

# GÜZELYURT - LEFKE

North Cyprus





## A Place Like its Name 'BEAUTIFUL LAND'

In Turkish, 'Güzelyurt' means, 'beautiful land', and how apt this is for this small yet charming town situated between Lefkoşa and Lefke. This is the part of this beautiful island where the greatest concentration of the citrus groves for which Cyprus is famous can be found. Indeed, this whole corner of the island is resplendently green but also blessed with a wealth of historical sites for the visitor to see. Although the region is rightly famous for its oranges, lemons, mandarins and grapefruit, the abundant water of the terrain also allows a host of other seasonal crops such as melon, watermelon, potatoes, pomegranate and others to be grown here making this North Cyprus's most productive agricultural region.

Set in the foothills of and with splendid views of the Troodos Mountains, Güzelyurt's mild climate is perfect for the production of citrus. The vast majority of North Cyprus's exports of this vital crop are from this region. Every year, in June and July, the Güzelyurt Orange Festival is held bringing a great social and cultural vitality to the region.

Along with its rich natural splendour though, Güzelyurt is home to a wealth of important historical sites such as the ancient city of Soli, the ruins of the Vouni Palace, the Bronze Age settlement of Toumba tou Skourou, and the Church of Aya Mamas in the centre of Güzelyurt. The region is also home to two of Cyprus's leading universities; - the North Cyprus campus of Turkey's renowned Middle East Technical University at Kalkanlı and the Lefke European University situated in Lefke.

Güzelyurt can easily be reached by road and is 40 kilometres from Lefkoşa and 47 kilometres from Girne. In addition to the main highway via Lefkoşa, there is also a pleasant sea and mountain road from Girne.

The hospitable people of Güzelyurt are ever ready to share the rich culture, fascinating historical sites and wonderful natural beauty of this region with the visitor.



## The History of Güzelyurt

Whilst the definite date of Güzelyurt's first settlement isn't known, remains and artifacts from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages have been discovered in the vicinity of the town. One story relates that Morphou was founded by Spartans emigrating from Greece who brought with them the worship of Aphrodite. Prior to 1974 the town was known as Morphou (Omorfo) but was changed to the Turkish, Güzelyurt which carries the same meaning of 'beautiful land'.



Regional Festivals



The Statue of Artemis  
in the Archaeological  
Museum

Orange Groves



## The History of Lefke

### Enchanting Lefke

There are many theories relating to how the town came to be named 'Lefke' but perhaps the most likely is that it was from 'Lefkon', the son of one of Alexander the Great's generals, Ptolemy Philedelphus. It is said that the region was given to him as a wedding present in order for him to found a town which was at first known by his name of Lefkon or Leukon but which, in time, changed into Lefke. There are several sites of historical interest in the area from the Byzantine, Venetian, Ottoman and British Periods.

Nonetheless, it is Lefke's unrivalled natural green splendour which mainly attracts visitors. Situated in the north west of the island at a distance of 62 km from Lefkoşa and 68 km from Girne, Lefke has, throughout history, been a ideal place of settlement, helped no doubt by its pleasant climate, plentiful water supplies, productive soil and also, importantly, its rich copper reserves. The Ottoman Period, in particular, left many striking works in the town and its environs. The remnants of other civilizations, too: - Roman, Venetian and the British Administration can be seen. The vast copper mines of the Cyprus Mining Corporation (C.M.C.) which began operating in 1914 and continued up to 1975 operated mainly in the Lefke area. Lefke's golden years were between 1940 – 1950 when copper mining was at its peak and the population of the town increased to 15,000. In 1990 the European University of Lefke began operations and today attracts around 3000 students. There are approximately 2000 date trees originating from Egypt in the area and the baskets made from their fronds were used to bring the mined copper ore from the underground mines to the surface.

## The Vibrant Tones of Orange, Green and Blue Await Visitors to the Güzelyurt-Lefke Region

This greenest corner of the island, with its citrus groves and its rich and varied culture and history, is an oasis of peace and calm. This is a place where one can just sit in the shade of a tree and watch the turquoise waters of the sea or, if you feel like it, wander around the evocative ruins of Soli or, from a dizzying height above the Mediterranean, watch the sun go down over the ruins of the Vouni Palace, the sole extant example of Persian culture on the island. The Ancient City of Soli was one of the nine ancient city states of Cyprus and today its magnificent Swan Mosaic, dated from the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. is on display at the site. In 2005 gold artifacts were discovered here; - the 'Golden Leaves of Soli', which can now be seen in the Güzelyurt Museum of Archaeology and Natural History. During Ottoman rule Turks migrated to Lefke and consequently the area is known for its mosques and Ottoman mansions. The area is also famous for its aqueducts, date palms and citrus groves.

This region is especially endowed by nature and is home to several species of orchid and other endemic flora including the Medoş Tulip (*Tulipa cyprica*). There are also a great many monumental trees in the region, most notably the monumental olive trees of the Kalkanlı area.



Lefke Aqueduct



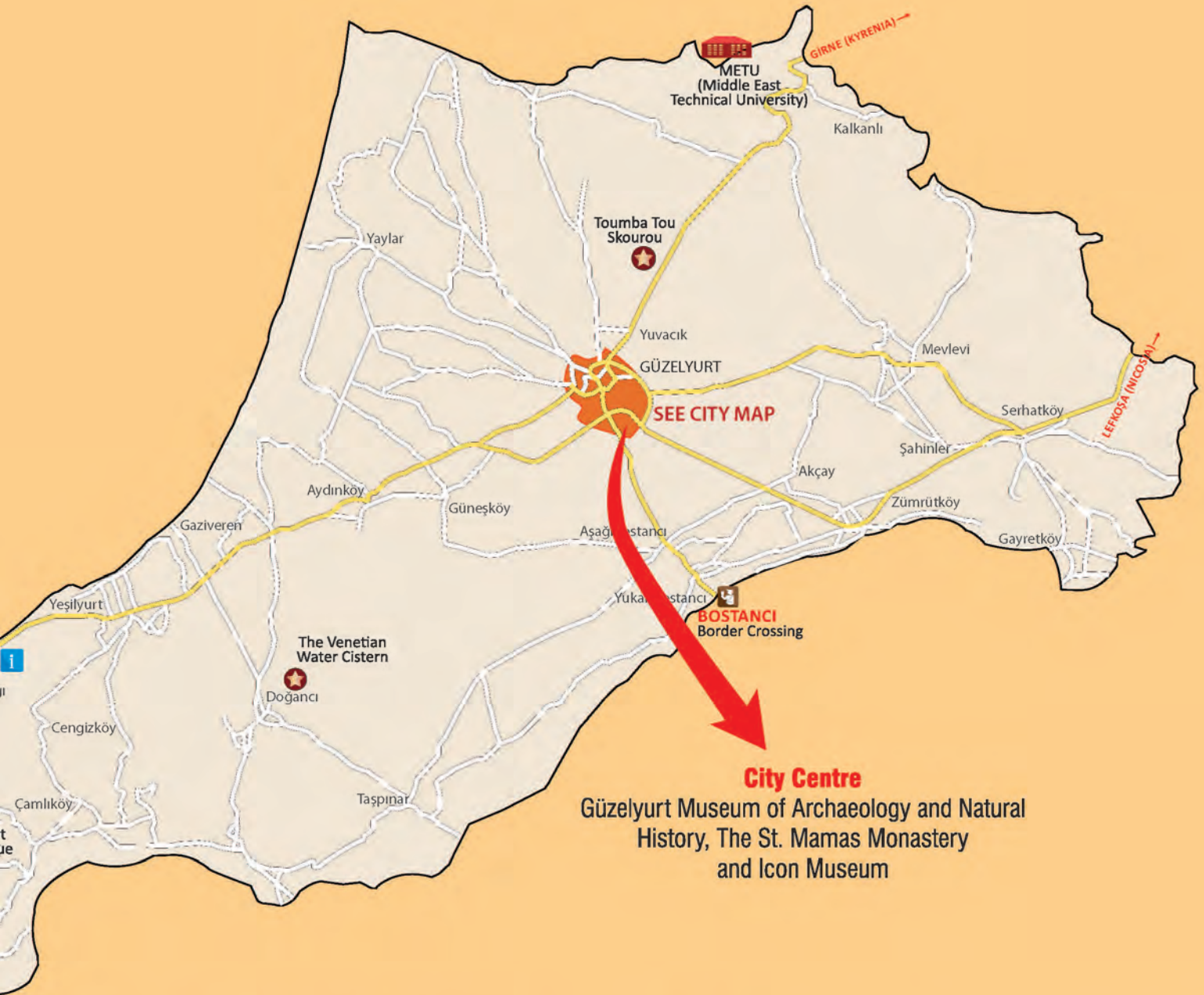
Golden Leaves of Soli



Orchid

# Güzelyurt District Map





**City Centre**

Güzelyurt Museum of Archaeology and Natural History, The St. Mamas Monastery and Icon Museum

## Things to Do in Güzelyurt and Lefke

- Be sure to visit the 'Golden Leaves of Soli' Exhibition at the Güzelyurt Museum of Archaeology and Natural History.
- Take a trip to the town of Lefke, which retains much of its old Ottoman atmosphere, and yet has fine examples of British Colonial Period architecture. There are also Ottoman Period aqueducts. The town is also known for its walnut trees but more than that, its date palms, many of which are veritable monuments themselves.
- See the beautiful 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. 'Swan Mosaic' at the Soli Basilica.
- From the spectacular mountaintop viewpoint at Vouni Palace, where the mountain meets the sea, you can watch the fabled island of Petra tou Limniti.
- Pick strawberries from the fields at Yeşilirmak and then see the huge grapevine on the beach front. This grapevine is so huge that it has even made it into the Guinness Book of World Records.
- Get information about copper mining in Cyprus. This is the metal which gave its name to the island. At the Gemikonağı Lake you can see the old CMC (Cyprus Mining Corporation) hamam (baths).
- Take part in one of the many local festivals which take place throughout the year. In April there is the Yeşilirmak Strawberry Festival whilst in May, Lefke hosts the Walnut Festival. June sees the Güzelyurt Orange Festival and in November there is the Lefke Date Festival.



Ottoman Period Houses - Lefke



Vouni Palace  
Bademliköy



British Era Water Cistern - Lefke



Strawberry Gardens -  
Yeşilirmak

## Places to Visit in Güzelyurt and Lefke



**Piri Mehmet Pasha Mosque - Lefke**



**The Cengiz Topel Monument - Cengizköy**



**The centuries old grapevine - Yeşilirmak**



**Gold Brooch Güzelyurt Archaeology Museum**



**St. Mamas Church**



**The Acendu Fountain - Lefke**



**Monumental Olive Trees - Kalkanlı**

- The Güzelyurt Archaeology and Natural History Museum
- St. Mamas Church and Icon Museum
- Toumba tou Skourou, Bronze Age settlement
- The Venetian Water Cistern at Doğancı village
- The Cengiz Topel Monument, Cengizköy
- The CMC Copper Mining Area, Karadağ, Lefke
- The Piri Mehmet Pasha Mosque, Lefke
- The Tomb of Vezir Osman Pasha, Lefke
- Roman and Ottoman aqueducts, Lefke
- British Administration Period Water Storage Tank
- The buildings of the British Administration Period
- Ottoman architecture and mansions
- The Gemikonağı Lake
- Yeşilirmak and its huge grapevine featured in the Guinness Book of World Records Book
- The Ancient City of Soli (Theatre, Basilica, Agora), Yedidalga
- The Vouni Palace and Athena Temple, Bademliköy
- Petra tou Limniti Neolithic Settlement, Yeşilirmak
- The Monumental Olive Trees, Kalkanlı



**The Venetian Water Cistern - Doğancı**

## Notes on the Historical Sites

### The Güzelyurt Archaeology and Natural History Museum

The museum opened in 1979 after restoration. The museum consists of a natural history section where flora and fauna of Cyprus are displayed and an archaeological section where exhibits from Cyprus's rich historical past are on view. The courtyard serves as an open-air museum. Since their discovery in 2005, the 'Golden Leaves of Soli' have been on display and are of great aesthetic and archaeological importance. Another important work is the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. statue of the Anatolian goddess Artemis of Ephesus, discovered in Salamis Bay in 1980.

### St. Mamas Monastery

The St. Mamas Church and Icon Museum is situated within the Monastery complex next door to the Archaeology and Natural History Museum. Several significant icons and other artifacts are on display here. There are differing versions relating to the cult of St. Mamas; - one states that it was introduced to Cyprus by Cappadocian soldiers sent by the Byzantine Emperor Tiberius in order to counter the Arab invasions of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The soldiers, who were followers of St. Mamas, are said to have brought the mortal remains of St. Mamas in a stone sarcophagus and to have placed it in a small church that they built in Morphou. The church soon became too small for its purpose and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century a larger one was built in the Gothic-Italianate style on the same site. The current church was built in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The upper part of the iconostasis bears some of the hallmarks of the Venetian and Lusignan Periods, and is a fine example of late 16<sup>th</sup> century wood carving. St. Mamas is portrayed in some of the icons mounted on a lion and holding a lamb in his lap. St. Mamas is recognized as a protector of animals, flocks and shepherds.

### The Ruins of Soli

The ancient city of Soli is believed to have been founded by Athenians returning from the Trojan Wars in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and was at first known as 'Alpeia'. Amongst the mythological protectors of the city, Demophon, son of the Athenian hero, Theseus, is mentioned. In 600 B.C.E., Athenian statesman, Solon, advised that the city of Alpeia be moved to the lower lying littoral in order to facilitate the export of the copper ore from the area and the ruler of the town, King Philocypros, who was also Solon's pupil, had the city relocated to its present place and renamed it 'Soli' after Solon. The city then fell under the successive influence of the Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Periods. However, by the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the copper mines were more or less exhausted and its harbour had silted up leading to a period of stagnation for the city. After the Arab raids of 647-649 when the city was destroyed, it was finally abandoned after more than a millennium of continuous occupation. Today, amongst the impressive remains are the Amphitheatre, The Basilica of St. Auxibus and the Agora. The theatre is a Roman structure, built on top of an earlier Greek theatre facing the sea. It dates back to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.



The seats for the spectators were carved in a semicircle out of the hillside rocks, and the entrance to both those and the orchestra was by two side entrances. The audience was separated from the orchestra in the middle by a limestone wall. The theatre, which has only been restored to half of its original height, had a capacity of around 4000. The stage originally was in two storeys, covered with marble panelling and decorated with statues. The basilica, dedicated to St. Auxibus, was built in the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and is one of the first Christian churches in Cyprus. It was extended in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries but was destroyed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arab raids. The church has three doors and a courtyard with a fountain ringed with columns. Beyond the courtyard are another three doors through which the church is entered. Inside there are two rows of twelve columns, and the large columns are standing today. Mosaics depicting decorated geometric patterns, as well as animals such as birds and bulls, dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century have survived in very good condition up to the present day. Among the animal figures were vines and a particularly beautiful swan. Excavations have also uncovered a Hellenistic Period colonnaded avenue leading to the Agora and the remains of a monumental fountain in the Agora itself. On a hill to the east of the theatre a temple dedicated to Aphrodite has been discovered. In excavations conducted in 2005, extremely valuable gold artifacts were discovered, some of which are now on display at the Güzelyurt Museum of Archaeology and Natural History.

## Vouni Palace

Vouni Palace is situated on a sheer hillside 250 metres above sea level. It was constructed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. by the pro-Persian Phoenician King, Doxandros, ruler of the neighbouring city of Marion, in order to keep the city of Soli under control. The palace was destroyed in a fire by the people of Soli in 380 B.C.E. and was never used again. The palace complex you see today is situated on three terraces and the uppermost one houses the scant remains of the Athena shrine. The central terrace is the site of the 137 roomed palace and in the immediate vicinity are remains of temples. The lower terrace which faces the sea contains houses with stone bases and mud brick upper storeys which housed most of the residents. Excavations have brought to light earthenware jugs blackened by the fire that destroyed the palace containing what has been described as 'the Vouni Treasure'. The treasure includes gold and silver bracelets, ornamented silver cups, and hundreds of coins with the Marion, Kition, Lapithos and Paphos seals. Between 1927 and 1931 The Swedish Archaeological Mission under the directorship of Einar Gjerstad excavated Petra tou Limniti, the island clearly visible from Vouni, and identified the first remains of the hitherto undiscovered Neolithic Period. (7000-5300 B.C.E.). Archaeologists discovered items going back to the pre-Neolithic age, consisting of bone needles, stone utensils, tools made from obsidian and flint, farming implements, idols and jewellery made from precious stones. Because no signs of permanent settlement were discovered it is believed that the island was only used for hunting and fishing.





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