

# GİRNE (Kyrenia)



North Cyprus





## The Pearl of Cyprus Tourism

Situated between the Five Finger Mountains (The Northern Range) and the Mediterranean Sea, Girne (Kyrenia) is unquestionably one of the most beautiful and evocative cities of the Mediterranean. It is blessed with beautiful sandy beaches the length of its coastal strip and also possesses the greatest concentration of touristic facilities. In terms of its geographical location, its history and its natural beauty as well as the enchanting Mediterranean Sea, Girne is truly blessed. Beyond the coastal littoral upon which the town stands lies the mountain chain through which a narrow pass allows passage to the interior of the island.

Girne is truly the perfect place for a relaxing holiday. Without doubt, one of the town's most evocative places is the old horseshoe shaped harbour which has become the symbol of the city. Here, the old buildings of the Venetian, Ottoman and British Colonial periods, and the delightful restaurants, bars and small hotels offer tourists an unrivalled atmosphere of charm and fascination. And, as if not already beautiful enough, during the summer months Girne bursts into colour with the vibrant hues of its fishing boats and yachts.

From the historical perspective, Girne offers its visitors immense riches; - amongst the must see places are the historical harbour, Girne Castle and the Ancient Shipwreck Museum housed within it, St Hilarion Castle and the Bellapais Abbey.

On the fringe of the historical harbour stands the imposing Girne Castle. It is the largest and best preserved castle in all of Cyprus and bears the indelible traces of the Byzantine, Lusignan and Venetian periods. Once inside the castle visitors can see the Lusignan Dungeons, a recreation of the Vrysi Neolithic Settlement, the Akdeniz Village Tomb, the Kirni Village Tomb, the Lusignan and Venetian Towers and, of course, the Mediterranean's second oldest recovered sunken trading vessel in the Ancient Shipwreck Museum.

All of these features; - the castle and the harbour, as well as the most beautiful example of Gothic architecture in Cyprus at the Bellapais Abbey, and all its other attractions put Girne at the very heart of North Cyprus's tourism industry.

Situated in the foothills of the Five Finger Mountains, the Bellapais Abbey, built in the early XIII century, is the Eastern Mediterranean's finest example of Gothic architecture. The English writer Lawrence Durrell, who wrote his novel "Bitter Lemons" relating his experiences whilst sojourned in Cyprus, bought and restored a house in Bellapais village.



**Historical Harbour**

# The History of Girne

The history of Girne can be traced back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. As the centre of one of the nine ancient kingdoms of Cyprus the town bears the traces of the various civilisations which have ruled over the island. The area around the old harbour was originally fortified by the Byzantines and then further developed by the Lusignans and Venetians who rebuilt the castle and its environs. The harbour became neglected during the Ottoman period but was revived during the British colonial administration. In this period, due to its charming and romantic atmosphere, the town became a popular summer resort for soldiers and their families travelling between the colonies of the Empire. Girne retains these characteristics to this very day.

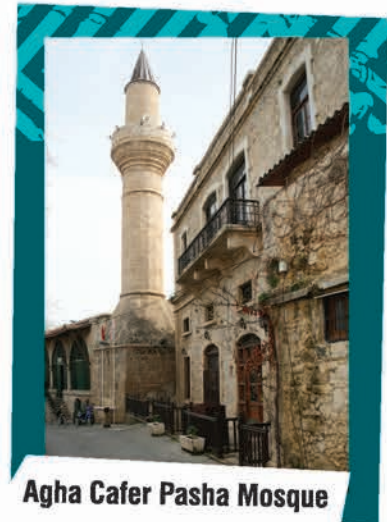
It is believed that Girne was originally founded by the Achaeans and is named in Roman sources as 'Corineum'. Buildings constructed during the Byzantine period were developed and put to new use during the Lusignan and Venetian periods and further construction also took place. The traveller Oldenburg described Schernae (Girne) on a visit in 1211 during the reign of Lusignan King Hugh I as, "a small town of waterside residences which has city walls and bastions within it". From these lines we can perhaps deduce that the name Schernae, meaning 'pleasant' or 'delightful' has evolved over time into the 'Girne' of today.

The remains of the fortifications in and around Girne that we are able to see today were constructed during the Lusignan period as a means of protecting the people of the town against external attacks. With the advent of gunpowder during the Venetian period the fortifications lost their importance and were dismantled and used in the construction of Girne Castle and other buildings in the vicinity.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July 1570, Girne, which was one of the Venetians safest strongholds, surrendered without a struggle to the Ottoman forces and the town thus entered into Ottoman Administration. During this period Girne became a port of call for small trading vessels and the coastal area of the town was settled by people who obtained their living from the seas. This area became known as 'Lower Girne'. Later, inhabitants of the town began to settle outside the city walls to the south known as Upper Girne and this area gradually saw greater development whilst Lower Girne continued as a small and somewhat neglected haven for fishing boats.



**Girne Castle**



**Agha Cafer Pasha Mosque**



**Lusignan Tower**

# Things To Do In Girne

- Pay a visit to the Eastern Mediterranean's most magnificent example of gothic architecture at the Bellapais Abbey.
- See St. Hilarion Castle, one of the Girne mountain range's three legendary and enigmatic castles and the inspiration for Walt Disney's fairy castle in his film of 'Sleeping Beauty'.
- At St. Hilarion marvel at the awe-inspiring view of Girne and the northern coast of Cyprus, from the Queen's Window situated at 732 metres above sea level.
- Visit the Herbarium at Alevkayası where you can see the collection of all plant species endemic to Cyprus including rare species. Take part in an 'Orchid Trail Walk'. The best time for this is from January to May.
- Take a first hand look at one of nature's wonders;- the hatching of turtles at Alagadi Beach. The months of July, August and September are the most suitable for this most unforgettable of experiences. You have the chance to watch the Caretta Caretta (Loggerhead Turtle) and Chelonia Mydas (Green Turtle) hatchlings' first rendezvous with the sea.
- Take a trip back in time with a visit to see the remains of the 2300 year old sunken trading vessel in the Ancient Shipwreck Museum inside Girne Castle.
- Take a pleasant stroll through the lanes and paths of the English village of Karmi (Karaman) nestled on the mountainside overlooking Girne. All the streets carry the names of the flowers which are so abundant here. You are sure to be deeply affected by the beauty of the village square, the houses and well-tended gardens. If you have time left after your trip to Karmi you may have time to visit the hillside town of Lapta just to the west.
- Discover the underwater wealth of the Girne region by taking a dive at one of the many diving spots.
- For lovers of golf the course to the east of Girne possesses perhaps the best views of any course in the Mediterranean.
- Between the months of February and May a climb to the peak of Buffavento Castle will elevate your spirit.
- There are ample possibilities to join some of the many walking or bird watching tours that regularly take place.





**Nature Walks**



**The Medoş Tulip (Tulipa Cypria)**



**Kormakiti Village  
(Koruçam)**

- An interesting memento of your holiday in Cyprus would be to take a photograph in front of the 'Five Finger' outcrop to the east of Girne and which gives its name to the entire Five Finger Range.
- Near to Esentepe village on the road to the Karpaz is the Antiphonitis Monastery where there is a renowned fresco of Christ Pantocrator from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.
- Girne's old harbour is rightly considered the pearl of North Cyprus tourism and is one of the absolute must sees for the visitor to Cyprus.
- West of Girne is the "Blue House" built by Makarios sympathiser and entrepreneur Byron Pavlides and opened to great fanfare in the winter of 1973.
- Also west of Girne is the Maronite village of Kormakiti, now known as Koruçam. Here you can stop and see aspects of Maronite culture and try their cuisine.
- There are many local and regional fairs and festivals that you can visit in order to sample different aspects of Cypriot culture. In March you can visit the Tepebaşı Medoş Tulip Festival which celebrates the endemic 'Medoş' tulip (Tulipa Cypria). In May and June music lovers can attend the International Bellapais Music Festival, while also in June there is the Ozanköy Carob Pekmez (molasses) Festival, the Lapta Tourism Festival and the Esentepe Wild Apricot Festival. In October the village of Zeytinlik hosts the International Zeytinlik Olive Festival. A visit to any or all of these festivals offers an authentic view of the Cypriot way of life.



**The Zeytinlik International  
Olive Festival**



**Antiphonitis Monastery,  
Esentepe**



**Lusignan Coats of Arms – Girne Castle**



**St. Hilarion Castle**



**Bellapais Abbey**

## Places to Visit in Girne

- Girne Castle and the Sunken Shipwreck Museum
- The Old Harbour
- St. Hilarion Castle and the Five Finger Mountains
- One of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture in the entire Eastern Mediterranean, the spectacular medieval Bellapais Abbey
- Buffavento Castle in the Five Finger Mountains
- The Church of the Archangel Michael and the Icon Museum, Girne
- The Sourp Magar Armenian Monastery at Alevkayası
- The Ruins of the Roman city of Lambousa, Lapta
- The Temples of Pighades, Çamlıbel
- The Akdeniz Tombs
- The endemic flora of Cyprus, orchids and rare plants in the Alevkayası area and the Alevkayası Herbarium
- The Karaoğlanoğlu War Graves and Martyrs Museum, Karaoğlanoğlu
- The Blue House, Çamlıbel

# Girne (Kyrenia) District Map



## Town Centre

Girne Castle and Shipwreck Museum, the Old Harbour, Archangelos Michael Church and Icon Museum, Agha Cafer Pasha Mosque...etc.



# Notes on the Historical Sites

## Girne Castle

Girne Castle principally bears the traces of the Byzantine, Lusignan and Venetian Periods and is remarkably well preserved in the present day. Today, having been extensively renovated and restored, it bears testament to a contemporary understanding of museumship for both local and foreign visitors. Amongst the features to be seen in the castle are the dungeons, the Church of St. George, the Akdeniz village tomb, an enactment of the neolithic settlement at Vrysi, the Kirni Bronze Age tomb, the Venetian Tower, an Exhibition Hall, ancient cisterns, the Lusignan Tower and the Ancient Shipwreck Museum which displays a recovered sunken trading ship dated as of 300 years B.C.E.

The castle was originally constructed to protect the city against attacks by Arab corsairs. Its importance increased during the Lusignan Period when it underwent important structural improvements. This construction was interrupted in 1371 when the castle was besieged by the Genoese in what became the longest siege ever suffered by the castle: - four years. After the lifting of the siege, construction was continued in the light of defensive military strategy of the times. Accordingly defences were constructed primarily against armoured knights and longbowmen. When the Venetians took control of the castle in 1489 they began again to construct the defences bearing in mind the artillery of the Ottomans. North-West and South-East towers were added but, in spite of these precautions, once Lefkoşa (Nicosia) had fallen, Girne surrendered to the Ottoman forces in 1570 without a fight. The castle is surrounded by a moat and entrance to the castle was via a drawbridge at the North-Western gate. The moat on the landward side of the castle was filled with water prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The three lion crest found on the vault of the inner gate was salvaged from an older building elsewhere and placed here. Within the walls of the castle is the small church of St. George, which was built in the early Byzantine Period of the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. Turkish political prisoners held in the castle during the First World War had a tomb built for the Ottoman Admiral Sadik Pasha in the corridor leading to the central courtyard. The current tomb was reinterred here in the castle after 1974 until which time it had been interred in the Baldöken Cemetary in the town centre. Amongst other features of the castle are the North-Western, South-Western and South-Eastern Venetian Towers, a guard room and Great Hall from the Lusignan Period, various dungeons, storage rooms and the powder magazines.



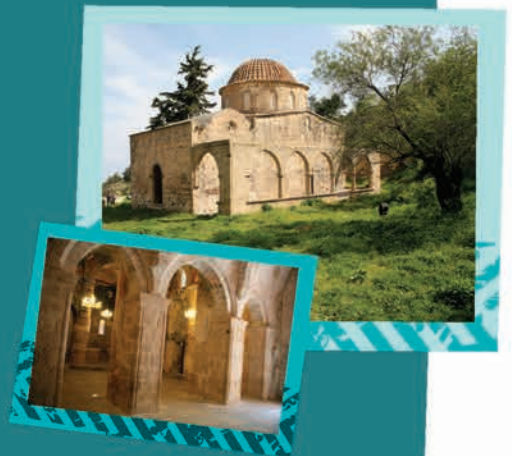
## The Shipwreck Museum

The ship exhibited in the Shipwreck Museum which is situated in one of the old guard rooms of Girne Castle is the second oldest recovered sunken ship in the Mediterranean. The ship, which dates from the Hellenistic Period, was discovered by a sponge diver in 1965 and brought to the surface in a salvage expedition directed by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology from 1967-69. It has been established that the ship was approximately eighty years old when it sank. The 14 metre long wooden hull is built mostly of Aleppo pine. The 413 amphorae on board originate from the islands of Rhodes, Kos and Samos. The 29 millstones which were used as ballast have identification marks which suggest they came from Kos. From the rediscovered artefacts it can be established that the ship traded along the coast of the Aegean and the Mediterranean and was manned by a crew of four. The 2300 year old ship is a major tourist attraction for Girne.



## The Church of Antiphonitis

This beautiful church is situated in a wooded valley about 8 kilometres south of the village of Esentepe and can be reached from Esentepe or the village of Bahçell. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the church was constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The narthex on the western side and the arcade on the south side were both added during the Lusignan Period. The church was once the centre of an important monastery. In terms of the basic plan, the building is in the Byzantine style. However, the architecture is unusual for Cyprus suggesting that it was built by local craftsmen and builders. The dome of the edifice rests on eight stone columns which form an octagon and four of the columns are attached to the wall. The frescoes which adorn the church were painted in two separate periods. The wall frescoes have suffered damage or have been removed from their original positions but are nonetheless remarkable. The oldest of these frescoes date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century; the more recent ones are from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the frescoes retain their brilliant colour and portray the saints and scenes from the Bible. The dome depicts a representation of the Christ Pantokrator represented inside a medallion surrounded by angels and flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. The twelve apostles seated on their thrones and images of prophets are also represented.



## The Church of the Archangel Michael and the Icon Museum

The Church of the Archangel Michael now houses the Icon Museum which displays icons from the Girne area. The bell tower of the church was added twenty five years after the construction of the church in 1860 and is visible all over Girne.



## St. Hilarion Castle

St. Hilarion is one of the Five Finger Mountain Range's three mountaintop castles. It stands a proud 732 metres above sea level and has a wealth of features for the visitor. Among these are; the Gate House, the Queen's Window, the Barbican, the Royal Apartments, the Cistern, the Kitchens, the Belvedere, Prince John's Tower and the Byzantine Church.

Like the castles of Buffavento and Kantara further to the west, St. Hilarion was constructed to afford protection against attacks by Arab corsairs raiding the Cyprus coast during the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The castle takes its name, not from St. Hilarion the Great, the founder of monasticism in Palestine who died near Paphos about A.D. 371, but after a later saint, of whom little is known. The name first appears in records in 1191. In spite of the castle having, at one time, a vital strategic function, it was used by the Lusignans mainly as a summer retreat. With the advent of cannon artillery and the increasing importance attached to coastal defences, St. Hilarion, along with the Kantara and Buffavento castles, lost its functionality and importance. The castle has three parts. The parapets for the defence of the main entrance were fortified by the Byzantines in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The lower section of the castle was used for military purposes. The middle section contained the Royal Palace, the kitchens, the church and a large cistern. At the entrance to the castle in the upper section there is the Lusignan Gate. Between the two hills there is a courtyard. The nobility resided in the Eastern section whilst the kitchens and the other rooms for daily use were in the western section. The panoramic view through the Queen's Window, carved in the Gothic style, on the second floor of the royal apartments is outstanding. The Prince John Tower is at the very top of the castle.



## The Karmi Bronze Age Cemetery

Close to the hillside village of Karmi (Karaman) is a Middle Bronze Age necropolis where chamber tombs have been carved out of the rock. On the wall of an access passage of one tomb the relief of a female figure has survived. This is the earliest relief of a human figure discovered on the island so far and it is believed to represent a fertility goddess. Also discovered in one of the tombs was a Minoan 'Kamares' cup and blue faience beads from Egypt which are thought to be gifts to the dead and which suggest very early trading relations with Crete and Egypt. The artifacts that have been discovered are believed to have belonged to seamen who worked on the ships at nearby Lapithos (Lapta). Based on this information we can understand which countries the early inhabitants of Cyprus were trading with.



## Bellapais Abbey

This beautiful abbey is built on a rocky outcrop on a hillside of the Five Finger Mountain range. Its name is derived from the French, 'Abbey de la Belle Paix'- 'Abbey of Peace'. It is a masterpiece of the French Gothic style and is the best example of its kind in the Middle East. Built by Augustinian monks in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it is a most imposing partial ruin in a wonderful position commanding a long view down to Girne and the Mediterranean Sea. The parts of the abbey which remain standing today were built by the French King Hugh III (1267-1284). The colonnade that surrounds the courtyard and the refectory were added during the reign of Hugh IV (1324-1359). After the Ottoman conquest in 1570, the abbey was given to the Orthodox Church. The anterior courtyard and the abbey were entered through the main gate via a drawbridge. The church situated at the rear of the courtyard is the oldest part of the abbey and dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Italianate frescoes in the narthex were painted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Two marble sarcophagi from the Roman Period, one atop the other, are situated in the north-western corner of the central courtyard and were used by the monks to perform ablutions. The doors opposite the sarcophagi lead to the Refectory and the coats of arms of the Kings of Cyprus, Jerusalem and the Lusignan Kings can be seen inscribed on the marble lintels above these doors. The Refectory is a perfect example of Gothic art. On the northern wall there is a pulpit from where prayers were offered during mealtimes. Next to the refectory are the remains of a kitchen and underneath the kitchen there is a two chambered cellarium. The monks' dormitories, study and common room are on the upper floor. The Treasury was over the north aisle of the church in the south west corner.



## Sourp Magar Armenian Monastery

The Sourp Magar Armenian Monastery is situated in the Five Finger Mountains close to Alevkayasi. The monastery was founded in the early eleventh century and at that time belonged to the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church. It was dedicated to Saint Macarius of Alexandria. It is also known as the Monastery of Sourp Magar and Mary. Around 1425 the monastery was transferred to the Armenians of Cyprus. It evolved into an important secondary place of pilgrimage for Armenian pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and this situation continued right up until 1974. It was also used a summer retreat by the Armenians living in Nicosia.



## Buffavento Castle

Buffavento Castle is situated atop the Five Finger Mountain range at a height of 950 metres. It was built as a defense against Arab raids and as a signals post. It has been variously known as "The Lion Castle", and "The One Hundred and One Houses". During the Lusignan Period (1192-1489) it was used as a prison and this is when it was known as "The Lion Castle". The name "Buffavento" was given to it by the Italians and means 'Defier of the Winds'. An ancient myth relates that there were 101 rooms in the castle and that whosoever passes through the door of the lost 101st room would inherit a treasure.

The lowest part of the castle was probably built by the Byzantines in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This base was expanded by the Lusignans in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is not regular in shape as it makes use of the mountain itself for its defense. During the Venetian Period Buffavento, like the other mountain strongholds of St. Hilarion and Kantara, fell into disuse as the coastal castles of Cyprus, such as Girne and Gazimağusa (Famagusta), became more important for the defence of Cyprus.

Another tale related to the castle tells of a Byzantine princess who, suffering from leprosy had retreated to the castle. Her dog also suffered from the same disease and one day the princess noticed that the skin of her dog had begun to heal. Following him she saw that the animal bathed in a spring far below the castle. She did the same and was cured. In gratitude, she founded the Monastery of Ayios Ioannis Chrysostomos at the spot near the water source.

## Hazreti Ömer Tekke - The Tomb of Omar

Four kilometers to the east of Girne, on the coastal road to Çatalköy, is the tomb of Hazreti Omar. The small Hazreti Omar mosque and tombs house the remains of a 7<sup>th</sup> century commander and six other Muslim holy men. Many tales and myths relating to Hazreti Omar have been handed down to the present day. According to one, Omar was a company commander in the army of the Umayyad caliph, Muawwiye. In one of the Arab raids Omar and his soldiers set foot on Cyprus at the very spot where the tomb now stands, and there they fell to awaiting Byzantine forces. After the skirmish their bodies were interred in brick built tombs. After the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1571 rumours led to the rediscovery of the tomb and a shrine was built to the north west of the cave in which they were re-interred. In time, a *masjid* (small mosque) was built which encompassed the tomb and around it rooms were built for an imam, a caretaker and visitors to the tomb.



## Lambousa

The ancient Greek writer Homer stated that Lambousa, along with Salamais and Paphos, was founded by Achaeans returning from the Trojan Wars around 1200 years B.C.E. The philosopher Strabo on the other hand, claimed that it was founded by the Spartan King Praxandros around the same time. Yet another tale relates that the city was founded by Belus, King of Tyre, in the 8th century B.C.E. as a Phoenecian colony. During the proto-Christian period and Byzantine Period, Lambousa moved to its present site by the sea from whence it gained great wealth partly also because of its port and its shipyard.

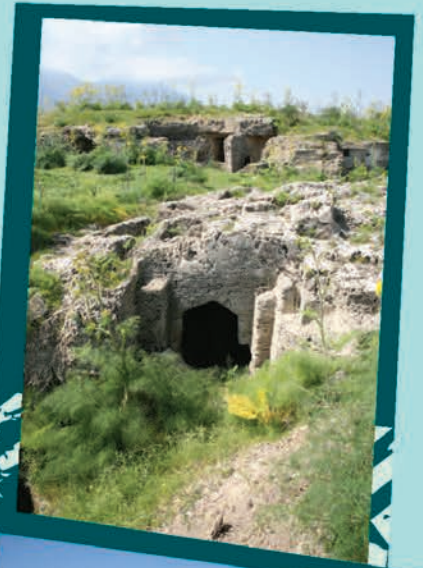
During the Christian Period it was also the centre of one of the 14 Bishopricks. During this period it was given the name Lambousa, meaning "shining", maybe because of its shining wealth. It is thought that the city fell into ruin as a result of either Arab pirate raids or due to earthquakes. It is related that tales of Lambousa's wealth attracted Arab raiders who laid siege to the city in the year 654 A.D. In return for their lives and freedom to leave the city unmolested the Arabs demanded the inhabitants surrender their possessions and jewellery. However, subsequent archaeological excavations appear to reveal that the Lambousans, instead of surrendering their possessions to the raiders, hid them in walls and ceilings.

During the Lusignan and Venetian Periods, Lambousa was known under the name Le field de la Pison and was the property of a wealthy feudal lord. It was during the Lusignan Period that Lambousa was abandoned by its inhabitants who left to found nearby Lapithos. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a section of Lapithos was split off to form a new village, Karavas, the present day Alsancak, and the ruins of the ancient city of Lambousa were utilised to supply stones for the construction of the new village. This led to the disappearance of much of the ancient city.

Today, amongst the features of Lambousa that can be seen are the Akhiriopietos Monastery (6<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> century), the St. Evlalios Church (16<sup>th</sup> century), the Queen's Bath, remains of the city walls and carved funerary chambers.

## Lapta

The name 'Lapta' is derived from Lambousa via its name in Greek, Lapithos. Due to the frequency of Arab raids on the city, the inhabitants of Lambousa gradually moved from their vulnerable coastal settlement to the safer foothills of the Five Finger Mountain. The settlement grew during the Lusignan Period. Excavations in the area have uncovered the remains of chamber tombs from the Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages. Lapta today is a delightful place, with many touristic and historical attractions. Situated between the sea and the mountains, it is a place of calm and restfulness.





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