

Cyprus – people, culture, language

A guide for businesses



The country



Petra Tou Romious, legendary birthplace of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. Source: European Commission

Historical overview: the third largest island in the Mediterranean and the eastern limit of the European Union, Cyprus lies close to Syria, Turkey, the Lebanon and Egypt. This important location and valuable resources of timber and metals attracted Greek settlers three thousand years ago. Copper, used in the manufacture of bronze, gets its name from *Kypros* – the Greek name for the island.

Early wealth brought successive waves of invaders and Cyprus has been ruled by Romans, Franks, Venetians, Ottomans and by Britain in the 20th century. Cyprus finally gained its independence in 1960 with the Greek language, culture and Orthodox Church still the dominant influence, although the north of the island has been partitioned since the 1974 Turkish invasion. Today, 800,000 people live in Cyprus, with 209,000 living in the capital, Nicosia. Around the same number of Greek Cypriots live in London.

Environment: this lovely island with its sunny beaches, cool pine-clad mountains, tranquil timeless villages and beautiful Byzantine churches attracts visitors from all over Europe. Cyprus has many species, particularly plants, which are found nowhere else in the world. Griffon vultures, foxes, fruit-eating bats, sea turtles and moufflon, a wild sheep endemic to Cyprus, can all be seen.

Did you know..?

- For over 50 years a rail system existed in Cyprus, with trains linking the western port of Karavostasi and the main port of Famagusta in the east. The importance of freight eventually outweighed that of passengers and the last train left Lefkosia for Famagusta on 31 December 1951, marking the end of the steam era in Cyprus.
- Pop star George Michael is of Greek-Cypriot origin. He was born Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou on 25 June 1963.
- Richard the Lionheart, the famous crusader, spent his honeymoon in Cyprus in 1192 after marrying Berengaria of Navarre in Limassol.

The people

- **Cultured:** the Cypriots are well educated and tend to be cosmopolitan and hardworking, yet fun-loving, too.
- **Friendly:** you will feel the friendliness almost instantly when you arrive in Cyprus.
- **Religion:** 78% of Cypriots are Greek Orthodox; 18% are Muslim; Maronite, Armenian Apostolic and Christian together make up the remaining 4%.
- **Cultural heritage:** Cypriots are very proud of their cultural heritage, which stretches back more than 9,000 years. Relics from every era can be seen, from Greek temples and Roman mosaics to 15th-century frescoes. Many villages specialise in a particular art form and as you travel around Cyprus, you will come across pottery, silver and copperware, basket weaving, tapestry and Lefkara's famous lacework. Crusader castles rub shoulders with ancient vineyards, frescoed monasteries overlook citrus orchards, and sandy, sun-soaked feet tread Roman mosaic floors.

Business culture and etiquette

- **Be punctual:** arrive for business appointments promptly at the time specified.
- **Meetings:** a brief but firm handshake is the accepted custom at the start and end of a meeting. If you have to leave in the middle of the meeting, leave with a handshake. Note that refusing an offer to drink Greek coffee is considered impolite.
- **Dress code:** Cypriot dress is casual. Nevertheless, be careful to dress properly for a business meeting. For men – a suit and tie. For women – dignified dress. Remain in this dress even if the weather on the island is relatively warm, and don't remove a jacket or tie before your colleague does so.
- **Gifts:** acceptable gifts for business meetings are items for the office or quality pens (including pens with your company logo). On receiving an invitation to a home, chocolates or flowers are a welcome gift.
- **Holidays:** try to avoid business meetings in the months of July and August or around the times of national holidays.



Language

Official language: Greek.

English: the vast majority of business people have a good command of English.

Finding translators/interpreters: in the UK, you can search for local, quality-assured providers on **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals). In Cyprus, translators and interpreters are readily available – the best place to enquire is at the British Embassy.



The foothills of the Troodos mountain range.
Source: European Commission

Basic Greek phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Greek phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases – if you are interested in learning the Greek language, you can search for quality-assured trainers and courses at www.blis.org.uk.

	Greek	Pronunciation
Hello	Γειά σας	Ya-sas
Good day/ morning	Καλημέρα	Kalimera
Good evening	Καλησπέρα	Kalispera
Goodbye	Αντίο	Adio
Yes / no	Ναι / Όχι	Ne / ohí
Please	Παρακαλώ	Parakalo
Thank you	Ευχαριστώ	Efharisto
Excuse me	Με συγχωρείτε	May sinhoritay
My name is...	Με λένε...	May le-ne
What's your name?	Πώς σας λένε	Pos sas le-ne



Cyprus Yacht Harbour
Source: European Commission

Tips for effective communication

1. Be clear and concise

- Less is more: use, short, simple sentences.
- Use active rather than passive voice.
- Don't use idioms, irony, jargon or dialect expressions.

2. Speak more slowly

- Communicate your message in bite-size chunks, and pause regularly...
- ...but maintain the natural rhythm and stress pattern.

3. Reinforce your message

- Maintain eye contact so your listener benefits from facial expression and lip movement.
- Help your audience understand by getting LOUDER on key words and using intonation to communicate meaning.
- Make clear, direct statements.
- 'Triangulate' your ideas: repeat them three times in slightly different ways.

4. Make presentations effective

- Adapt your message to the audience in advance.
- Use appropriate graphics and handouts to enhance communications.
- Send through materials in advance, if possible.
- Signpost your main points and summarise at the end.

5. Double-check understanding

- Yours and theirs! Jot down names, numbers and technicalities.
- Ask your audience to repeat key points or arrangements back to you.

Signposting and resources

- **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals) – an on-line, quality-assured database of translators, interpreters, language trainers and cultural consultants in your area. You can search for BLIS providers offering Greek language services in the East Midlands.

Sources

Research and text: Central European Development Agency (CEDA) 01302 367662
Euro Information Centre www.euro-info.org.uk
International House www.ihworld.com

Other resources: UK Trade & Investment www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

Photographs: European Commission www.europa.eu.int

Information correct on 9 February 2005

RLN East Midlands: promoting a greater capability in language and cultural skills for business and employment.
Tel: 0115 854 1399
Fax: 0115 854 1617
www.rln-eastmidlands.com