How to spend the perfect holiday in Cyprus, the Mediterranean island that has it all

An insider guide to Cyprus – from award-winning beaches to charming villages

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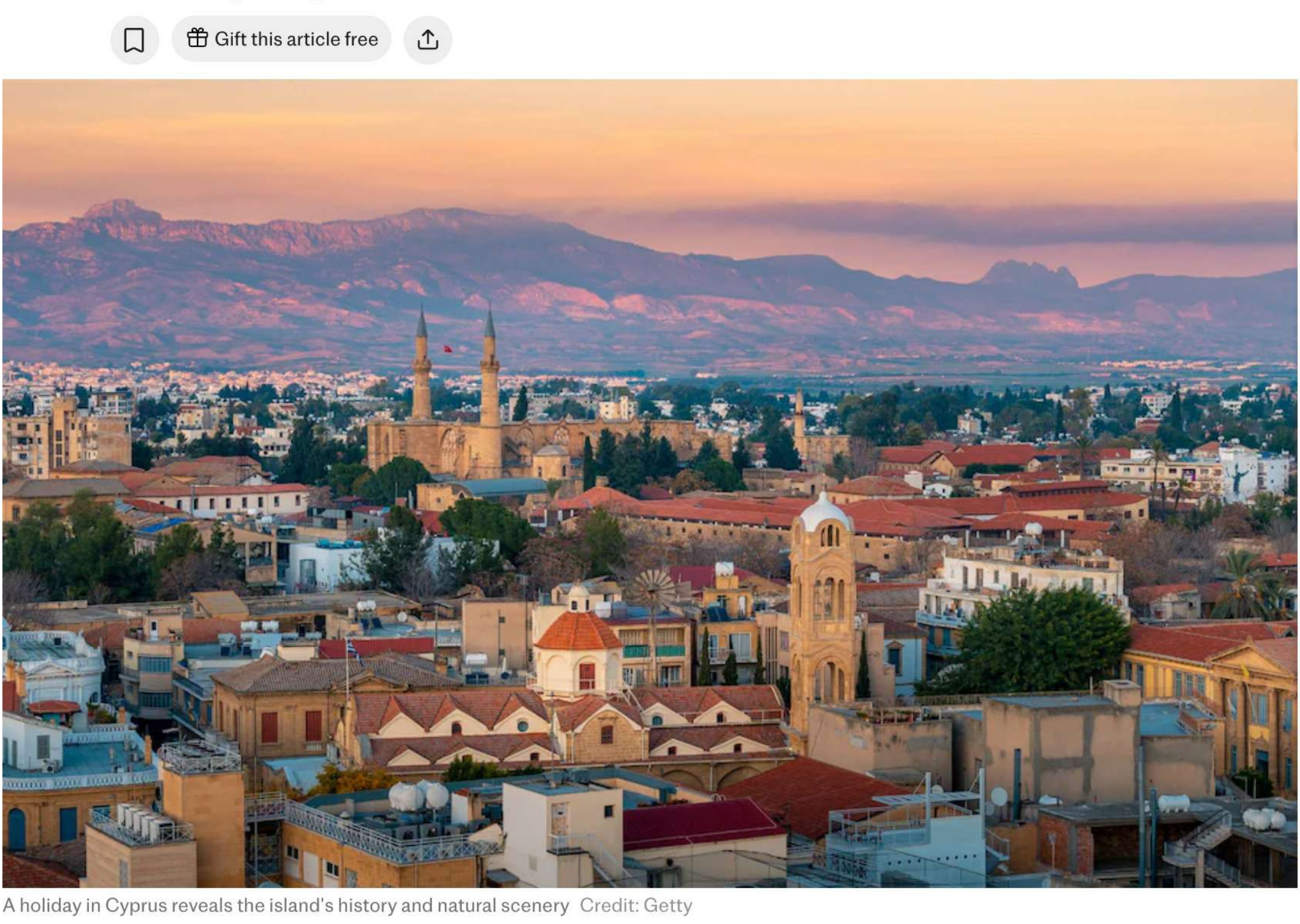

A holiday in Cyprus reveals the island's history and natural scenery Credit: Getty

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Travel writer
11 June 2025 5:00pm BST

Although Cyprus has a plethora of trendy resort towns with award-winning beaches and tavernas, along with its capital Nicosia at its core, it is also home to some of the world's finest archaeological treasures. Paphos, for instance, is a Unesco World Heritage Site in its entirety, while the remains of ancient settlements can be found at the metropolis of Limassol and Larnaca.

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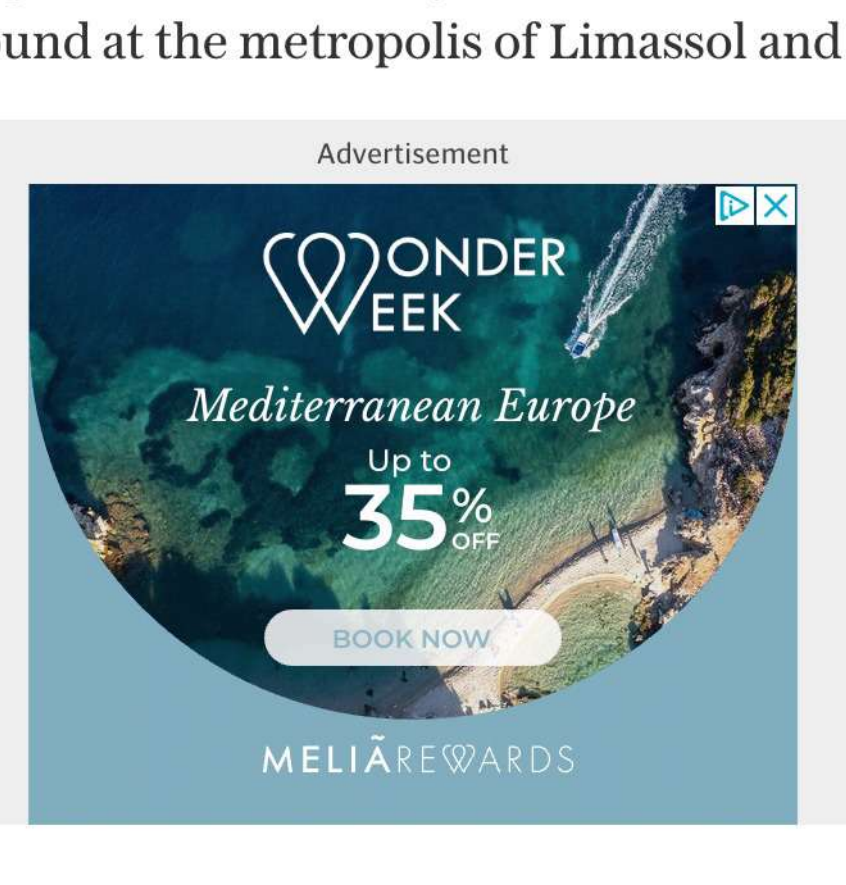

Inland, the countryside is dotted with unspoilt villages. It is blanketed by olive groves and vineyards where grapes are turned into fine wines, including the world's oldest named wine, originating around 800BC, Commandaria. It is famed for being served to Richard the Lionheart at his wedding in Limassol in 1191.

Cyprus manages the tricky task of combining history and modernity with aplomb as seen by the growing number of shiny new skyscrapers, galleries, malls, beaches and ultra trendy marinas.

For further Cyprus inspiration, see our guides devoted to the island's best hotels, restaurants, things to do and beaches.

In this guide

- How to spend your holiday
- Where to stay in Cyprus
- When to go to Cyprus

How to spend your holiday

Day one: morning

Paphos is a good place to start your explorations of the island. If time is of the essence head straight for the harbour area. Here, the Kato Pafos Archaeological Park is dominated by its mosaics that depict scenes from Greek mythology, considered by Unesco to be among the finest in the world. Close by is the medieval fort – look for the short flight of steps inside leading to the roof for a breezy view of the seafront.

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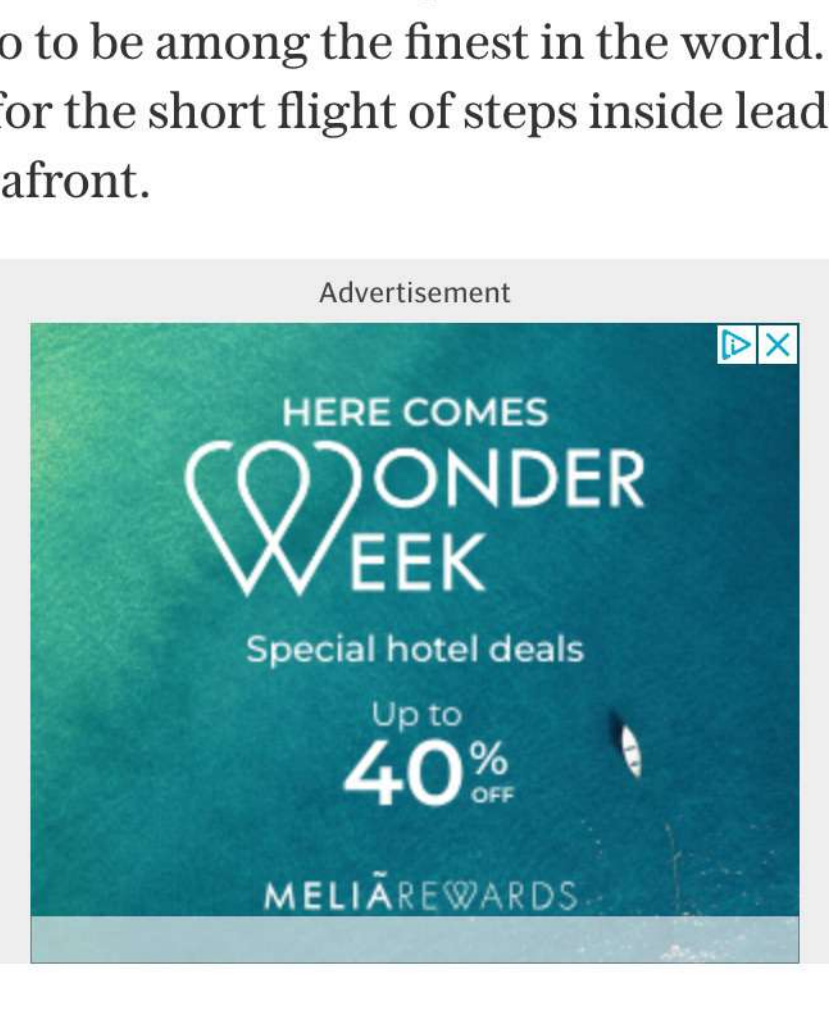
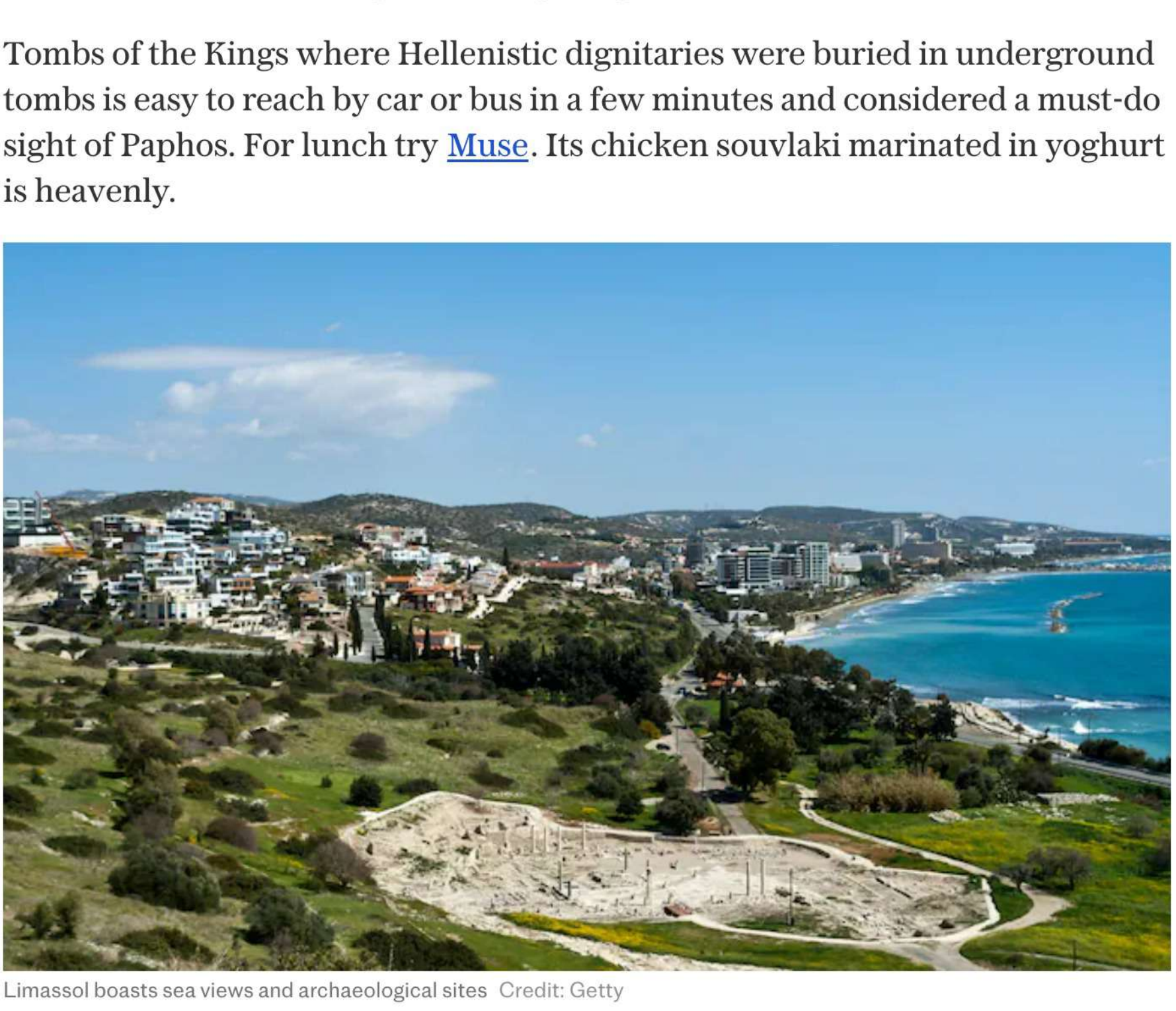


Next, follow the signs for Agia Kyraki and St Paul's Pillar where the apostle Paul is said to have taught the Christian gospel to the people of Cyprus in 45AD. On the short walk you will pass Hondros, which is one of the oldest traditional tavernas in Paphos and a good place to take a coffee break.

Tombs of the Kings where Hellenistic dignitaries were buried in underground tombs is easy to reach by car or bus in a few minutes and considered a must-do sight of Paphos. For lunch try Muse. Its chicken souvlaki marinated in yoghurt is heavenly.



Limassol boasts sea views and archaeological sites Credit: Getty

Afternoon

Follow the signs for Limassol (spelled locally as Lemesos) on an easy drive along the highway. Look out for views of the Troodos Mountains on the way to the ancient city kingdom of Curium (also spelt Kourion). Here, you can see mosaics, the remains of an agora and cathedral, and an ancient theatre where operatic performances are often held.

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Limassol is a trendy sort of place and nowadays tends to radiate around its new, shiny marina where you can gaze at yachts and sip on a local wine – Limassol is famed for its wines – or shop in its designer outlets. A walk along its lengthy, palm tree-fringed seafront is a must.

Evening

Enjoy Mediterranean dishes like octopus encased in pastry with olives at Vivaldi by Mavrommatis in the luxurious Four Season Hotel on the seafront, or dine at Japanese-Peruvian themed restaurant Matsuhisa at the Amara Hotel – the black cod with miso is divine.

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Day two: morning

As you make your way out of Limassol on the coast road you'll catch sight of the archaeological site of Amathus (often spelt Amathous). This ancient city-kingdom dates way back to before 300BC and, although today quite a small site, it is worthy of a quick stop.

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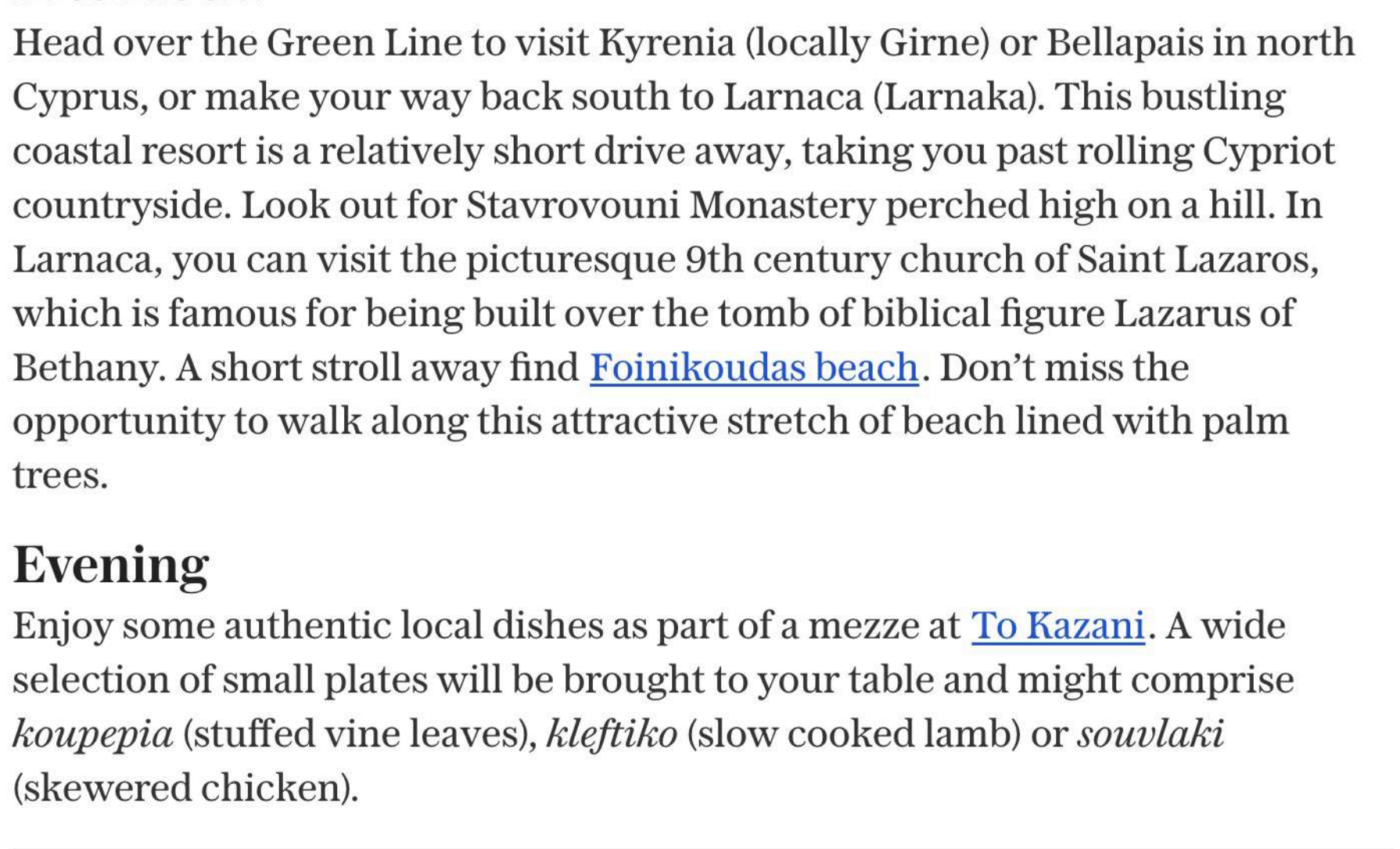
Next, head to Choirokoitia where you can see the reconstructed circular homes where the Cypriot people of Neolithic times would have lived. The village of Lefkara is famous for its intricate handmade lace, known as *lefkaritika*, and makes an ideal coffee stop – The Agora Hotel's freddo expresso is recommended – before heading to the capital of Cyprus, Nicosia.

The city is one of the last remaining divided cities in the world as a result of the Turkish invasion in 1974. Venetian walls dominate the city; visit the Archbishop's Palace and its museum containing an extraordinary collection of Byzantine icons. The neighbouring St John's Cathedral is famed for its colourful frescos depicting scenes from the Bible. For lunch, try Pantopoleio Kali Orexi for a treat of *psefdokeftedes* meatballs flavoured with feta cheese and oregano.



The ancient city-kingdom of Amathus dates way back to before 300BC Credit: Getty

Afternoon

Head over the Green Line to visit Kyrenia (locally Girne) or Bellapais in north Cyprus, or make your way back south to Larnaca (Larnaka). This bustling coastal resort is a relatively short drive away, taking you past rolling Cypriot countryside. Look out for Stavrovouni Monastery perched high on a hill. In Larnaca, you can visit the picturesque 9th century church of Saint Lazaros, which is famous for being built over the tomb of biblical figure Lazarus of Bethany. A short stroll away find Foinikoudas beach. Don't miss the opportunity to walk along this attractive stretch of beach lined with palm trees.

Evening

Enjoy some authentic local dishes as part of a mezze at To Kazani. A wide selection of small plates will be brought to your table and might comprise *koupepia* (stuffed vine leaves), *kleftiko* (slow cooked lamb) or *souvlaki* (skewered chicken).

Insider Tips

City hack

The museums and archaeological sites are all operated by the government's tourist board and, as such, are inexpensive. The Kato Pafos Archaeological in Paphos for example, despite being an Unesco World Heritage site, is just €4.50 admission, or €7 to include the Tombs of the Kings.

Attractions

If you are planning to spend a day exploring Nicosia within its mighty walls it is best to leave your car in the parking areas outside. The most central car park is at the Tripoli Bastion, just south of Paphos Gate. The network of small streets and buildings within the walled city are best explored on foot.

Neighbourhood watch

Ledra Street in Nicosia is something of a magnet for shopping enthusiasts. This long street is lined with shops. However, perhaps its biggest draw, is its lookout platform. Ascend to the 11th floor of the Shacolas Building for a panoramic view of the walled city.

Did you know?

There are no less than ten ancient painted churches in the Troodos Mountains housing some of the world's finest examples of Byzantine religious art. They are protected by their Unesco World Heritage status and many have been restored. Tourist offices may be able to contact the churches' caretakers ahead of your visit to ensure they are open.

Hotels

While most of the hotels in Cyprus are on the resorts' seafronts or within a short walk of the beach, don't be afraid of booking one that is off the beaten track. Look at the Akamas Peninsula near Polis Chrysochous in the west, the Troodos Mountains or the Cape Greco Peninsula near Agia Napa (locally spelled Ayia Napa) in the east for a nature-inspired holiday.

Where to stay

Luxury living

Hotels may vie for being the island's best, but the Anassa always comes out on top. Given its tranquil location on the fringes of Cyprus's Akamas national park, and luxury amenities like a seriously opulent spa and gourmet cuisine, it is easy to see why. Hidden behind mature greenery, this whitewashed, tiered, multi-award-winning hotel gently cascades down to the sandy beach of Chrysochou Bay – its waters are close enough for a swim before breakfast. It is an effortlessly elegant sort of place, refined without being showy.

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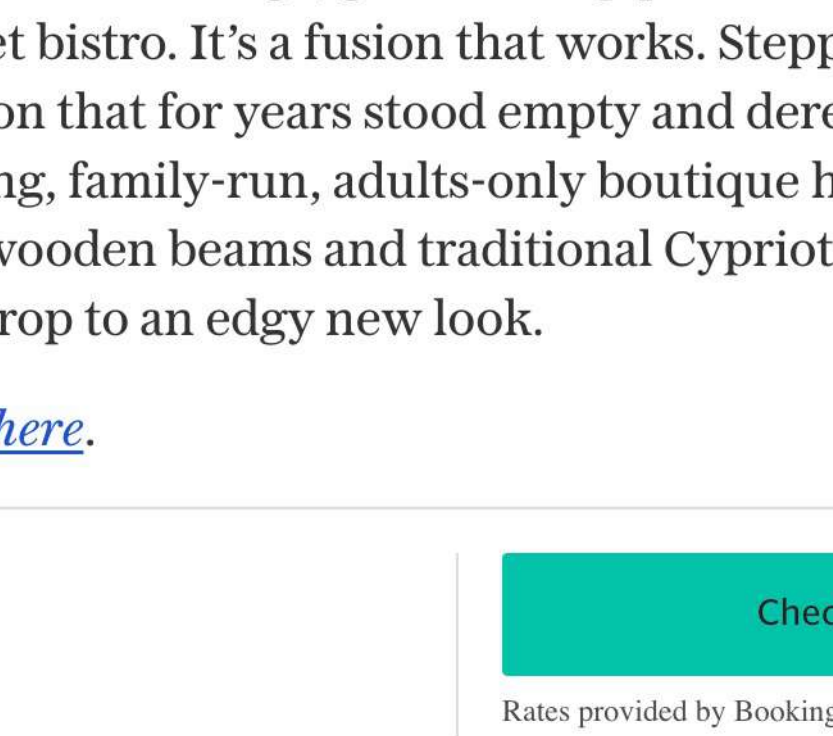

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Boutique beauty

Lanarca's Lokàl Hotel is full of surprises. The façade of the centuries-old mansion in which it is housed hides a fabulous interior that is seriously cutting edge. There's a glass-floored bridge, glass rooftop pool and bar, lots of hi-tech gizmos and a gourmet bistro. It's a fusion that works. Stepping inside the 19th-century listed mansion that for years stood empty and derelict, and now houses this welcoming, family-run, adults-only boutique hotel, will take your breath away. Its old wooden beams and traditional Cypriot stone archways now provide a backdrop to an edgy new look.

Read our full review here.

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Budget bolthole

The Greek word "philoxenia" loosely (and reductively) translates as "hospitality". But if you want to know its true meaning, visit the outstanding family-run Aphrodite Beach Hotel overlooking pebbly Yiannis Beach, near Akamas Peninsula National Park, where all – including an assortment of rescued animals – are given sanctuary. Spacious, comfortable rooms and dining areas are all tricked out in neutral colours with marble floors. You might think you'll miss the automated this, that or the other, the posh toiletries, the tennis courts, the luxury brought to you by the world's best hotel designers, but once inside this hotel, it will weave its charm over you, and you'll see that all you really need is *philoxenia*.

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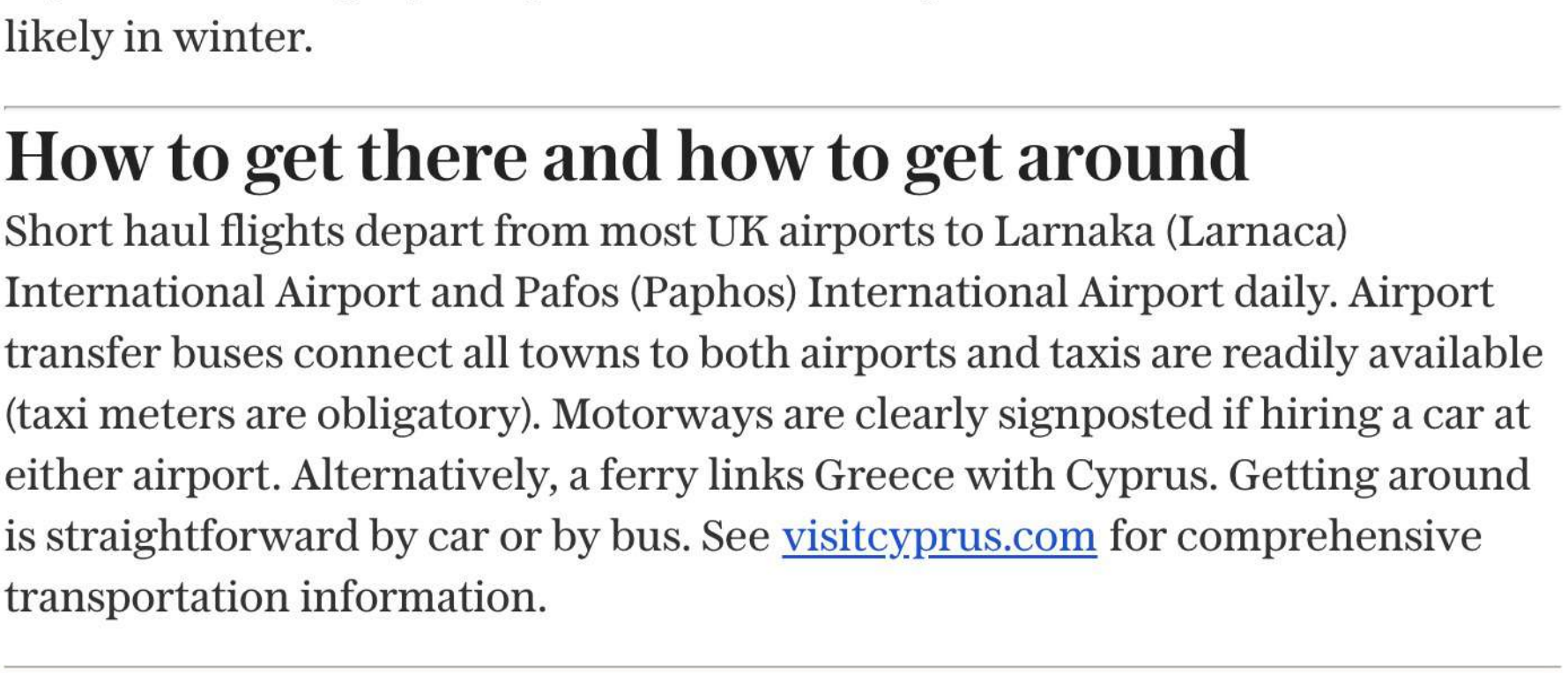


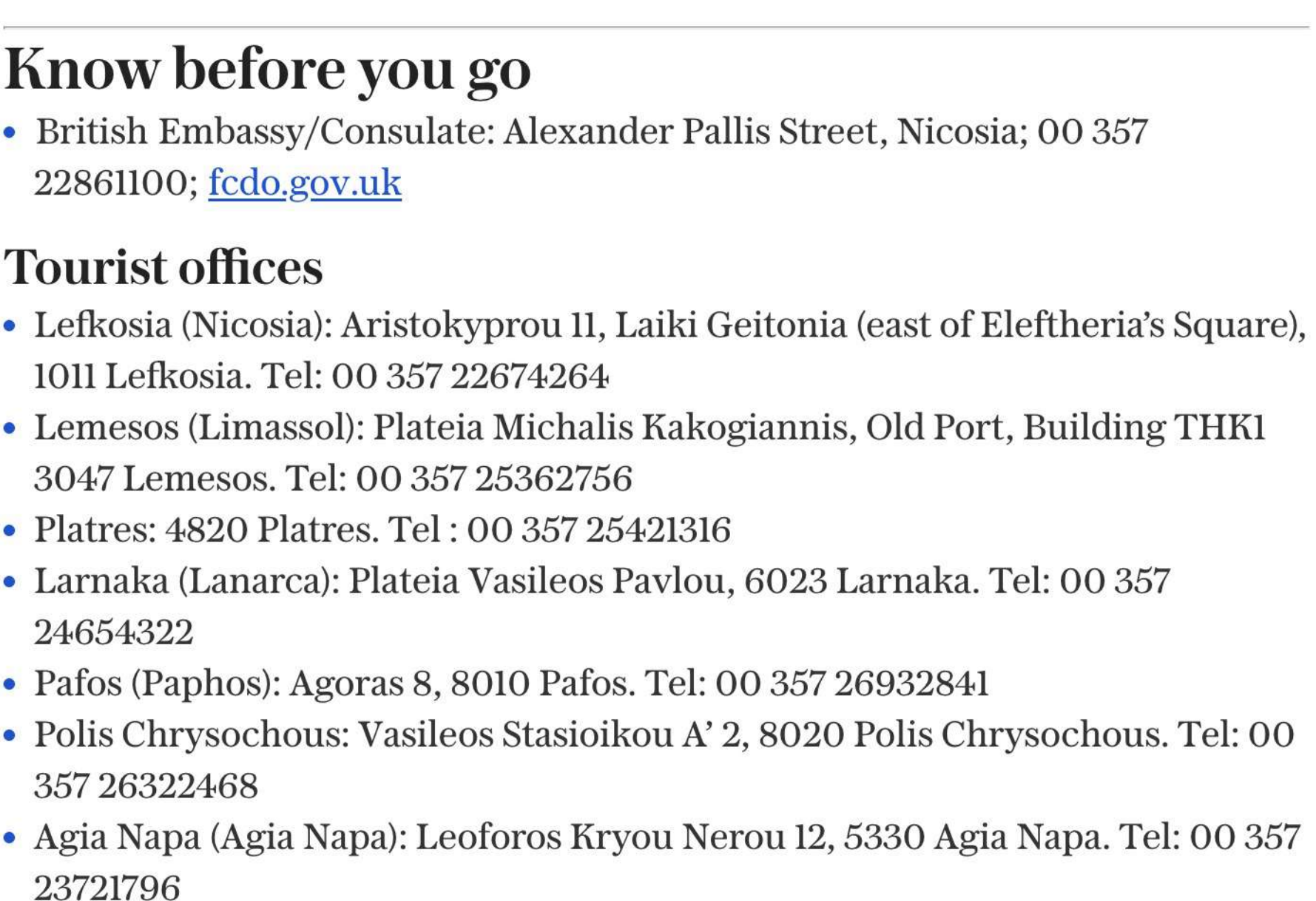
Dine at a restaurant in Limassol's marina Credit: Getty

When to go

If you want nothing more than to feel warm sand between your toes, swim and enjoy water sports, visit in July and August when average daytime temperatures will exceed 31C. Spring and autumn are cooler, and are ideal if you plan to explore the island. Winter months can be tricky with warm, sunny days that turn mighty chilly as soon as the sun goes down. Rain is also most likely in winter.

How to get there and how to get around

Short haul flights depart from most UK airports to Larnaka (Larnaca) International Airport and Pafos (Paphos) International Airport daily. Airport transfer buses connect all towns to both airports and taxis are readily available (taxi meters are obligatory). Motorways are clearly signposted if hiring a car at either airport. Alternatively, a ferry links Greece with Cyprus. Getting around is straightforward by car or by bus. See visitcyprus.com for comprehensive transportation information.



Know before you go

- British Embassy/Consulate: Alexander Pallis Street, Nicosia; 00 357 22861100; fcdo.gov.uk

Tourist offices

- Lefkosia (Nicosia): Aristokyprou 11, Laiki Geitonia (east of Eleftheria's Square), 1011 Lefkosia. Tel: 00 357 22674264
- Lemesos (Limassol): Plateia Michalis Kakogiannis, Old Port, Building THK1 3047 Lemesos. Tel: 00 357 25362756
- Platres: 4820 Platres. Tel : 00 357 25421316
- Larnaka (Lanarca): Plateia Vasileos Pavlou, 6023 Larnaka. Tel: 00 357 24654322
- Pafos (Paphos): Agoras 8, 8010 Pafos. Tel: 00 357 26932841
- Polis Chrysochous: Vasileos Stasioikou A' 2, 8020 Polis Chrysochous. Tel: 00 357 26322468
- Agia Napa (Agia Napa): Leoforos Kryou Nerou 12, 5330 Agia Napa. Tel: 00 357 23721796
- Protaras - Paralimni: Protara 14, 5296 Protaras – Paralimni. Tel : 00 357 23832865

The basics

- Visit Cyprus website: visitcyprus.com
- Ambulance 112
- Police 112
- Fire 112
- Emergency services 112
- Currency Euro
- Telegraph code from abroad 00 357
- Time difference +2 hours GMT
- Travel time from London 4.5 hours

Local laws and etiquette

- The law of Cyprus is based heavily on British law and, as such, crimes of a violent or sexual nature, trafficking, drug use or supply, and theft is not tolerated and will be referred to the judicial system without hesitation.