



# Cyprus: stepping stone of history

Island civilisation in the Eastern Mediterranean

19–27 October 2026 (MM 212)

9 days • £4,930

Lecturer: Ian Colvin

A vibrant panoply of archaeology, history and art in both south and north.

Ancient cities and tombs, churches and monasteries, forts and castles – a legacy of occupations and influences spanning millennia.

Two nights in the Troodos mountains, with its remarkable Byzantine frescoed churches.

A rich and magical island of sunshine, scenic beaches and magnificent mountains, Cyprus affords the opportunity to delve deep into the histories of both Europe and the Middle East. The third largest island in the Mediterranean, after Sicily and Sardinia, it is culturally the most diverse of the three, with the earliest history.

Every great power from antiquity to the present day has set foot and left a mark, often using the island as a stepping-stone for imperial conquests: the Assyrians and Persians, the Greeks and Romans, the Anglo-French monarchs and crusader knights, Ottoman sultans and the British army have all made homes here, thereby recognising Cyprus's vital position in the East Mediterranean and the wider world.

This fascinating tour explores the layers of civilisation which have created Cyprus. It examines the oldest traces of human presence through artefacts found at Khirokitia, the early Mycenaean trading centres at the west end of the island, and even the remaining evidence of the Persian occupation that occurred in the fifth century BCE.

In the Greco-Roman world, Cyprus was renowned as the birthplace of the great cosmic goddess Aphrodite; locals still identify a cove near Paphos as the place where she arose from the foam (Greek *aphros*) of the waves. A cult devoted to her was established in Kato Paphos, where a sanctuary to Apollo is also found, as well as the monumental remains of late Roman cities with their spectacularly colourful well-preserved mosaics.

Hellenistic burial sites and early Christian basilicas demonstrate how Cyprus has welcomed successive and diverse occupants. The tiny painted churches and monasteries of the Troodos Mountain Range are UNESCO gems. Dating to the Byzantine occupation, each is a masterpiece of Orthodox art and each



Map of Cyprus, copper engraving c. 1620.

has its own character and style – a feast for the eyes and balm for the soul. The Troodos is also home to Kykkos monastery, still a functioning religious site, with a magnificent collection of sacred icons. Indeed, icon painting was a hallmark of Cypriot life (and remains so) and you will discover a myriad of magnificent examples in the brilliant museums that dot the island.

When Richard the Lionheart conquered Cyprus in 1190, the island became the centre of the Latin Church in the East. The French Lusignan dynasty ruled for over 300 years, establishing vast fortified castles and mountain-top palaces, as well as exquisite Gothic-style cathedrals. These were subsequently taken over by the Venetians who left their mark on cities such as Nicosia and Famagusta, until they too were replaced by the Ottomans when, inevitably, churches and cathedrals became mosques as Islam was brought to the island.

The tour also explores the realities of living in a divided island and we will spend our time visiting the sites of both Greek-speaking southern Cyprus and the Turkish territory of the North. We will examine the British presence here until 1963 and the results of the

1974 hostilities. Yet in spite of the troubles, the indigenous people of Cyprus, whether Greek- or Turkish-speaking, retain pride in being Cypriots. Their rich multi-lingual dialect is testimony to the depth of history that flows through their veins.

## Itinerary

**Day 1.** Fly from London Heathrow to Larnaca at midday (British Airways). Drive c. 80 miles to reach Paphos, arriving c. 9.00pm. First of three nights in Paphos.

**Day 2: Paphos.** The day is spent in and around Paphos. The UNESCO-listed archaeological park dates largely from the Roman period and includes impressive mosaics, restored and sheltered from the elements under modern wood constructions. Visit the remains at the Tombs of the Kings, a necropolis where one hundred graves were once found. The afternoon is dedicated to the excellent District Archaeological Museum and the Byzantine Museum, notable for the 13th and 14th-century icons, as well as a 9th-century icon of Agia Marina, considered the island's oldest.

## Cyprus: stepping stone of history continued

**Day 3: Kourion, Episkopi, Limassol.** En route to the ancient city kingdom of Kourion, we pass Episkopi, one of two British sovereign territories on the island. The earliest remains found at the extensive archaeological site at Kourion date from the Hellenistic period (325–50 BC), although evidence suggests the city kingdom was founded by the Argives of the Peloponnese. Continue to Limassol (Lemesos), visiting the fort and castle, originally an early Christian basilica rebuilt in the 16th century under Ottoman rule. Local folklore claims the castle's chapel as the location for Richard the Lionheart's wedding to Berengaria de Navarre. Return to Paphos via the Birthplace of Aphrodite.

**Day 4: Paphos to the Troodos mountains.** Today is punctuated by stops at three monasteries: Ayios Neophytos, founded in the 12th century by the recluse and writer Neophytos. Byzantine paintings cover the cave that he carved out of the mountainside. Several 16th-century icons can be viewed in the church, constructed much later. A further 12th-century foundation is the beautifully-sited Chrysorogiatissa monastery; the church here dates to the late 18th century. In stark contrast to the modest rural churches, the lavishly decorated Kykkos monastery is one of Cyprus' wealthiest. The complex is home to one of three icons attributed to Apostle Luke. First of two nights in Kalopanayiotis.

**Day 5: Troodos mountains.** The Troodos mountain range is famous for its collection of Byzantine churches and monasteries, still in use today. With unprepossessing exteriors, the painted interiors are a revelation. The frescoes are in varying states of preservation, some having been partially removed or destroyed during later expansions. Among those seen today are Ayios Ioannis Lambadistos, adjacent to our hotel, and Agios Nikolaos Tis Stegis, notable for the extensive frescoes to survive.

**Day 6: Kyrenia, Bellapais, Nicosia.** Leave the mountains stopping at the small Byzantine church of Panagia Asinou. Cross the border for the first time into the Turkish occupied north of the island and drive to the coast at Kyrenia (Girne). Visit the 16th-century castle, occupying one end of the harbour. Continue to Bellapais, immortalised by Lawrence Durrell. Here a 13th-century church and 14th-century cloister were added to the original Augustinian monastery. First of three nights in the southern capital Nicosia (Lefkosa, Lefkoşa).

**Day 7: Nicosia.** The city remains divided by the Green Line. We spend the morning at the Cyprus Museum, housing the most extensive collection of Cypriot antiquities worldwide (*due to the building's capacity, only a small amount of the collection can be on display*). The A.G. Leventis Gallery displays key Cypriot art, with a focus on the events of 1974 and the consequences felt by the Greek Cypriots. Some free time. *The Byzantine Museum and Cathedral are currently closed for restoration. If they re-open in time we recommend visiting.*

**Day 8: Salamis, Famagusta, Nicosia.** The ancient coastal city of Salamis lies to the north of the border, near Famagusta (Gazimağusa). Christians rebuilt sculptures and archways throughout the former Cypriot capital following a 4th-century earthquake. Large parts of the city remain unexcavated – a further example of the differing attitudes of the north and south towards cultural heritage. Founded following the destruction of Salamis, Famagusta, now the northern capital, was the island's most important sea port before 1974. Return to Nicosia for a walking tour of the north, including Buyuk Han, Selimiye Mosque, crossing the border to the south on foot.

**Day 9: Nicosia, Larnaca.** Visit the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia in the Old City, of particular importance is the Caterina Cornaro gallery. Drive to Larnaca airport for the flight to London Heathrow, arriving c. 6.00pm.

## Lecturer

**Ian Colvin.** Historian and Byzantinist specialising in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus in Late Antiquity, with interests in the wider history of the region. Trained at Oxford, he moved to the University of Cambridge, where he was a researcher for 18 years. He directs an ongoing archaeological expedition to ancient Archaeopolis in the South Caucasus since 2001, and leads a number of tours in the region.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £4,930 or £4,670 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £5,710 or £5,450 without flights.

**Included:** travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 3 lunches and 6 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions to museums and sites; all tips for restaurant staff, drivers and guides; all state taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and a local guide.

**Accommodation: Elysium, Paphos** (elysium-hotel.com): traditionally furnished 5-star hotel adjacent to the Tombs of the Kings. **Casale Panayiotis, Kalopanayiotis\*** (casalepanayiotis.com): 4-star refurbished farmhouses beautifully situated in a mountain village. **Hilton Park, Nicosia** (hilton.com): a functional 4-star business hotel on the outskirts of the old town.

**How strenuous?** A busy tour involving a lot of walking on archaeological sites. Uneven ground, irregular paving, steps and hills are standard. There is also a lot of standing in museums and churches. The roads in the Troodos mountains are winding and may prove difficult for those suffering from motion sickness. Average distance by coach per day: 58 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.

\* This hotel offers a unique experience, blending high standards of comfort with the charm of a traditional Troodos mountain village. Please note that the rooms are spread throughout the picturesque village of Kalopanayiotis, often at varying distances from the central building, which houses the reception, dining areas, and other facilities. You should be prepared for some walking and the use of a free funicular railway to navigate the village. The distinctive layout adds to the hotel's charm but may require some patience, particularly during check-in and portering, which can take a little longer due to the hotel's unique setup. To ensure a smooth experience, we have allocated additional time here, and both the tour manager and the hotel staff will be on hand to assist as needed. We are confident that staying here offers a rare opportunity to immerse yourself in authentic village life in an enchanting setting, while enjoying modern comforts.