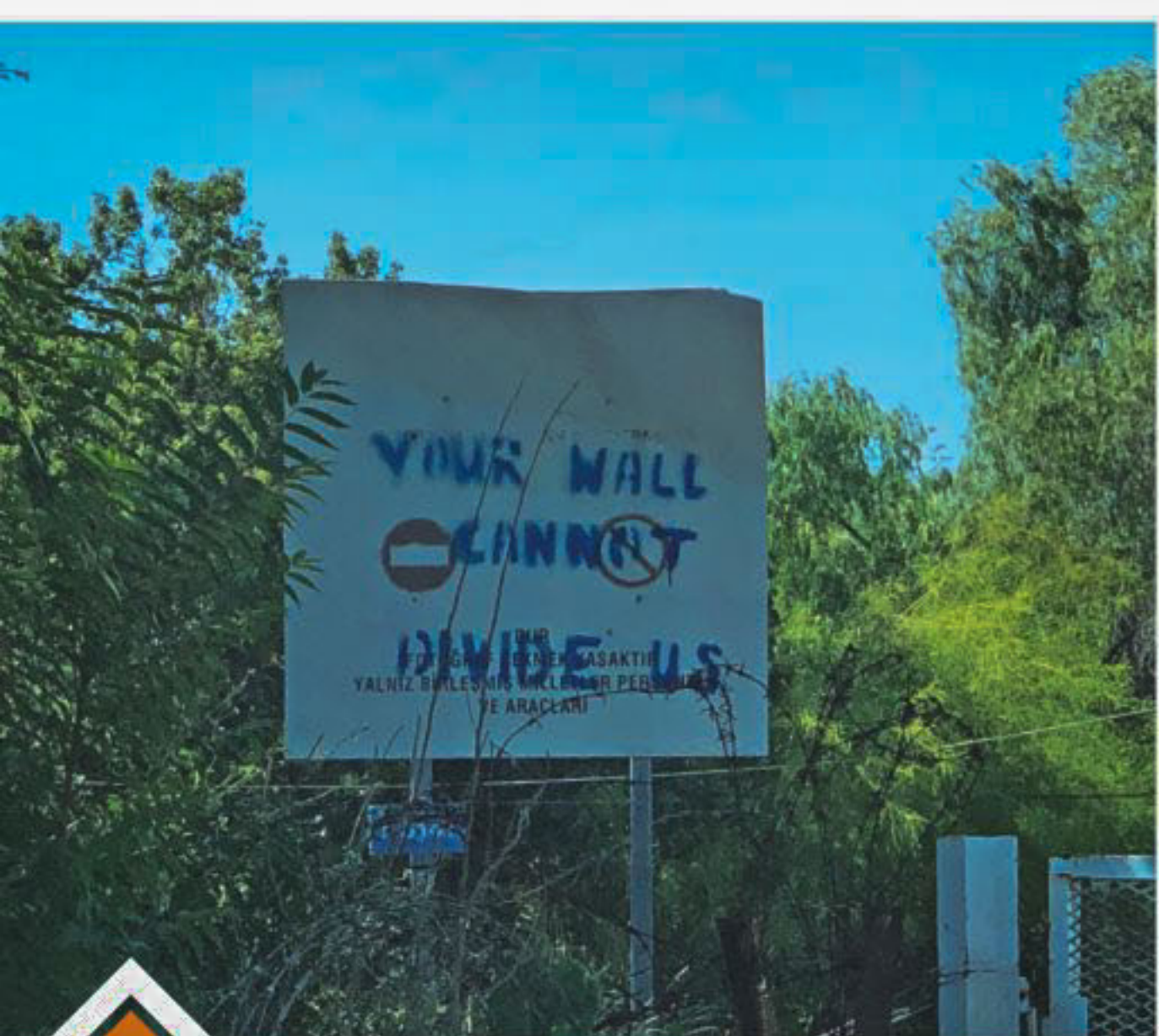


10 THINGS I LEARNT IN AND ABOUT CYPRUS THE TINY ISLAND NATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Cyprus is a beautiful little island in a very strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea. It has been influenced by many diverse cultures, languages and people. In close proximity to Lebanon, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, this island has been home to some of the world's rarest historical treasures. Hosting just a little over 1.1 million people, Cyprus is the third most populous island in the Mediterranean. I have been to Cyprus twice—once in 2017 and once this year. Both times, I've been impressed by the complexity of its history and the warmth of its people. Here are 10 things I learnt in and about Cyprus.



1. Cyprus is home to Europe's last divided capital—Nicosia/Lefkosa/Lefkosia: Most people who have not been here do not know that the capital has a border right through the centre separating the north of the island from the south.



2. The north of Cyprus is under military occupation: Since the Cypriot dispute ended in 1974, the north of the country has been under Turkish military occupation. It is, in fact, recognised as a state, only by Turkey, called the Turkish Northern Republic of Cyprus.

3. The Turkish Army's military occupation of northern Cyprus is illegal under international law. Having been to both parts of the Island, I learnt one uniting factor though—Cypriots from both sides want to be reunified.

4. One (of many) similarities I found between Greek and Turkish Cypriots is hospitality. On all ends of the island, I was welcomed and felt that Cypriots went out of their way to show me the beauty of their little island.

5. Although small, this island has been conquered and fought over constantly over the years due to its strategic location within the Mediterranean.



6. Cyprus is believed to be the birthplace of the Greek Goddess of Beauty and Love, Aphrodite. Legend has it that Zeus threw his sperm around Aphrodite's rock and from the foams of the water emerged Aphrodite. It is said that if you swim around the rocks three times, you are destined to find true love (yes, of course, I swam around it but we'll just have to wait and see whether or not I'll meet my Prince Charming). Cyprus is also home to Aphrodite's rock. Legend has it that if you wash your face with the water from the baths, you will be gifted with eternal youth and beauty (yes, I did that too and was recently told that I look 22, so yay?)



8. Halloumi, the delicious salty semi-hard cheese made from sheep or goat's milk and a staple in Middle Eastern, Turkish and Greek cuisines, originates from Cyprus. It was initially made during the Medieval Byzantine era. Initially, this cheese was preserved using mint—today, mint is used as a garnish. In hot summer days, it's common to eat the salty Halloumi with sweet fresh watermelon.

9. The Greek spoken in Cyprus is relatively different from the Greek spoken in Greece. In fact, my Cypriot friends told me that the Greeks in Greece apparently joke about their accent.

10. Finally, it is believed that if you tie a handkerchief to a tree at the entrance of the Christian catacombs in Paphos, many of your wishes may come true. For example, infertile women can bear children, lost husbands return and family feuds are resolved; in some cases, it is also believed that tying something belonging to a long lost lover may even mean they will return.

7. The water is unbelievable. As expected, Cyprus is surrounded by clear blue water of the Mediterranean Sea. From the waters in Kyrenia up north to the Blue Lagoon on the west and Paphos in the South, everything looks like a postcard!

