



Cyprus April 2024

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Monday 23 Apr 24

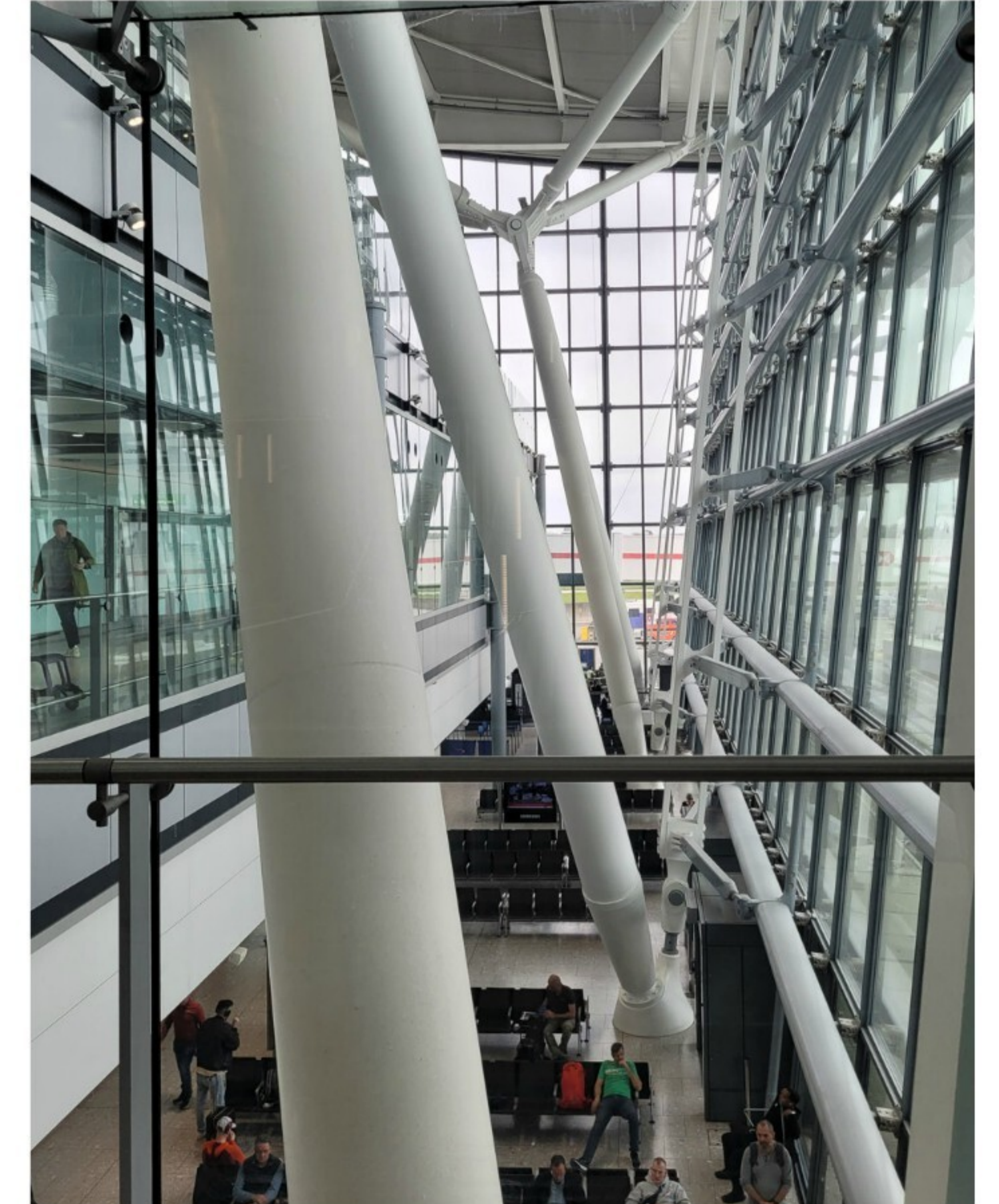
Cambridge to Kyrenia

It's an 0745 pick-up because we're off to Cyprus for a week.

It's an easy enough journey and we compensate for the austerity of BA by buying lunch at Itsu in advance.

We're on-time into Lanarka where the e-gates work and the bags come though promptly. Then it's a drive of a little short of two hours including a good ten minutes to cross the border.

The Hotel Pia Bella is a little strange. An old and rather tired frontage but then a modern new wing with well appointed rooms. There's also a large restaurant where we enjoy a buffet supper which I wash down with a generous glass of Efes.



Tuesday 23 Apr 24 Kyrenia and Bellapais

First breakfast at a new hotel is always a big test. The buffet is uninspiring but there is an omelette chef and I do get a freshly made Americano so I'm ready for the day.

We begin with a climb to the look out above St Hilarion Castle, the largest of three crusader fortresses in the Kyrenia mountains.

Then we head over to Bellapais, the village close to Kyrenia made famous by Lawrence Durrell in his book 'Bitter lemons of Cyprus'. It's a picture perfect village with shops, restaurants and the 12th century Bellapais Abbey. We sample Turkish Delight and sesame peanuts with carob syrup at Aphrodite's Secret Nut Shop and I'm impressed enough to buy some!

Lunch is provided at the tourist hotel Altinkaya on the road back to Kyrenia. It's a simple, nourishing meal of meze, chicken and fresh fruit but nothing special. I wash it down with a bottle of Efes.

After lunch we head down to the old harbour which is guarded by the Venetian castle where we visit the Shipwreck Museum after which we take a walk down by the recently renovated harbour. There are lots of restaurants but sadly this is not walking distance from our hotel.

Back at the Pia Bella I enjoy 10 lengths in the excellent swimming pool before dinner which is another rather uninspiring buffet. I have a small glass of Efes and a glass of local red.





Wednesday 24 Apr 24 Famagusta

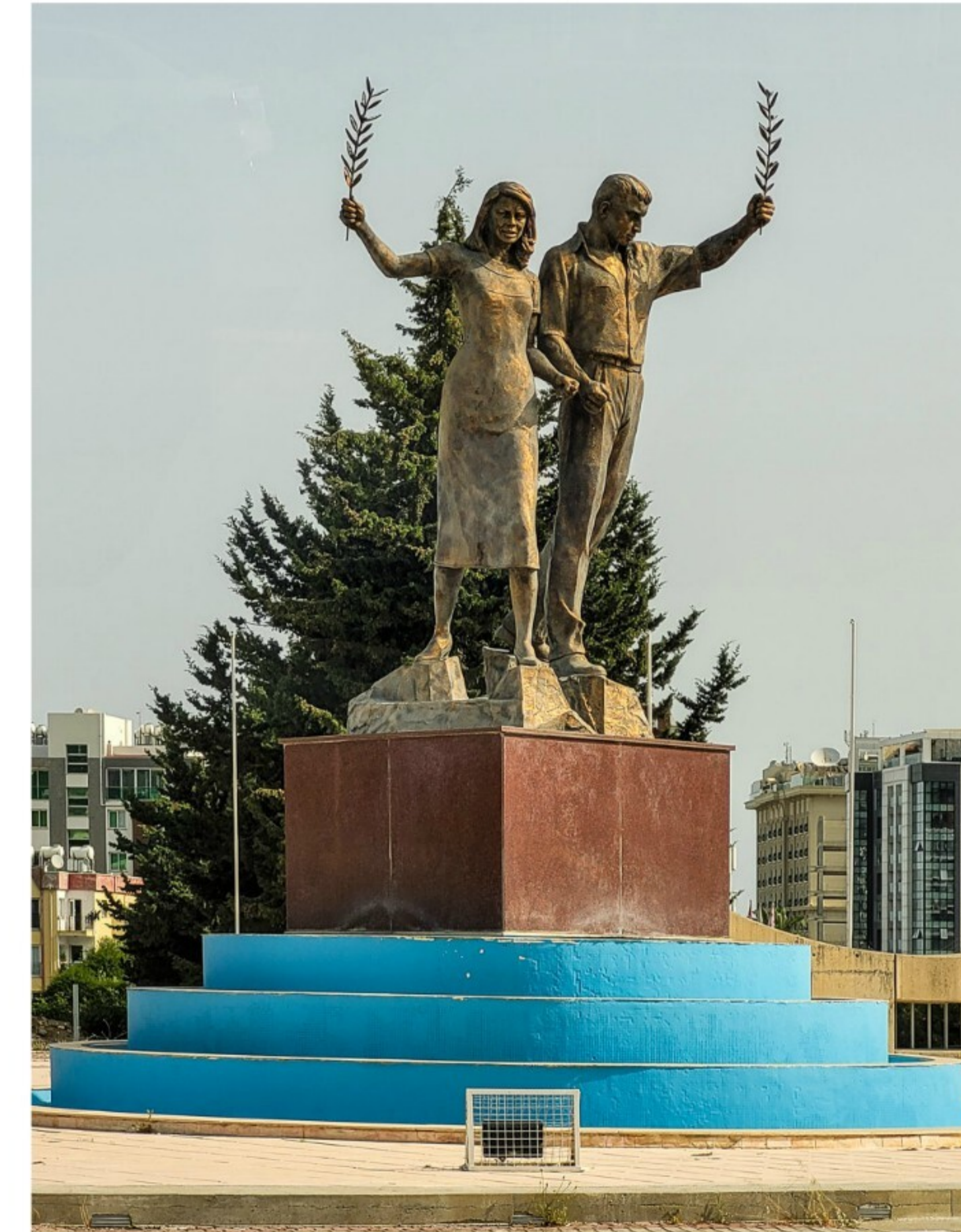
Today we head out to the east past the Peace Memorial into the Kyrenia Mountains where we get a sight of the Five Fingers Mountain before descending to the Mesaouri plain.

First stop today is the site of St Barnabus' Archeological and Icon Museum where I get my first Cypriot coffee of the trip. The site consists of a church now serving as the museum, holding a stunning collection of Cypriot artefacts dating back as far as the 7th century BC, the monastery now sheltering an archaeological collection, and a chapel housing the tomb of the saint.

Stop number two is the Roman site at Salamis before we get to see the ghost community of Varosia. This was previously a largely thriving Greek Cypriot beach resort. When the Turks invaded in 1974 everyone fled and it's stood vacant ever since.

Lunch is at Incir Alter in Famagusta where we've pre-ordered. I have a grilled sea bream, which is not as good as I'd get at home, and a bottle of Bolmonti (Efes by another name!). Then we have spare time in Famagusta to see the 14th century St Nicholas Cathedral which is now the Lala Mustafa Pasa Camii (mosque). Finally there's time to visit the incredible Petek cake shop and ice cream parlour before returning to Kyrenia.

We give up on the hotel and have dinner at Sea Food Market which does what it says on the can. We select our fish and it gets cooked. Simple. I have an excellent and rather large sea bream and a coupe of glasses of very drinkable Daytona dry white wine from Turkey.







Thursday 25 Apr 24 Nicosia (north)

Today's our day to visit the north, Turkish part of Nicosia. Said to be the only divided city left.

We see/drive alongside the Green Line so-called because it was drawn with a green 'crayon' by Major General Peter Young. Then we walk, it's not a big city, and spend time in the Museum in the former surgery/house of Dr Fazil Kucuk, first Vice President of Cyprus. He has a good story and although you could class him as a revolutionary he was really a liberal patriot concerned with protecting the rights of the minority Turks.

Our coffee/toilet stop is in Buyuk Han, a splendidly renovated/preserved caravanserai. We then walk to the bazaar which is somewhat modest and then to the frontier at Leda street. We're told to bring our passports so that we can cross for lunch. No one does.

We return to Buyuk Han and have lunch at Sedirhan. I have an Adana Kebap and a bottle of Amsterdam. However this is 8% and a 500ml bottle so I order a can of Sprite and drink a shandy!

We're back at the hotel at about 1600 so plenty of time to catch up with my diary etc. I check out the garden bar drinks menu. Cocktails are just TRY200 a go which seems like a good deal so I have an excellent Pina Colada.

Our VJV highlight dinner is at the Abbey Bell Tower in Bellapais. It's pretty ordinary. I order a bottle of Villa Doluca red to share with my neighbours.





Friday 26 Apr 24 Nicosia (south)

Today we have an 0930 pick up only it's not. Our new guide has gone to the wrong hotel!

As we leave the north we get a last look at the Suat Günsel Mosque. Then we cross the border and we're into an urban environment which might just as well be anywhere else in Europe. Such is the power of EU funding!

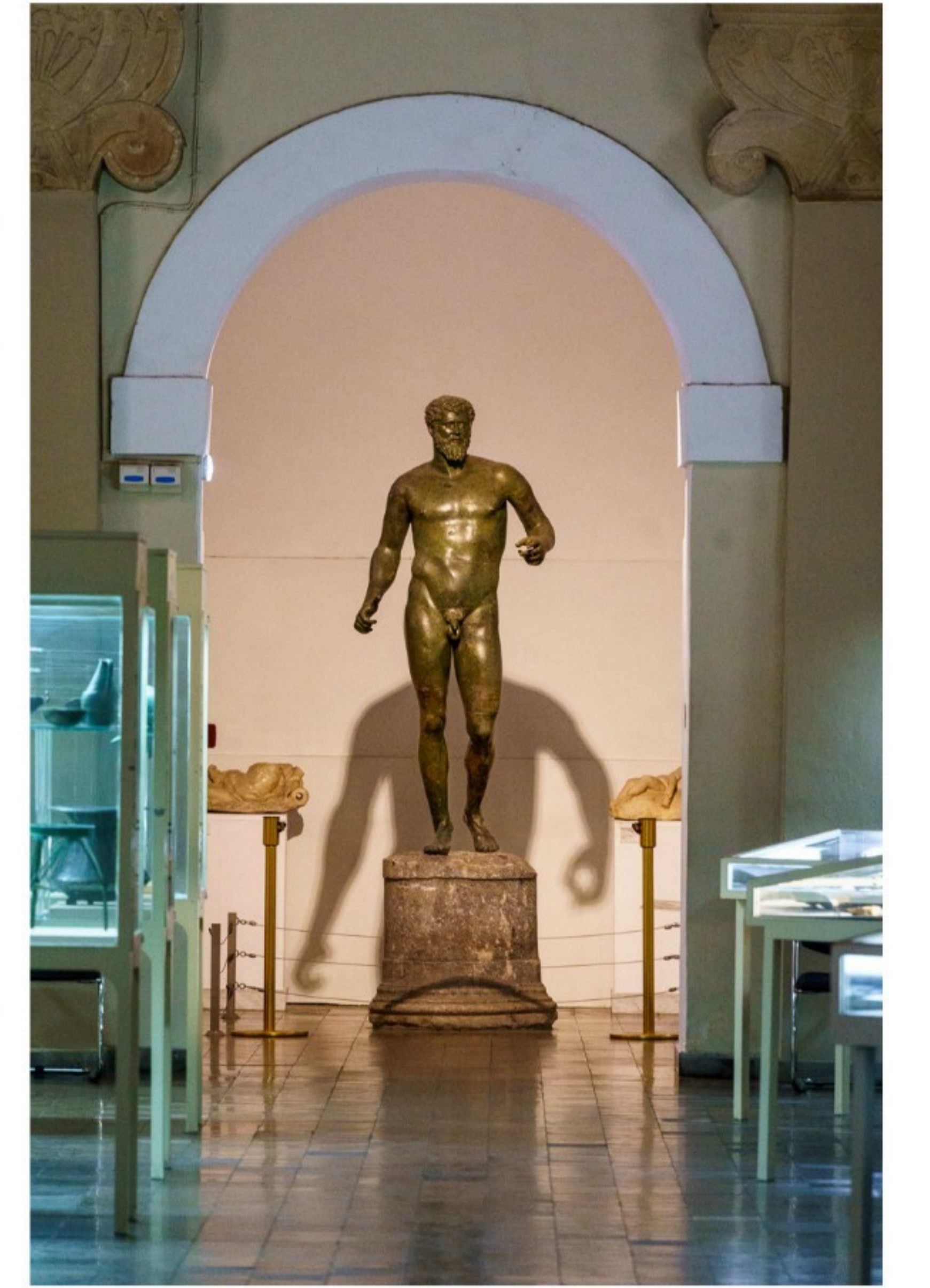
We go by the Archbishop Makarios Cultural Foundation and visit the Cathedral of St John. Of course all the churches and cathedrals we visit in the south are Greek Orthodox so lots of icons, plenty of gold and no photography. Next door we visit the Folk Art museum and near by there's a spanking new Church of St Barnabus and St Macario which was built during Covid.

We check out the border crossing from the Greek side and note that Leda Street continues. Our guide tells us that the two city mayors do their best to keep the city as integrated as possible so that when it's unified it can be a smooth process.

We grab lunch at an Italian café where I amuse the waiter by asking for a Margherita half with cheese and half without. Now the beer comes courtesy of Keo. After lunch it's the Archeology Museum (Cyprus Museum) with a Frappe at a very pleasant café in the garden afterwards.

We're in room 646 with a sea view at the Hotel Mediterranean. Then it's a buffet dinner where we share a bottle of excellent Koukouvagia Cypriot red.





Saturday 27 Apr 24 Troodos Mountains

We're off into the mountains today and we're told it will be cold so I take my sweater. A good decision. The Troodos Mountains run the length of Cyprus but when people talk about going to Troodos they mean Troodos Square where we stop for coffee close to Mount Olympus (1952m).

Then we head up to the tomb of Archbishop Makarios which is 'guarded' by an enormous statue of the man. Our guide says she's sure he would not like it. Then we head off on an ecclesiastical tour our Cyprus' UNESCO listed frescoed Byzantine churches.

We start at Kykkos where the church is 'opulent', large and bedecked with gold. It's within a monastery which is built in the style of mountain institutions worldwide: lots of stone. There's one more church before lunch viz Agios Nikolaos it's Stegis. It's a strange building, almost gingerbread style, with a peculiar roof.

We're now close to Kakopetria which is a village with a choice of restaurants in the centre. We opt for Zoumos where I enjoy barbeque lamb and a bottle of Keo.

After lunch we have the final churches of the day: the Panagia tis Podythou and the much smaller Panagia Theotokou. That's enough churches for the day.

Dinner is in the Italian restaurant on the deck. I enjoy a Negroni then contrefilet di manzo which is superb. And a glass, a big one, of local red to wash it down. A good end to a long day.





Sunday 28 Apr 24 Paphos

We leave at 0830 to enable us to drive along the coast road by Limassol instead of taking the motorway. It's illuminating. The beach runs for 10-20km and since the financial crisis local planning rules have been relaxed to encourage investment and that means several ridiculous high rises. The result is a mess and I wonder if they're going to regret it.

First stop is the 'birthplace' of Aphrodite at Kouklia. We don't actually visit the Sanctuary of Aphrodite but stop overlooking the sea and observe, and photograph, the three rocks in the sea from which she is said to have emerged.

Then we drive on to Paphos an early capital of Cyprus and a most attractive small city. We start at the Hrysopolitissa Basilica which dates back to the fourth century and is now home to the small Agia Kyriaki church. Then it's the big one, the Paphos Archeological Site with lots of mosaics. Finally we have the Tombs of the Kings only there are no Kings buried there.

It's another free lunch and we go to Yiannis Kathikas Tavern in Kathikas. For once it's a good lunch with fresh mezze, a surprisingly good couscous with yoghurt and super succulent pork. There's one last call after lunch and that's to the Archeological Site of Kourion. It's another well kept and presented site with a theatre, baths and more mosaics.

We dine again on the deck, this time courtesy of the Asian restaurant. I have another Negroni and then we share a bottle of Black Sheep, a Greek Merlot Shiraz blend.





Monday 29 Apr 24 Limassol to Cambridge

A morning start without the alarm! It'll be a long day today with no formal program and a pick up at 1630. We won't be home until soon after midnight, fingers crossed.

We take a walk along the front as far as Puesta Oyster Bar & Grill and get a coffee there. It looks like it might be a good place for lunch.

We begin to camp out on the balcony next to the lobby bar and I order a Pina Colada. Then Juni finds that she's lost her credit card. It must have dropped out of her phone case this morning. No matter we're told we can just block the card online which we do.

We have lunch at Puesta. It's first class, next to the beach and genuinely a fish restaurant. I have an excellent whole sea bass and a glass of local white finished off by an espresso. Nice to end the holiday on a high note.

The ride to the airport is smooth. It's one of those vast airports built for the summer crowds so it's pleasantly empty. Check in, immigration and security all go smoothly.

Our flight is fine and BA even manages to serve me a gin & tonic (at a price). We touch down in London at 2225 and I'm walking off the plane at 2240 and we're met by Sherzad and on the road by 2305. The advantages of late night driving is no queues, but there are road works, and we're home by 0030. Everything worked and at home everything's still working.



My five highlights

Dr Fazil Kucuk's museum in Nicosia. Nice to see someone who seems to have been a fundamentally good man remembered for what he's achieved.

Cypriot village food in Kathikas and Kakopetria. An unfortunate contrast to the free lunches on the first days and to the dinner buffets in both hotels which really weren't very good.

Our room in the Mediterranean Beach Hotel. A sixth floor sea view, spacious room, UK plugs and USB sockets and decent lighting. Sadly no walk in shower!

Turkish Delight in Bellapais. I've always imagined this to be a sickly jelly but the product we tasted here was anything but.

Cypriot people everywhere, both north and south of the Green Line. People rarely disappoint me and in Cyprus they were unfailingly friendly. They spoke English willingly. Cypriots in the north have every justification to feel that they've not had a fair deal but they never let it interfere with their interactions with us.

For the full text of my blog go to <https://bit.ly/3QxMeF7>

