

Title:

North Cyprus - the new face of the Mediterranean

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Summary:

Discover North Cyprus, the unspoilt gem of the Mediterranean

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Article Body:

Long neglected in comparison to its well-know neighbour to the south, North Cyprus has come into its own in recent years and now stands proudly as one of the most 'up and coming' Mediterranean holiday destinations. The island's history has seen it under the rule of most of the world's powers; from the Romans, ancient Greeks and Lusignans, to its more recent past as a British colony. In the 1970's, the island was subject to international dispute again, culminating in an invasion by Turkish forces to protect the interests of their compatriot Turkish Cypriots. The result was the 'green line'. Under the control of the United Nations, this border separated the two parts of Cyprus and also effectively isolated the north, both politically and economically. The island remains divided, and of the world's powers, only Turkey technically recognises the state of North Cyprus. However, recent history has seen changes and it is now possible for visitors and residents to freely cross between the parts of the island.

Regardless of the politics, the effect of this isolation is a bonus to tourists. Whilst the recent relaxing of restrictions has meant growth in development in many areas, much of the country remains all but untouched by the hand of modern life. There are still many places where farmers use donkeys in preference to tractors and there is a feeling that the 20th century, never mind the 21st, has had little impact. North Cyprus is also home to some of the most important archaeological and historic sites in this part of the world. The remains of Salamis, the capital of Cyprus in Roman times, include a massive amphitheatre and other important remains. Though much remains to be excavated, the sheer scale of the site is breathtaking. Equally breathtaking are the views from St Hilarion castle! An important 'crusader' castle, St Hilarion is in a remarkable state of preservation and an abiding testament to the skill and fortitude of its builders. A few miles away, in the peaceful mountainside village of Bellapais,

is the remarkable Bellapais Abbey. Dating from the 13th century, this monument to an older civilisation still exudes a palpable atmosphere of peace. Famously the setting of Lawrence Durrell's novel, 'Bitter Lemons of Cyprus', the village is a 'must see' for visitors. As is the sea-front town of Kyrenia. With a castle and many delightful, bustling alleys, the heart of Kyrenia is its ancient harbour, described by the Mail on Sunday as 'one of the most beautiful places in the world'. Originally warehouses for carob and other of the island's products, the water-side buildings are now home to a range of delightful restaurants and shops.

There are so many more important sites that a good guidebook is as essential as good sun-cream! But amongst all this history, there is a more lively side to North Cyprus too. Many hundreds of restaurants and tavernas can be found here. All at prices that delight the wallet, whilst delighting the palette with a mouth-watering choice of local and international cuisine. The location also makes it ideal for the many operators offering watersports and diving. The coastline, as with many similar places, is protected by statute and items may not be taken from the ocean bed, but there are some challenging and scenic dives here. Indeed, the north coast was the site of the world's oldest recovered shipwreck. Professionally lifted from the sea-bed some years ago, the remains of the ship, and its cargo, can be found in Kyrenia's castle museum.

Despite its languid and old-fashioned aura, North Cyprus is definitely firmly in the 21st century when it comes to accommodation. The many hotels, of all sizes, and holiday villages here are all of a surprisingly high standard. Whilst there are a number of international style larger hotels, brimming with every facility imaginable, there is much pleasure to be had in discovering some of the small 'boutique' hotels and family-run properties that form the majority of the available tourist accommodation. Travel is simple too, with a number of airlines operating into Ercan, the island's principal tourist airport. All in all, North Cyprus offers much for the Mediterranean visitor and now is the time to explore and enjoy, before the 21st century catches up.