**Travelogue #1 – Nicosia, Cyprus**

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean after Sicily and Sardinia.  It is located in the Eastern end of the Sea roughly 55 miles (90 km.) south of the Turkish coast.  It has an ancient history.  The earliest known human activity dates from around the 10th millennium BC, and the island has since been part of many civilizations and empires: Greek, Egyptian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman, to mention only the major ones.  Skipping forward a few eons to the end of 1878, Great Britain "leased" Cyprus from Turkey, and in 1914 was able to annex the island when Turkey was on the losing side of the First World War.  Cyprus next became a crown colony and was ruled by Britain until it became independent in 1960.  The Greek (77%) and Turkish (18%) populations were soon at each other's throats.  The majority pressed for "Enois" (merger with Greece), and in 1970 Turkey invaded.  Fierce fighting erupted, and several hundred were killed on both sides.  To greatly simplify events over the next few years, the UN stepped in, ceasefires were declared, and various partitioning plans proposed; today the UN is still on duty manning the "green zone", the line separating the island's two countries: the Republic of Cyprus to the south, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to the north.  About 3% of the island is still sovereign British territory, housing two air bases that help protect the Suez Canal, a still important sea route to the former Asian colonies.

The island of Cyprus today has a population of 1.2 million, divided roughly 25% and 75% between the Turkish north and the Greek south.  We began our tour in the capital, Nicosia.  The city is unique in that it is the capital of two countries with an international border running through the middle.  Our hotel was in the Greek side of the fortified old town in an area of small shops and restaurants catering to tourists.  The other side of the old town is also quite touristic, although somewhat less prosperous.  We spent the first two nights in Nicosia and covered much of both sides of the old town on foot.  The weather was ideal for walking; the city is essentially flat, and our peregrinations extended some 8.6 miles in total.

We watched these backgammon players in the old part of Greek Nicosia.

While the Greek half of Nicosia is predominately Orthodox Christian, we also saw several mosques including some which had once been Orthodox churches. Following the Arab invasions of the 7th century, some churches were converted to mosques and minarets were added.



We listened to a Greek Orthodox service in the Faneromeni Church.

We sat in the cool darkness of the Faneromeni Church while three black-robed priests took turns reading from a large book placed in a stand in front of a wall of icons.  Their sonorous chanting was rhythmic, melodic, and almost hypnotic.



The Selimiye Mosque is housed in the largest and oldest surviving Gothic church in Cyprus.

In contrast to the dark, highly ornate Orthodox church, the interior of this large mosque was spacious and brightly lit.

We walked down Arasta Street in the Turkish part of Nicosia.

This large open-air market on Arasta Street was reminiscent of bazaars that we saw last year in Macedonia.



This attractively-stocked fruit stand was in the Bandabulya Municipal Market, which strangely had more sellers than customers.

This jellied fruit candy was messily delicious and left a white trail of powdered sugar when eaten.



These old Mercedes 600 and Cadillac limousines were prominently displayed in the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace.

Few buildings in Nicosia exceed two or three stories, especially in the old town; there were a couple of high-rises, including this one in this modern area of town.



Fancy cars, up-scale shops, but few tourists, created an air of affluence in this part of Greek Nicosia.