

Cyprus

(Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus)

Location

Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea, next to Turkey and east of Greece. It is often viewed as part of the Middle East because of its proximity to Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea at 9,250 square miles, with Sicily and Sardinia just ahead in size. Its position in the Mediterranean Sea has made it the center of many territorial battles. Greece, Turkey, and the UK have all struggled to maintain a hold on Cyprus.

Geography

Considering the small size of the island, Cyprus has a great range in its topography. Its lowest point is even with the Mediterranean Sea at sea level. Its highest point is Mount Olympus at 1,951 meters and is situated in the Troodos mountain range to the southwest of the island. Other mountain ranges, which command most of the land area in Cyprus, include the Kyrenia and Pentadactylos in the north. Cyprus also has a large central plain known as the Mesaoria, which is on the east side of the country. The mountain ranges that dominate the island leave only 40% of the land suitable for vegetation growth and only 7% of the total land in Cyprus is used as permanent cropland. Earthquakes can affect the island because of its location near fault lines, although they are usually not severe.

Climate

Being situated in the Mediterranean Sea lends a temperate climate to Cyprus. The island experiences relatively hot summers with little rain while the winters are much more wet and cold. Winter does not last long in Cyprus, however; the majority of the year it enjoys warm, sunny days. The mountain ranges accumulate snow in the cold months but there is rarely any accumulation in the plains. The plains tend to be warmer for the entirety of the year when compared to the area of and around the mountains. With the hot, dry summers come the occasional droughts, which can be devastating.

History

The earliest known civilization in Cyprus first appeared in between 7000 and 4000 BC. Trade was established by 1000 BC because of the natural resources Cyprus holds, like copper and marble.

Almost immediately after Cyprus's wealth was discovered, tumultuous battles erupted over who would rule the island. The Phoenicians held ownership of the island from 1050 until 750 BC. During 750 and 325 BC, the island got passed between the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Persians. Alexander the Great defeated the Persians by 325 BC and took control of Cyprus, but it wasn't long before it fell back into the hands of Egypt. With the expansion of the Roman Empire into the AD era, Cyprus became a Roman territory. Interestingly enough, the appointed ruler of Cyprus at the time converted to Christianity, making Cyprus the first country to be ruled by a Christian. Cyprus remained a Roman territory even after the empire was split in two, although it adopted the Eastern Roman culture known as the Byzantines, which lasted in Cyprus until 1191 AD. At this time, the crusades took place and Cyprus was taken over by the English when King Richard I defeated the governor of the island. The island was eventually ceded to Venice in 1489. Venice lost Cyprus to the Ottoman Empire in 1571, but the empire could only maintain its hold on the island until 1878 when Britain annexed the island (this did not officially take place until 1914 when the Ottoman Empire joined with the Germans in World War I). Britain held control of the island until 1960 when Cyprus successfully became an independent republic. While it seemed as though this republic would remain strong, Cyprus's past history of turmoil would resurface in 1974 when Turkey invaded. Turkey now maintains a hold on the north part of the island. The island is thus divided, the people of the south (The Republic of Cyprus) being Greek Cypriots and the north (The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) Turkish Cypriots.

Important Dates

The major religion in Cyprus is Greek Orthodox Christianity so the important dates in Cyprus are very similar to the dates that we celebrate, such as, December 25th and Easter Sunday, as well as other religious dates (Good Friday, Maundy Thursday, Pentecost). They also celebrate Greek Independence Day on the 25th of March, Greek Cypriot National Day on April 1st, Cyprus Independence Day on the 1st of October, and Greek National Day on October 28th.

Population

The total population of Cyprus is about 789,000 as of 2007. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Turkish Cypriots) comprises 18% of this population and the Greek Cypriots comprise 77%. There are other ethnicities that make up the remainder of the population. This is a large population considering the small size of the island and the fact that most of the land is uninhabitable due to the mountain ranges. The average life expectancy of the population is a respectable 78 years, equal to that of the United States.

Currency

Cyprus has two currencies: the Cypriot Pound is used by the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Lira is used by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The US Dollar is slightly weaker than the Cypriot Pound while the Turkish Lira is slightly weaker than the US dollar (as of February 2008). The Euro is also very common in both areas of the island although it was only recently accepted.

Education

Cypriots believe very strongly in the importance of having well educated children because they will aid in the improvement of Cyprus's economy and society. Primary schools are compulsory and free in Cyprus while secondary schools are free but not compulsory. The University of Cyprus was opened in the early 1990s. Until that point many students chose to study abroad at universities in Europe. The illiteracy rate is relatively low, at 9.5%, considering the education expansion did not really begin until Cyprus first gained its independence. Britain helped start many schools and literacy programs in the 1940s, but it was not until the 1960s and 70s that government officials really began to focus on education. The system established now is very refined and successful.

Language

The official languages of Cyprus are Greek and Turkish. Given the separation between The Republic of Cyprus and The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, it makes sense that Greek is predominantly spoken in the south and Turkish in the north. English is widely spoken in both areas as well and is used as a way to communicate between the two cultures on the island.

Religion

There are two main religions in Cyprus. The majority of Greek Cypriots are Greek Orthodox while the Turkish Cypriots are predominantly Muslim. There are several other religions present in Cyprus, including Judaism and Buddhism, but these make up a very small percentage of the population.

Agriculture

As noted earlier, there is very little available land for agriculture. Only seven percent of the land is used as permanent cropland. However, Cyprus's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture. The most common crops grown in Cyprus are potatoes, citrus fruits, cereal grains, and tobacco. The northern part of the island maintains the best agricultural land for these crops, but the south grows most of the fruit and potatoes the island exports.

Trade

Cyprus has a fairly advanced economy (mostly due to the tourism industry) but with few natural resources it depends heavily on imports of products to the island. The main imports are fuel and heavy machinery and much of this trade is between Europe. The main exports are potatoes and citrus fruits. Cyprus has many more imports than exports and this creates a trade deficit that the country must deal with.

Food

Cyprus boasts a Mediterranean cuisine rich in cheese, lamb, and seafood. The unique food of the island include sheep and goat cheese that is fried, known as halloumi, and meat that is marinated in a special sauce and then dried in strips, known as lounza. Seafood is definitely common in meals, from octopus to shellfish.

Landmarks

There are many ancient ruins in Cyprus that draw tourists. There are ruins of temples to Greek gods and an ancient amphitheater known as the Kourion outside of Limassol, and the ruins of ancient Salamis can still be found outside the modern city. There is architecture from the Byzantine era from the Ottoman Empire and Gothic-style castles from the English invasion. Virtually every culture that claimed ownership over Cyprus left their mark on the island. Probably the most well known landmark of Cyprus, however, is Aphrodite's Rock. According to Greek mythology, this large rock off the coast of the island near the city of Paphos was the birthplace of the goddess Aphrodite, who sprang forth from the sea. Aphrodite is also known as Kypris, as homage to her birthplace.

Conclusion

Although Cyprus's history is rife with battles over the island and today is comprised to two republics, it is a prosperous country with a rich culture.

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