baths of Aphrodite. Here, water flows down a wall of rocks, creating a pool in a small grotto, shaded by lush greenery.





According to Greek mythology, this is where the goddess Aphrodite would come to bathe, and where Adonis fell in love with her. The pool is located near a botanical garden, as well as several hiking trails.



We sat and marveled at the pool, then strolled down one of the walking trails, taking in the views of the coast. Last, we made our way down to one of the beaches, where I took my hiking shoes off, letting the wave's crash over my feet as the fresh, cool breeze from the sea surrounded me. We then headed back to the hotel for a farewell dinner, where we reminisced about our journey and said our goodbyes over traditional Cypriot cuisine. The next morning, my husband and I flew home, forever altered by this fantastic experience.

I must admit, this tiny island in the Eastern Mediterranean has amazed me beyond my expectations. It amalgamates everything you may imagine that reflects "good life": a great weather, scenery that is so soothing with mountains, coastal beaches, valleys, and rivers; a relaxed style of life where people love music and food and celebrate it every single day; and ruins that reflect a very rich past from the number of civilizations that invaded this place. That's the kind of trip from which you come home with a calm sense of normalcy and relaxation while feeling enriched. The beauty of it is also that in one week you can cover this magnificent nation and easily combine with other nearby countries such as Lebanon or Malta or Greece or Egypt or Jordan.



Call us on our toll free at  
1-800-645-3233

Find the itineraries on our website at  
<http://www.mideasttrvl.com>

Or request them via e-mail at [info@mideasttrvl.com](mailto:info@mideasttrvl.com)

Follow us:   
Facebook page: [Spiekermantravel](#)