

Nicosia, Cyprus

the last divided capital in Europe

Background on Nicosia

Cyprus is an island in the southeastern Mediterranean. After the intercommunal conflict escalated and the Turkish invasion of 1974, the island has been officially divided since 1974 into the south, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), an EU member state but outside Schengen, and the north, the internationally unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). A UN Buffer Zone, or "Green Line", established in 1964 and still patrolled today, cuts across the island, acting as a soft border or a liminal de facto internal EU border. Nine official checkpoints are active across the island.

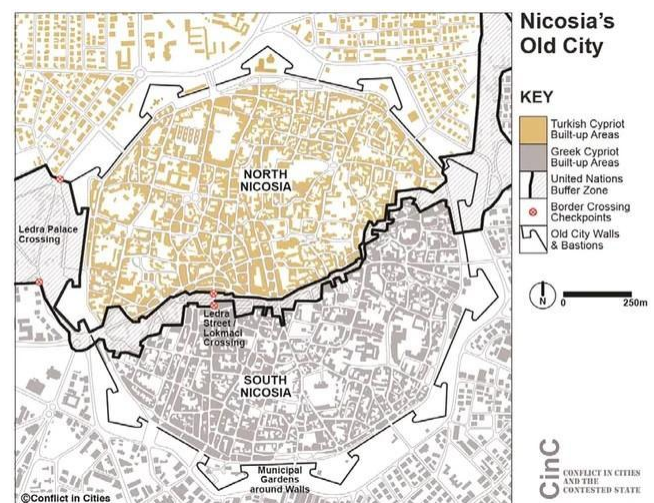
The first crossings opened to Cypriots in 2003, with the first one being Ledra Palace in Nicosia. To cross, a valid visa is required, and documentation is checked by both the police acting in the north and the RoC police.

Nicosia (Lefkosa) is the capital of Cyprus and is known as the last divided capital in Europe. The city, indeed, is formally split by the "Green Line" that divides the city in two. Besides, a division of the island, the "Green Line" entails a division of the population with Greek-Cypriots living in the South and the absolute majority of the Turkish-Cypriots living in the North.

Nicosia was almost continuously inhabited, with archaeological evidence dating its origins to the Neolithic period (5800–5250 BC). Over the centuries, the city developed under successive rulers, each leaving a distinct imprint on its urban landscape and



Map of Cyprus showing the division of the island by the Green Line



Map of Nicosia Old Town divided by the Green Line

cultural identity. During the Byzantine era, Nicosia became the administrative centre of Cyprus, while under the Lusignan dynasty it was established as the island's capital and expanded with palaces, churches, monasteries, and fortifications.

A major transformation occurred during the Venetian period, when the medieval Frankish walls were replaced by the circular fortifications that still define the historic city today. Under Ottoman rule, the city became increasingly multicultural but spatially divided into neighborhoods organised around religious and ethnic communities. Later, during British colonial rule, Nicosia expanded beyond the walls, adopting new architectural styles and modern urban planning approaches. Following the independence of Cyprus in 1960, Nicosia became the capital of the Republic of Cyprus.

Today, Nicosia remains a unique example of a layered Levantine city whose history, architecture, and urban development reflect centuries of cultural interaction, transformation, and resilience.

Possible entry points for digital storytelling

By looking at the history of the city, multiple entry points for digital storytelling become possible:

- Historical development of the city during different periods of time
- Everyday stories related to Nicosia
- The walls that shape the city: fortifications, borders, and identity
- Crossing points: memory, migration, and mobility in Nicosia
- Multiculturality of the city

NOTE

The city is not a neutral or fully accessible historical dataset. Nicosia's divided status and the unresolved political situation of Cyprus affect the availability, visibility, and circulation of sources. This means that there is a potential imbalance in representation, as Turkish Cypriot perspectives and materials may be less accessible through international and institutional channels. A digital story project should therefore critically consider the unequal visibility within the material.

Additional Resources

Efesiou, I., Chrysochou, N., Kalnis, G. (2024). Nicosia a Divided City. A Research Plan for Its Documentation and Holistic Future Development. In: Osman, A., Moropoulou, A., Lampropoulos, K. (eds) Advanced Nondestructive and Structural Techniques for Diagnosis, Redesign and Health Monitoring for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage. TMM 2023. Springer Proceedings in Materials, vol 33. Springer, Cham. Pp.181–198. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-42239-3_15

Shtern M. et al. (2022), City profile: Nicosia, in Cities 130, 1–9.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275122003055#article>

Öngül Z. (2020), Venetian Walls of Nicosia: Between Kyrenia Gate - Barbaro Bastion, Defensive Architecture of the Mediterranean / Vol XI / Navarro Palazón, García-Pulido (eds.), 713–720. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4995/FORTMED2020.2020.11417>

Britannica Encyclopedia: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cyprus/The-Republic-of-Cyprus>

Tales of Cyprus Project: <https://www.talesofcyprus.com/the-project/>

Adventure.Com: <https://adventure.com/greek-turkish-cypriot-nicosia-cyprus/>

On the Buffer zone: <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/en/about-buffer-zone>

Nicosia Municipality: <https://www.nicosia.org.cy/en-GB/discover/sights/the-medieval-walls/>

Department of Antiquity (includes list of monuments, UNESCO monuments, museums, etc.):

https://www.culture.gov.cy/dmiculture/da/da.nsf/DMLmonum_en/DMLmonum_en?OpenDocument

On the Venetian walls: <https://l1nq.com/44zykig>