

World Report

28 JULY 2007

# Turkey

& Northern Cyprus

The seduction of  
a summer rendez-vous



# Turkey



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# The perfect open-air package

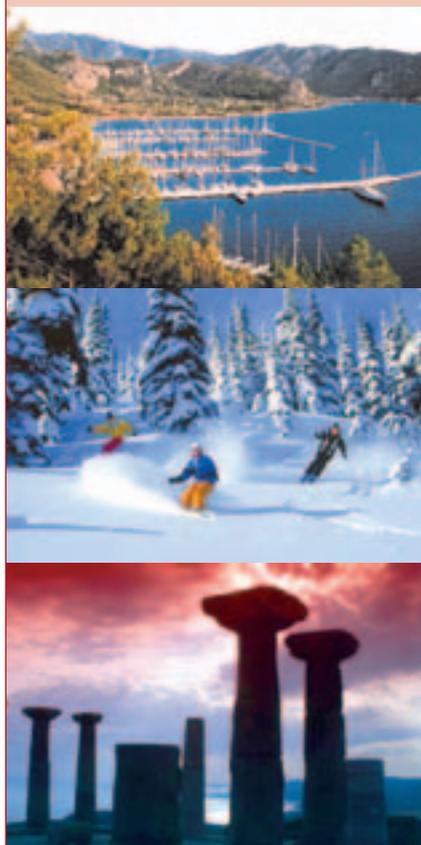


In Turkey, separating culture from a regular holiday is not included in the package. Visitors dozing off on an Aegean beach will eventually come across an historic site. Or perhaps they will book a day trip to a Greek amphitheatre up the coast, separating momentarily from their marina. Even buying a box of 'lokum', or Turkish delight, will usher you back to the traditions of the bazaar. In this country of continuums, nothing is wholly inseparable. And yet, all Turkey's treasures are out in the open.

For Sermin Ozduran, of the Turkish Culture & Tourism Office in London, things first took off with independent travel. Foreigners began to book online in the 1990s, often buying packages based on the location of a nearby archaeological site. More than a quarter of travellers these days are cultural tourists. Turkey does not have to work too hard on selling its attractions. "Even people headed for Lara Beach in Antalya don't want to believe they're the kind of people who just sit around at Lara Beach. Not many will admit to that. They want to see something else as well," she says.

Indeed, it is not rare to sail in the Aegean and spot a marble structure overlooking a bluff. Upon closer inspection, and after trekking up a dirt path past a fig tree grove, you will find a Hellenic temple. According to Ms Ozduran, this is what sets Turkey apart from other destinations. The Hellenic goddess still keeps watch on the boat traffic below, despite the passage of time. "In Europe, history tends to be kept inside a museum. In Turkey it is part of everyday life. You get the real feeling of what it was like to be in places like that thousands of years ago," she says.

**History and culture,** alive and accessible, seep through the very fabric of Turkish society



A unique mix of body culture and food for thought

Still, Turkey is waiting to be discovered. "The Aegean is not fulfilling its potential, which is similar to the Greek coast: boutique hotels and marinas," explains Emre Narin, vice-president of Marti Hotels & Marinas. Established in 1967, the company runs resorts in Marmaris, Antalya and the Mugla Peninsula. If Greece takes in \$12 billion a year in tourist inflows from its Aegean resorts, there is no reason for Turkey not to surpass that figure. In addition, cultural excursions to Mardin, Diyarbakir and the Black Sea enhance any Turkish holiday. Each town can be a brand of its own.

"When I travel down the Bosphorus, I'm amazed at what I see. Now we are finally aware of what we have," says Ora Narin, a member of the board of Marti Hotels and Marinas. The government has allocated \$100 million in promotional money for 2007. A measure of how important cultural artefacts are for the economy is the legal battles that have taken place to repatriate lost art. Only 10 years ago, pieces taken from archaeological digs in Turkey were sold in secondary markets as far as New York. This is increasingly rare as officials make the link between cultural assets and the economy.

In 2007, the city of Konya, home to the whirling dervishes, will celebrate its 800th anniversary. Ms Narin will attend a special night of poetry readings by Rumi, the Afghan-born mystic, on December 17. Turkey's criss-cross of cultures precludes categorisation. "At Catalbüyük there is a site that goes back 8,000 years. Then there are Byzantine churches with fantastic icons. You can see Christian art in the centre of a Muslim country. This is all so difficult to package!" says Ms Narin.



Cover illustration: Martina L. Teichner

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## INTERVIEW

# 'There is no end to tourism, but you have to renew yourself'



**ATILLA KOÇ**, the Minister of Tourism, outlines his vision for the future of the Turkish tourism industry

**Turkish tourism has grown above and beyond the WTO forecast for 2010. Is its growth sustainable?**

We have a Master Plan for 2023. The most important thing will be to work in different areas without neglecting mass

tourism. Turkey is still attractive as a winter sports destination. That's why we're working on 11 new resorts. A second aspect involves thermal tourism. Turkey has 1,600 thermal springs—more than any other country in Europe. Third is cultural tourism. Given Turkey's rich cultural legacy we've ordered an inventory of our heritage sites.

**What kinds of sites are being excavated?**

There are more than 3,000 archaeological sites waiting to be excavated. Some of them are caravanserais. People use to travel and stay for free in caravanserais with their horses. We'd like to convert

these now into boutique hotels and restaurants. We also have 206 amphitheatres, a figure larger than the total for Italy and the Adriatic, including Greece. It may take 10-20 years to restore them all, but it's quite important for us.

**With the Internet and low-cost airlines, tourism has changed. How are you addressing the end-consumer directly?**

I'm very optimistic about tomorrow. Internet bookings may hit the tour operators at first, but the Web is working like a new platform for business. Initially, people were wary about low-cost flights, but now they

are visiting their second homes almost once a month because of the low fares.

**Can tourism act as a motor of regional development?**

Even if you have very attractive destinations, if you don't have accommodation or roads, it means nothing. This is why we're putting more stress on construction. It's also why the private sector is now in transportation. Once we've created enough hotels, I think tourism is going to be the model for the economy. There is no end to tourism, but you have to renew yourself constantly—it's a cycle.

# A whirl of different worlds

**A bridge** between civilizations, Turkey's culture has been moulded by a society open to outside influences

If it were up to Atilla Koç, Turkey's Minister of Tourism, all roads would lead to Cappadocia. The rock formations of Göreme, a UNESCO World Heritage Site southwest of Kayseri, can easily take one's breath away. Beginning in the 4th century AD, monastic communities here sculpted temples out of the local sedimentary rock. The volcanic stone at times rises out of the foothills in capricious hat-like shapes. At Göreme's Open Air Museum, the not-so-intrepid traveller can wander through a tunnel system leading to halls with frescoes painted in an early Byzantine style. Discoveries like these are not rare in Anatolia.



**Whirling Dervishes** are adherents of the Mevlevi Order, founded in Persia in 1273. The famous dance is performed in remembrance of Allah

And it is no wonder. Known to the Romans as Asia Minor, Anatolia ('Anadolu' in Turkish) has acted like a conveyor-belt of civilizations. From the Neolithic finds at Çatalhöyük to the mysterious beginnings of the Kingdom of Urartu in distant Lake

Van, the Anatolian plateau is a continuum of history. Hittites, Urartians, Greeks, Achaemenids, Assyrians, Armenians—all have left their imprint in the rugged terrain. For a time in the 3rd century BC, this was even home to the Galatians, a Celtic warrior band 'invited' by Nicomedes I of Bythynia to plunder his neighbours. By 278 B.C., today's Turkish capital was known as 'Ancyra' and the lingua franca was Celtic.

With such a tapestry of civilizations, Minister Koç is not worried about satisfying the appetite for intellectual curiosity. "We know that Turkey's unique culture and history are key reasons for tourists to visit our country. One of the great things about Turkey is that it is very easy to make history a significant part of your holiday," he says. The combination of beach resorts in the Aegean and

Mediterranean coasts with day trips into the heartland, including the ruins of Ephesus near Kusadasi, has proven a winning formula. "Yacht tourism is another growth sector. We'd like to see Turkey as a destination for regattas. We expect 900 vessels to tie up in Kusadasi alone," explains Mr Koç.

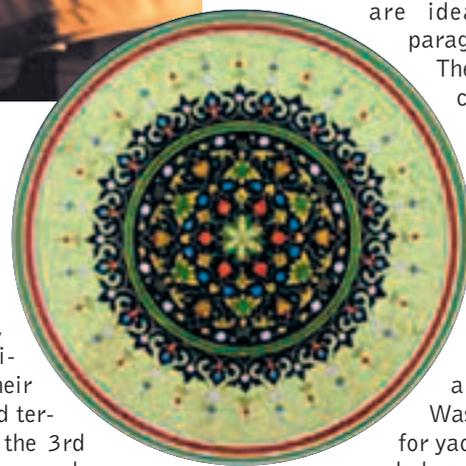
By 2023, the Ministry of Tourism expects 65 million visitors. In the meantime, Minister Koç is pondering other seasonal travel formulas that Turks themselves have cultivated for centuries. Known as 'yayla' (plateau) tourism, it is a unique discovery in this age of global warming. "People from the Black Sea would go up to the mountains to escape humidity. And Mediterranean town-dwellers would escape the heat by heading into the mountains. It's a whole new concept that we'd like to introduce to the world," says Mr Koç. Indeed, the mountains near the Dranaz Pass, along the Black Sea,

are ideal for trekking, paragliding and caving.

The culture there, including bagpipe playing, is very similar to that of Galicia and Asturias in northern Spain.

It may not be an extreme sport, but Ebru Bozacıoğlu, an Istanbul-born financial analyst living in Washington, has settled for yacht tourism. She already has her summer itinerary planned out. It includes a week-long navigational school in Kas, near Bodrum.

Although temperatures in August can often reach 40 degrees Celsius, the water is very cold. "Besides, there is always the 'imbat', a soft afternoon breeze that blows in from the Mediterranean," she asserts. For those with a tighter budget, she suggests a package tour that will take travellers from the ancient city of Ephesus all the way south to Antalya, stopping along the way at places like the underwater museum of Bodrum. Taking day trips on a 'Gumbet', a small steamship, makes travel even cheaper.





## THE MARMARA PERA

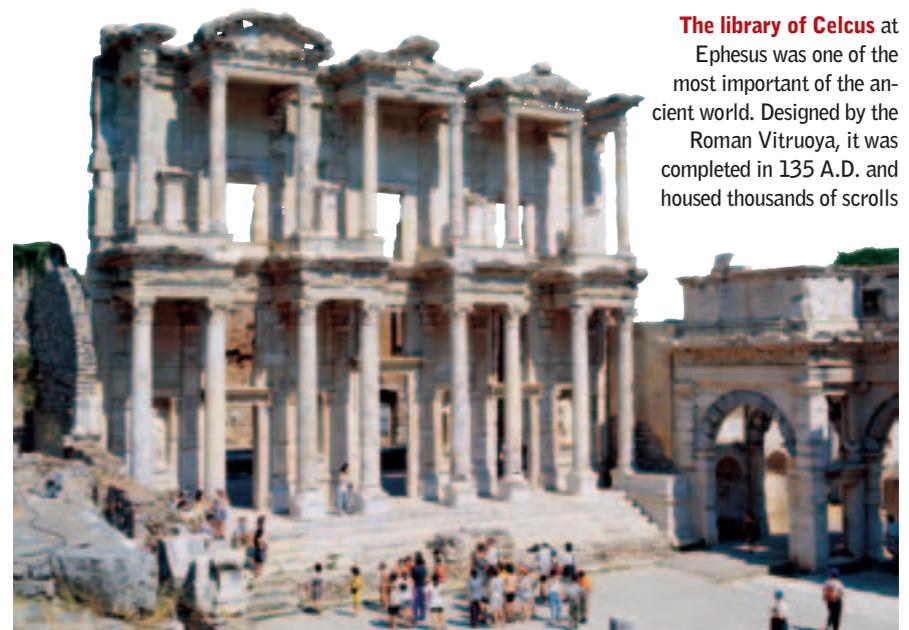
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**The library of Celsus** at Ephesus was one of the most important of the ancient world. Designed by the Roman Vitruvius, it was completed in 135 A.D. and housed thousands of scrolls

# Istanbul for fashion victims



© Fabrika



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© Koton

**Turquality** is tailor-designed to promote Turkish brands as they continue to rise in stature on international markets. Companies such as Ipekyol, Twist, Sarar and Machka collaborate with renowned designers Hussein Chalayan, Dice Kayak and Atıl Kutolglu to produce garments for the high street and the catwalk.

**Long gone** are the traditional garments of Turkey's past, as Istanbul weaves itself a new image as a European centre of fashion

The 1950s Istanbul dress code was an impenitent black. In Orhan Pamuk's novels, the Turkish Nobel Prize winner describes lonely men walking up cobblestone streets at night, invariably clad in shades of grey. The Ottoman Empire had long collapsed and the world had forgotten that Istanbul still existed. "The city into which I was born was poorer, shabbier, and more isolated than it had ever been in its 2000-year history," Pamuk writes. Now fast-forward to 2007. The cobblestone streets are paved over and a flagship store by Guess Jeans has just opened near the Pamuk apartments in Nisantasi. Teenage girls chat on their mobiles as they swish out of a Zara megastore. Older matrons head for espresso at the Cafe Vienna, or to the Starbucks on Vali Konagi street, if they are feeling brash.

Pamuk, incidentally, means 'cotton' in Turkish. Foreign visitors might check out the Koton outlet as they amble down Istiklal. Koton started out in 1988 as a single store. Today, it is a ubiquitous chain of ready-to-wear garments that has spread its designs to 134 franchises worldwide, including London. The turnover of this new global brand has already reached \$100 million.

Much of Koton's recent market penetration is due to Turquality, a government-backed initiative that helps companies maximize their image. The brand-building programme has created synergies in the textile sector, but also aims to slap quality labels on white goods, jewels and automotive parts. "Our overarching goal is to create 10 international brands within 10 years," says Ziya Altinyildiz, a deputy director at Turkey's Foreign Trade Secretariat.

For companies with core business in tex-

tiles, Turquality has helped increase sales in Europe, but not all of them choose to open doors there. After all, retail today can often be more about real estate. Altinyildiz, established in 1952 as a wool fabrics manufacturer, has found new European patrons through its network of stores in Dubai. It reaches European customers in the UAE thanks to the large ratio of expats and has

booked stores in 3 different shopping malls.

Differentiation is key. To compete with markets in Southeast Asia, Turkey has moved away from labour-intensive to technology-driven production. R&D in the textile sector has revolutionized factories producing cotton garments, shoes or leather products. To cater to new segments, companies like Desa Deri, based in Istanbul, have also taken up 'fast fashion' by concentrating on lead time and flexibility. At its tanneries, the Turkish leather specialist has labs that test vegetable dyes and check for hypo-allergenic qualities.

But fashion victims always revert to the classics. That is the market that Pasabahce caters to with its traditional Ottoman glassware, found everywhere in Turkey. ●

**Turkish brand Desa Deri** shops are to Istanbul fashion-conscious shoppers the equivalent of American and western European 'fast fashion' heavyweights such as Gap or H&M.



© Desa Deri

## European Capital of Culture



For centuries, the city on the Bosphorus has exerted an incantatory pull. Although difficult

to put into words, the magnetic draw revolves around grandiose Ottoman mosques, meandering streets, bustling waterways and an air of cosmopolitanism. This is a city steeped in history, where people fish from bridges and milk vendors still ring your doorbell. Pierre Loti, a 19th century French novelist, found the views so bewitching that he never left.

Today Istanbul spreads over 31 districts straddling Europe and Asia. The city centre lies on the shores of the Golden Horn, surrounded by the 5th century AD walls of Theodosius II. Neighbourhoods like Fener or Balat can throw you back to a time when Sephardic Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Turks thrived together. The historic peninsula opens up to a glistening Sea of Marmara, where containerships linger overnight waiting to unload. North of Sultanahmet is the old Genoese trading district of Pera, now known as Beyoglu. Across the Bosphorus lies quaint Kadiköy.

All being well, Istanbul will be Europe's Capital of Culture in 2010. The city's bid, 'Istanbul: City of the Four Elements', was officially presented in 2005. The brainchild of a former Greek Minister of Culture, each year the programme highlights a European city to mobilize municipal authorities. Among the benefits are monument restoration, infrastructure upgrades and greater tourist awareness.

# Shopping for wellness

**A well of opportunities** are placing Turkey at the forefront of the current trend for medical and spa treatment holidaymakers

Spa tourism in Turkey has a long history. Archaeological sites in Anatolia attest to the use of steam baths as a source of health in the Late Bronze Age. In terms of geothermal springs, Turkey is unrivalled in Europe, with 1,300 facilities. The water temperature ranges between 20 and 110 degrees Celsius and the settings are incomparable. But for wellness spas to be truly competitive, the installations often need remodelling. Professional medical care also needs to be expanded.

"We've been implementing a very serious health programme in Turkey in the last 4 years. All government hospitals are being brought under a special rehabilitation initiative by the Ministry of Health in order to make them independent entities," says Recep Akdag, Turkey's Minister of Health. In 2005, the government passed a bill that would allow for Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the health sector. Within 10 years, \$4-6 billion will be invested to improve infrastructure. Although Mr Akdag thinks medical standards in Turkey are very high, the legislation empowers the health sector to take on new challenges.

According to officials, 500,000 foreigners visited Turkey for health reasons in 2006. The central Anatolian district of Yozgat, with its 8 geothermal springs, is a current

hot spot. With its ageing population, countries like the UK could soon be sending elderly family members for professional care in Turkey. But the influx of wellness shoppers is not only about hot springs and geriatric centres. Increasingly, Europeans are finding that prices for plastic surgery, hair transplants, in vitro fertilization, cancer treatment, dialysis and even Lasik are much more competitive in Turkey. The technology is the same, but the lower overhead means medicine here is cheaper.



**MUHARREM USTA**  
Chairman of  
OHSAD

"Currently, we have a lot of people coming to Turkey for cardiovascular surgery and orthopaedics," says Mr Akdag. "Private hospitals are offering these services at much cheaper rates than in Europe." On a recent vis-



**The health system** in Turkey is efficient, modern and technologically advanced



**Turkey's 1,300** natural spas are unequalled in Europe in terms of location, amenities and purity. Wellness tourism is big business in the country, and a government programme to publicise Turkey's excellent medical facilities is set to turn Europe's easternmost country into a continental hotbed of medical tourism

it to Spain, the Health Minister inquired about the cost of an MRI. He was quoted a price of 250 euros and told there was a waiting list. Mr Akdag offered to have hospitals send their patients to Turkey for imaging. "Let us take the MRIs and send the results back to Spain. Meanwhile, patients would benefit from visiting Turkey. It would still be cheaper."

The Ministry of Tourism has decided to appoint a special coordinator for medical tourism with the goal of reaching a volume of \$1 billion in medical procedures per year as of 2006, strictly monitored by the health authorities. Private hospitals in Turkey are discovering new markets. Ophthalmology institutions, such as Istanbul's Dünya Göz Hastanesi, have created partnerships with European health providers. The 120 eye surgeons at Dünya Göz carry out Lasik surgery on 240,000 patients per year, 10,000 of whom are foreigners.

"There are about 300 private hospitals

in Turkey, 30 of which are highly qualified. In Istanbul alone, we have 15 hospitals with state-of-the-art equipment," says Dr Muharrem Usta, the Chairman of the Private Hospitals and Healthcare Organizations Association (Ohsad). As a medical professional, Usta has noticed a sharp decrease in the number of Turks going abroad for treatment. This is an indicator that domestic healthcare has reached a new equilibrium point. Over the next 2 years, Ohsad estimates 40 new hospitals will be built. "These hospitals will have to be accredited by American JCI or British HQS," says Mr Usta.

Meanwhile, an action plan for international services is being hatched. Mr Usta notes that an acceptable death rate for open-heart surgery is 2% in developed countries. The same percentage at some hospitals in Turkey is less than 0.6%. "In the U.S., people choose their hospitals solely on this type of statistic."

As in economics, all change is set off by future expectations. In Turkey, the gradual shift from national healthcare to private medical facilities began before 2000. In the 1990s, per capita income in cities like Istanbul had spiked. With more disposable income, new concepts of quality service emerged. Hospitals turned to ISO 9000 certification for quality control. Suddenly, people realised that healthcare at private medical centres was not only better, but affordable. Prices ultimately triggered a quiet revolution.

"Patient awareness was key. The government supports us because the state lacks the necessary human or technical resources to provide high-quality services. The private sector fills the gap," says Irem Ergün Öcal, chief operating officer at the Florence Nightingale Hospital. Located in Sisli, the heart of modern Istanbul, Florence Nightingale Hospital is a pioneer. It is also Turkey's largest private med-



## Private hospitals fill the gap

ical centre, with 2,400 open-heart surgeries each year. With capacity for 302 beds, it boasts telemedicine links to Europe and the U.S. for diagnostics. Insomniacs—and they are legion in Istanbul—are treated at the hospital's sleep lab. "Private medicine is still expensive compared to the state healthcare system. But we are still cheaper in comparison to U.S. or European hospitals," says Dr Ergün Öcal. Still, it is not so much the money involved as the professionalism that comes with it.

At Florence Nightingale, more than 50% of the doctors have worked in the U.S. Administrators hire English-speaking nurses so they can communicate with foreign outpatients. Because of high demand, Dr Ergün Öcal has decided to open a new department for international patients. "Many of them

stay in Turkey after their treatment for a holiday," she says.

Better prices, patient satisfaction and no waiting lists have contributed to success at Bayindir Hospitals, in Ankara. Only 15 years old, Bayindir Hospitals was accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI) in 2006. Cengiz Babacan, the general manager, remembers how a joint program with the Cleveland Clinic



Foundation in 1986 created the first synergies. The exchange of know-how in cardiovascular disease led to a round of scientific conferences. Within five years, the number of Turkish patients undergoing open-heart surgery in Ohio had tripled. "I know very few people going to clinics abroad. Thanks to the knowledge exchange, people are more aware of this type of operation," says Baba-

can. To attract foreign clients, the hospital group is focusing on complex surgical procedures in which distance and time are not important. Until recently, Bayindir was the only private hospital network in Ankara. Babacan is now considering branching out to Istanbul to increase competitiveness.

Turkey's health expense ratio to GNP is currently at OECD levels of 7.5%. According to Banu Küçükkel Tüccar, the director of Ankara's Güven Hospital, it will soon reach 7.8%. These indicators show that the transformation in medicine here is dramatic. She estimates

that 9% of hospital beds are now in private hands. "Turkey's infrastructure has a lot to offer. Medical tourists leave the country very satisfied," she says. The Güven Hospital's new Obesity Centre takes a multidisciplinary approach to weight loss, with a team of physicians, nutritionists, psychologists and physiotherapists. It is just one example of how expectations have changed.



**Kyrenia** (or Girne) is known for its friendly people, balmy climate and attractive prices



**The Korineum Golf & Country Club** adds a new dimension to tourism in the TRNC

# Northern Cyprus, naturally

**Truly one** of the best-kept secrets of the Mediterranean, this part of Cyprus is a world apart where idleness is a virtue

**A** world apart, this treasure of the eastern Mediterranean is largely unknown because of the EU's long-standing trade embargo. Local travel agents suggest checking the windshield wipers in your rental car upon landing at Ercan International Airport. Not that they are indispensable in this sun-drenched climate. The implication may be that you need to wipe your slate clean before entering the 7th century castles or lying on a beach with a bowl of mint yoghurt. As for the driving—it is best done on the left side of the road, as in the UK.

Fill your imaginary tank at the petrol station outside the airport and head north into Kyrenia (known to locals as Girne). Stop at the village of Agirdag to explore the Hot Cave, a geological wonder that pumps hot air out of the earth's crust. Many of these cave systems are free to explore on your own, but ask the village muhtars (mayors) for practical advice. Inland villages often act as impromptu gateways to archaeological sites. At the Bronze Age necropolis of Karmi, villagers will show you the oldest fertility symbol in Cyprus—an effigy hewn out of local rock. In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), hikers will also find an unsullied natural habitat home to 19 species of Gramineae grasses, including the Pinpinella Cypria.

The TRNC Ministry of Economy and Tourism supports investment in alternative tourism projects, including ecotourism and farm stays. Under this initiative, the ministry has introduced the Karpaz Areas Village Pensions projects. The Karpaz Peninsula, a relatively flat panhandle extending eastward into the Mediterranean, is one of the

prime targets for new tourism infrastructure. There are more than 46 beaches and coves ideal for scuba diving. A beach called Malibu is not far from turtle-nesting areas, and Karpaz is also home to many rare endemic species - the TRNC not having been affected by the last ice age. Often,



there are no other humans in sight, although run-ins with stray donkeys have been reported.

For a less rural experience, there is always the Korineum Golf & Country Club, on the northern coast outside of Esentepe. The 18-hole golf course adds a new dimension to tourism in the TRNC. With stunning views of the Mediterranean, it has been sculpted out of a forest of local pine and olive trees. Old trends in tourism were based upon sun and sand but now tourists from the UK and Europe have more choices. The Korineum Golf and Country Club is designed for a discerning type of clientele.

Since 2003, it has become easier to hop from one part of the island to the other. GNP in 2006 rose 7.8% partly as a result of inflows from tourism and construction. There are now 127 tourist establishments in northern Cyprus, compared to 24 in 1975. However, because public transport across the border is still in its infancy, hold tight to the rental car. And remember to activate the windshield wipers. ●

## FAMOUS VISITORS:

► Richard I was the first Anglo-Frenchman to set foot on Cyprus, after his fleet was diverted there from Rhodes during a storm. He fought Isaac Komnenos, who had imprisoned Richard's sister, at Tremetusia and, according to legend, placed him in silver chains, having vowed not to clap him in irons.

► In 1481, on a visit to the island, Leonardo da Vinci found the time to design the Lefkara lace pattern synonymous with TRNC, while also giving the town's fortifications a much needed touch-up.



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## Indian summer in Kyrenia

For British property investors, a villa on the slopes of Kyrenia of Northern Cyprus can offer the best value in the Mediterranean. With so many days of sunshine, this is prime real estate for second-home hunters. At Lapta, a town founded by the Spartans, the air is so pristine that the waft of junipers rolls down the mountain. Golfers may also find the northern coast enticing. At Esentepe, the Korineum Golf Club has crafted a terraced 18-hole course near the waterfront. The first tee looks over the 9th and 18th greens to maximize dramatic value. Playing golf has never been as challenging, and the developer has constructed golf-side villas scarcely minutes away. At the Esentepe Pine Village, work is on schedule for 65 villas starting at £133,000. The villas, at 125 square metres, will be located in a community with

tennis courts, public swimming pools and a chemist.

Because of the island's long history, land ownership is hotly disputed in Cyprus, both north and south. In 2005, the case of David and Linda Orams resounded in the British media. The couple, UK citizens, had built their dream villa in Kyrenia only to discover that the property was being claimed by a Greek Cypriot lawyer. Because the construction sector is considered the third pillar of the TRNC's economy, the case had wider implications. Erdil Nami, President of the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, thinks ownership battles will end once the island's status is defined.

"They're trying to block our construction with disputes over ownership titles. Their goal is to show the international community that the land belongs to the Greeks and we



**Property investors** find that Kyrenia is one of the greatest opportunities in the Mediterranean

are just exploiting it," says Mr Nami. Turkish Cypriots hold claims to 600,000 acres of their own south of the Green Line. According to Mr Nami, property has many layers. "In the meantime, there are alternative solutions like property swaps or compensation. Until then, our local government is the authority here," he states.

# TÜRK TELEKOM THE LINE



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