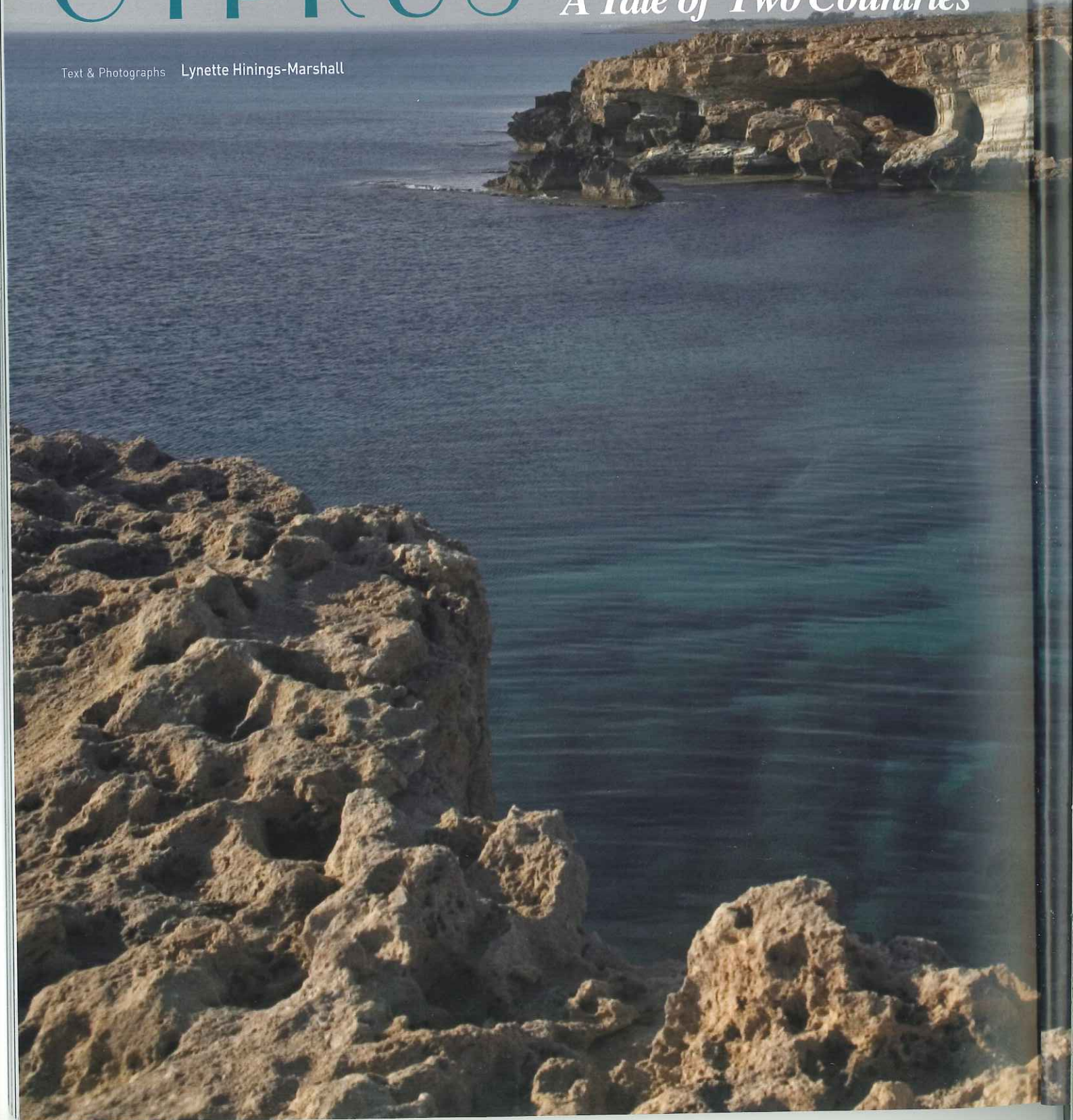


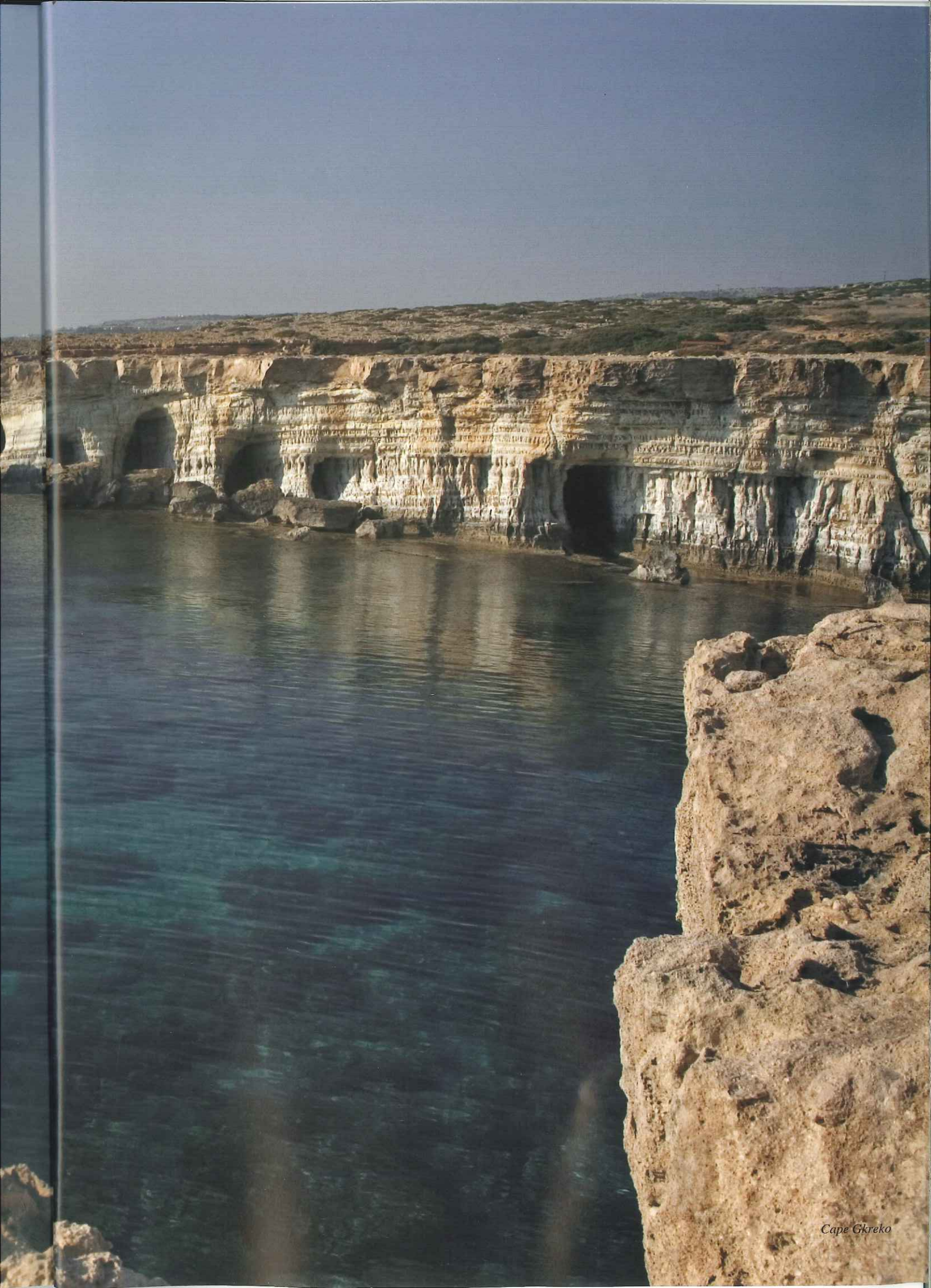
TRAVEL

CYPRUS

A Tale of Two Countries

Text & Photographs Lynette Hinings-Marshall





Cape Gkreko



Oroklini local tavern

Imagine a country you can drive across in two hours. Now divide it in half and that is the size of the Greek side of Cyprus. Nicosia (locals call it, Lefkosia), once the capital of the whole island, is divided. It is eerie to stroll down the Greek side of Nicosia's pedestrian shopping mall, past McDonald's and Starbucks, and be suddenly confronted by a uniformed soldier guarding the end of it. A high fence with barbed wire on top along with his serious weaponry extinguishes any cheeky desire to peek over at the occupied Turkish zone.

Cyprus' strategic position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa has shaped its destiny as foreign forces repeatedly conquered this tiny island. All have left their imprint in the form of Greek columns, Hellenistic theaters, Roman mosaics, Byzantine churches, Gothic monuments, Venetian walls and bridges, Turkish baths and mosques, and British roundabouts. When friends visit I always include a trip to Paphos where Aphrodite (or Venus as the Romans called her) the goddess of love and beauty allegedly rose from the waves in the strikingly beautiful spot of Petra Tou Romiou. Christianity in Cyprus also started at Paphos around A.D. 45 when the apostles Paul and Barnabas arrived to preach their new religion. Today Paphos is the site of a more recent British occupation as retirees soak up the sun and escape much higher taxes back in England.

One of my pleasures in Cyprus is the lack of crowds at historic sites. When I strolled through the spectacular archaeological site

of Kourio that dates back to the 13th century B.C., I shared this breathtaking experience with only three other visitors. I sat alone in the magnificent 2nd century B.C. Hellenistic theater and looked out at the same view, the same serene and sparkling blue waters glistening below, that Romans would have seen as they watched for invading armies from the east. It was in nearby Limassol (Lemesos) Castle that Richard the Lionheart married Queen Berengaria in 1191 and crowned her Queen of England. She had been shipwrecked just off the coast and to Richard's disgust the ruler Isaac Komnenos refused to send provisions. After Richard married Berengaria, he defeated Komnenos in battle and claimed the island. Today, Limassol stages some of the country's best-known festivals. In September the popular wine festival is supervised by Bacchus the god of wine whose statue rests nearby. Limassol is also home to nearly one-third of the population of Greek Cyprus. With many signs—particularly those advertising expensive jewellery and furs—in the Cyrillic alphabet, the keen observer will realize that there is a sizable Russian community living in Limassol.

At midday Saturday, the country closes its stores until Monday. In summer, this leaves the option of scrambling for space among a dense maze of bodies and umbrellas on one of the beaches, or jostling for a waterfront table at one of the tavernas that line the same Mediterranean coastline. For lunch the most popular dish is the traditional *mezé* (a succession of up to 20 small plates and a



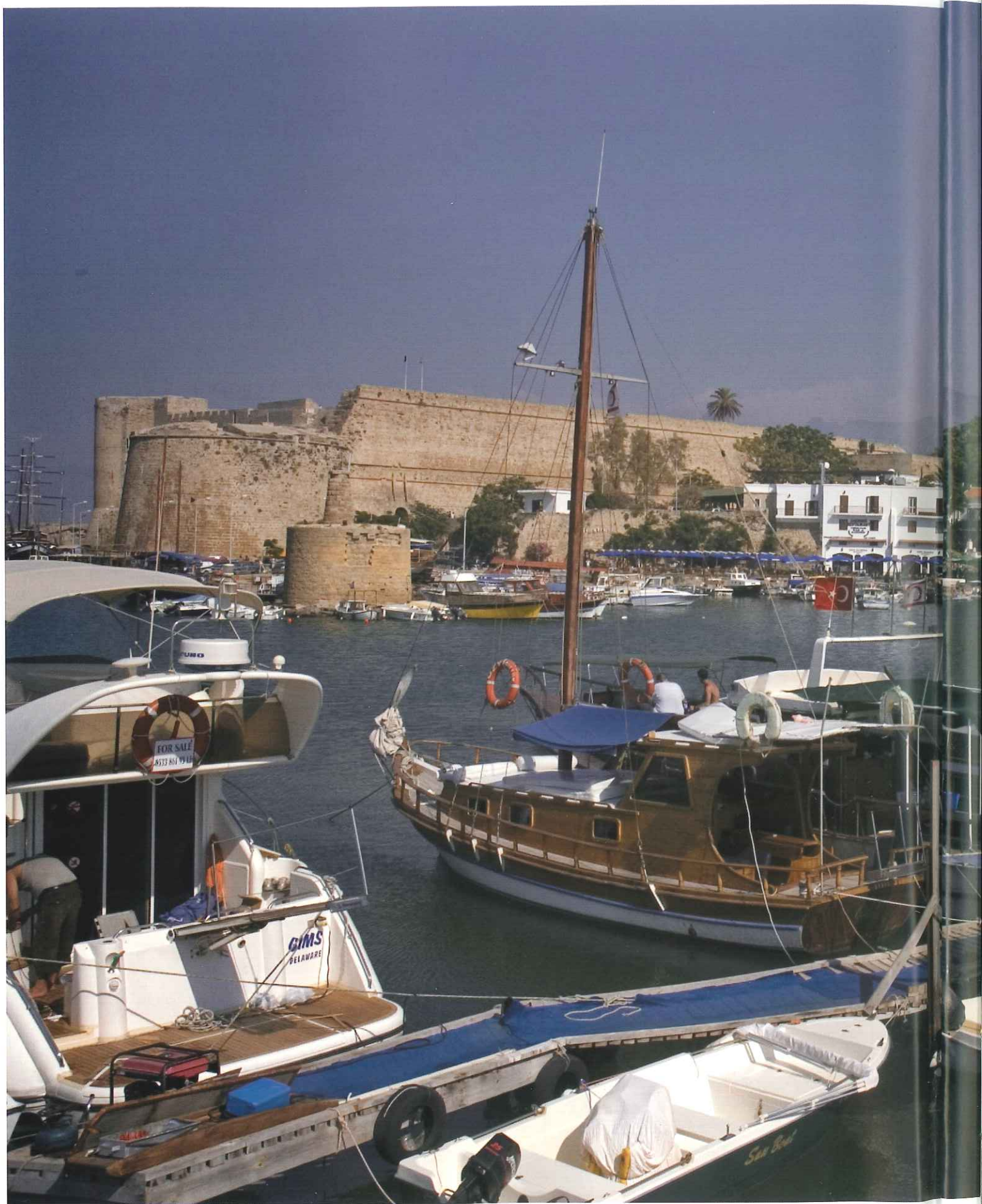
Kyrenia typical street

couple of grilled main dishes). After several samplings of the seafood mezé, I reluctantly had to accept the lack of fresh seafood. Most is frozen imports and the fisherman I bought sweet, fresh fish from at Larnaka port the first week of my arrival sadly has disappeared. Meat dishes predominate with pork or lamb *kebabs* the most popular, followed by *kleftigo*, which is lamb slowly cooked. *Kleftigo* ovens are everywhere. Once built like an igloo of soft stones held together with mud, they are now concrete. *Stifado* (braised beef and onions) and moussakas (eggplants, sliced potatoes, minced meat and cream sauce) are popular along with kanellonia (meat filled pancakes). Ubiquitous air-conditioned bakeries produce large trays of *baklava* (honeyed filo pastry with cinnamon and pistachio nuts), *kataifi* (a shredded nut pastry) and *galataboureko* (a custard pie) along with myriad temptations for the sweet-toothed. The bakery in my village of Oroklini brings out trays of hot, buttery, filo pastry swirls filled with spinach and feta cheese at four-o'clock every day. These are excellent with a glass of very cold Chardonnay while waiting for the sun to drop low enough to contemplate dinner.

A seasoned expatriate advised me to take my time to see all the sights. "Or what will you do afterward?" he challenged in a jaded voice. He was right. But waking up to a cloudless blue sky every day is why I, along with two million holidaymakers-predominantly British, German and Russian-enjoy this sun-drenched island. Since Greek Cyprus joined the European Union in 2003, many of

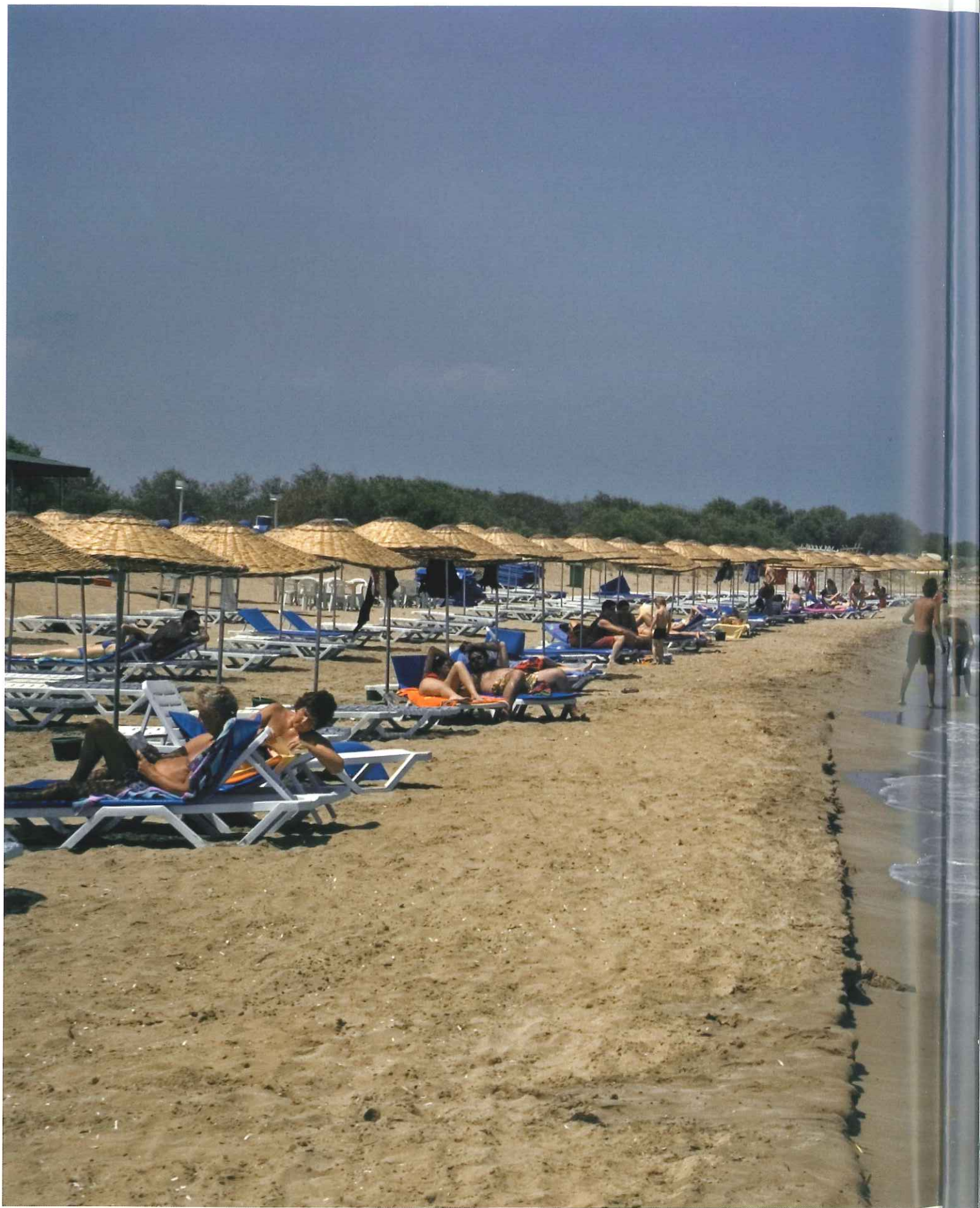
these tourists have chosen to stay and retire here. Even the pretty northern Turkish port of Kyrenia, ringed by medieval buildings and flanked by a castle attracts foreign retirees. However, with never-ending arguments over land titles, in Turkish Cyprus that venture is only for the truly adventurous and stories about fraud and inadequate construction are regularly reported in the media.

When you cross the border into Turkish Cyprus for the first time the poverty is confronting. You see dilapidated buildings, many with bullet holes still from the 1974 civil war that divided the country in two. A local friend and her mother went to the Turkish side of Nicosia earlier this year to visit her mother's previous home. My friend was surprised at how gracious the Turkish family was about letting them walk through the house for as long as they wanted. But it was a wrenching experience for her mother to see strangers living in the home she fled from in 1974 and never even had the opportunity to sell. The United Nations is still trying to arrange equitable settlements for all concerned, but more than 30 years on, the mutual dislike on both sides remains palpable. When I first asked Greek Cypriots how and where I should cross the border to Northern Cyprus, they said they did not know where the crossing was. I had to buy a guide book about Turkish Cyprus online from Amazon because none are sold in Greek Cyprus. After a couple of reconnaissance trips, I now drive north as often as possible through the pine, carob and olive-clad mountains or take the coastal road through Famagusta and along the northern beaches





Kyrenia harbor





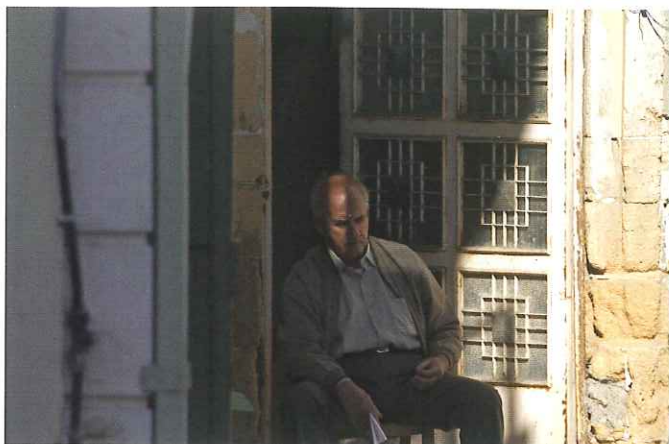
Northern Cyprus beach



Oroklini field



Limestone houses



Turkish Nicosia resident



Traditional craft woman



Turkish Cypriot mother and son



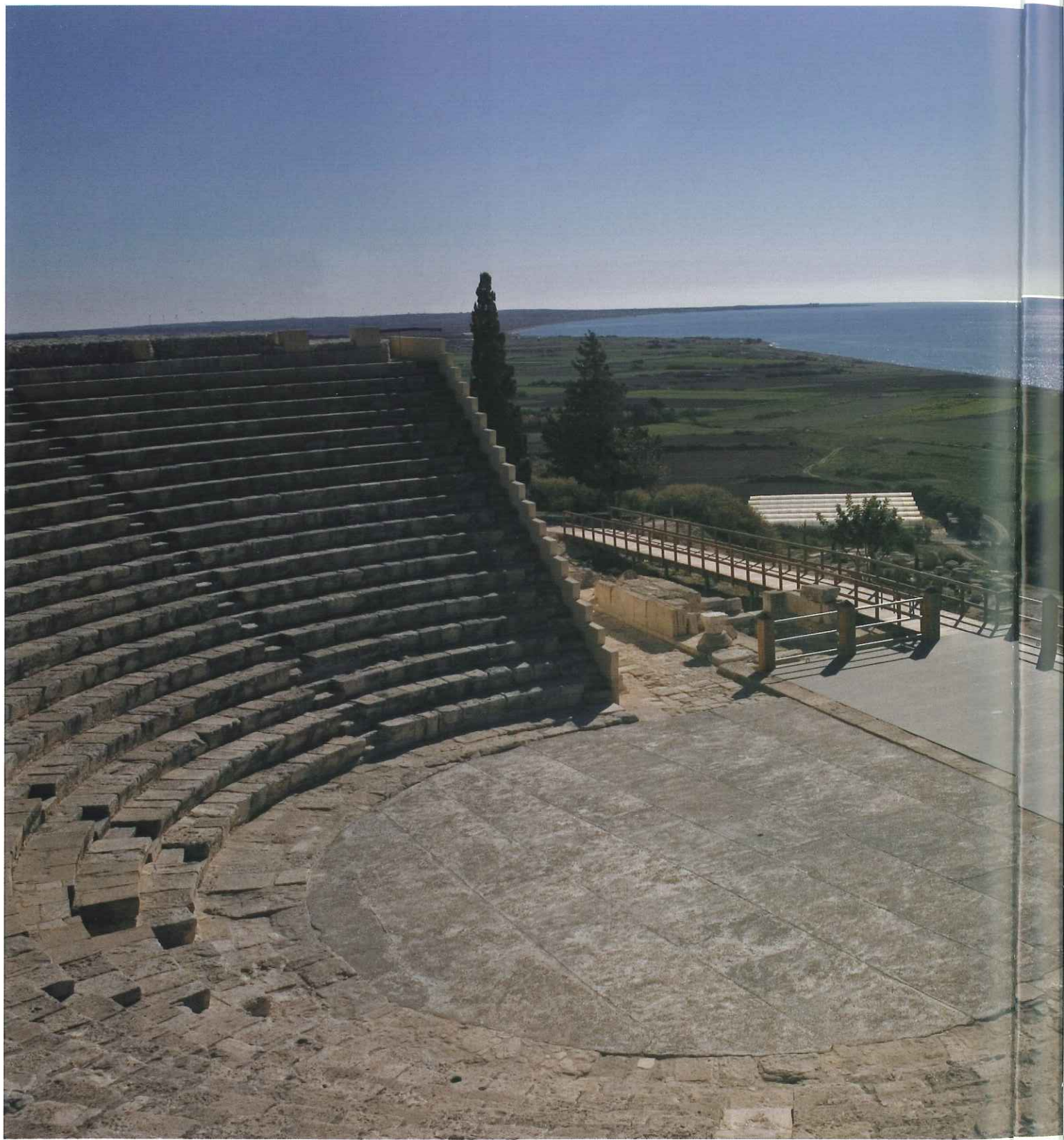
Shepherd

to Kyrenia. Turkish Cyprus with its Muslim population is more Europeanized in attitude than Greek Cyprus and this is reflected in its restaurants. Canny Turkish Cypriots even play "Zorba's Dance" to engender an Aegean atmosphere and to entice patrons into their cafes and open-air restaurants. The seriously threatened Green turtles and endangered Loggerheads lay their eggs at a number of northern beaches extending into the far northeast Karpaz Peninsula. This is where Winston Churchill likened its shape to a "dagger aimed at the underbelly of Anatolia" and it is here you will find the most beautiful beaches in all of Cyprus. At Akdeniz, 40 kilometers west of Kyrenia, the movements of the turtles have been monitored for 23 years. Unfortunately, foxes are a serious predator and lay in wait for the tiny hatchlings. Records show that only one in one thousand turtle hatchlings reaches maturity.

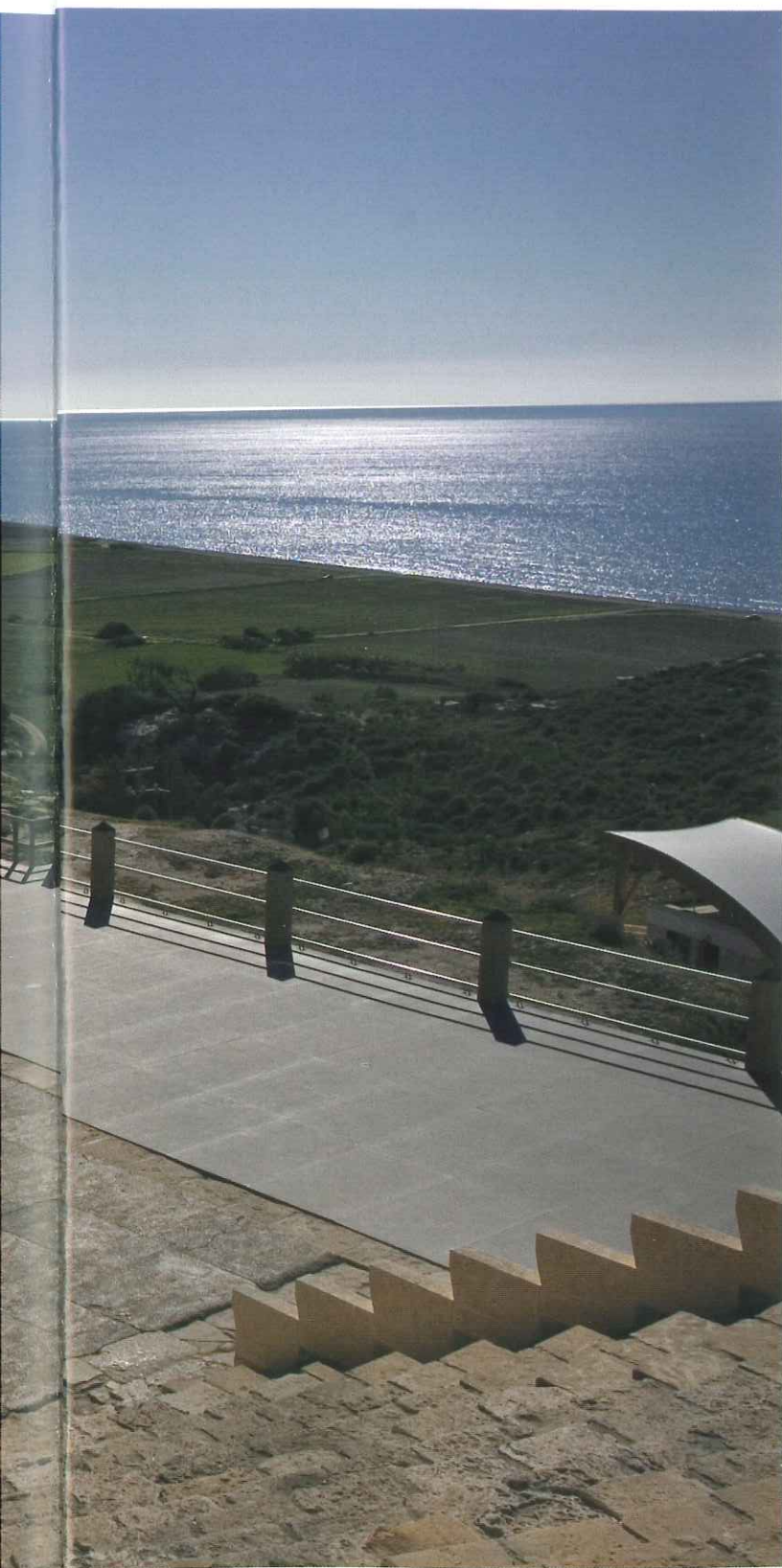
Back south in Greek Cyprus visitors flock to the hillside village of Pano Lefkara to stroll through its meandering, cobblestone streets flanked by beautifully restored traditional limestone

houses. Women sit in doorways and stitch their famous *lefkaratika* (handmade lace) in designs inspired by the Cyprus countryside. This exquisite embroidery is made on top of a heavy rectangular piece of wood covered in smooth cotton to prevent slipping. Leonardo de Vinci when he visited Cyprus in 1481 purchased a handmade lace cloth at Pano Lefkara for the cathedral in Milan. To this day it is tradition that a new cloth is regularly presented to the cathedral by the villagers of Pano Lefkara. Lucky visitors will chance upon a demonstration of "Turkish" (Cyprus) delight (*loukoumia*) being made. Many silver jewellery shops here also do a brisk trade throughout the year with prices competitive with those in the main cities.

After only a 30-minute drive uphill, the sporty traveller can find an excellent network of nature trails through the Troodos Mountains that peak at Mount Olympos. Here there are remnants of ice pits where, for centuries, ice was preserved and then transported late at night to the towns. Today when the winter snow



Kourio Ampitheater, 2nd century



falls at Olympos locals and tourists strap on their cross country skis for a morning of skiing before heading back down the coast for an afternoon of sunbathing. Yes!

Nestled in pines and orchards nearby at Platres is the Troodhitissa monastery. Reputedly, in the eighth century a monk from Asia Minor carried a Madonna icon and a painting of the apostle Luke to the cave of Trooditissa where he lived as a hermit guarding these precious items. After he died, shepherds kept alight the candle in his cave until around A.D.990 when the monastery was built as a more suitable housing for this treasure. Many miracles are attributed to the Madonna icon and a medallion-studded girdle, said to induce fertility, still lies near the icon. One oral tradition explains how when this girdle was worn and a boy-child resulted, he had to be dedicated to the church as a monk or "ransomed" with a generous donation. The present day monastery buildings have, since 1966, been out of bounds to the non-Orthodox and a gatehouse vets visitors.

It is summer now and local shopkeepers have mysteriously lost their ability to speak English. Last week, I just smiled when my usual ice cream cone cost double and, like the locals, I wait patiently for the tourists to leave. Then for about four months Cyprus will revert to large welcoming smiles and greetings in English. I do wonder what Cyprus will be like in ten years. In the nine months since I arrived, small housing enclaves for overseas retirees have risen from empty blocks all around me in Oroklini. The houses are identical, two-storey, square, concrete structures with sub-standard plumbing and wiring, and balcony-size gardens. Most fill in the small garden areas with concrete then place potted plants around. This is a mystery to me as, aesthetics aside, Cyprus suffers from severe water shortages and potted plants require more water. The homes seem moderately expensive but apparently not so for the predominantly German or British retirees. The four real estate offices in my small village swear that they cannot keep up with demand. This is in spite of much publicity about the several years' delay in many cases for even the Certificate of Final Approval being issued, much less the final Title Deed. Twelve years is not an uncommonly long time in Greek Cyprus and probably longer in Turkish Cyprus for a Title Deed to be issued. Legalities aside, is this surge of retirees good for Cypriots? With a small population of only 870,000 throughout the entire country, will they once again be conquered? This time by gray-haired, sun-tanned retirees who insist on Tetley tea and Sunday roasts instead of keftedhes and Cyprus coffee.

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