

North Cyprus

The door is always open

London - Karen Dabrowska

When Leman Ozkan, the Trade Relations Manager for Europe of the North Cyprus Tourism Centre, says the Turks are the good guys it is difficult not to believe her.

On April 24th this year over 65 percent of the Turkish Cypriots in North Cyprus voted for reunification and the island's entry into the EU as a one country. But over 75 percent of the Greek Cypriots in the south of the country voted against reunification.

"This showed the whole world that the Turkish Cypriots are willing to co-operate", Ms Ozkan emphasized. The EU, USA, UK and the Organisation of Islamic Conference all made some references to the results of the referendum and suggested that some of the embargoes imposed on the north should be lifted".

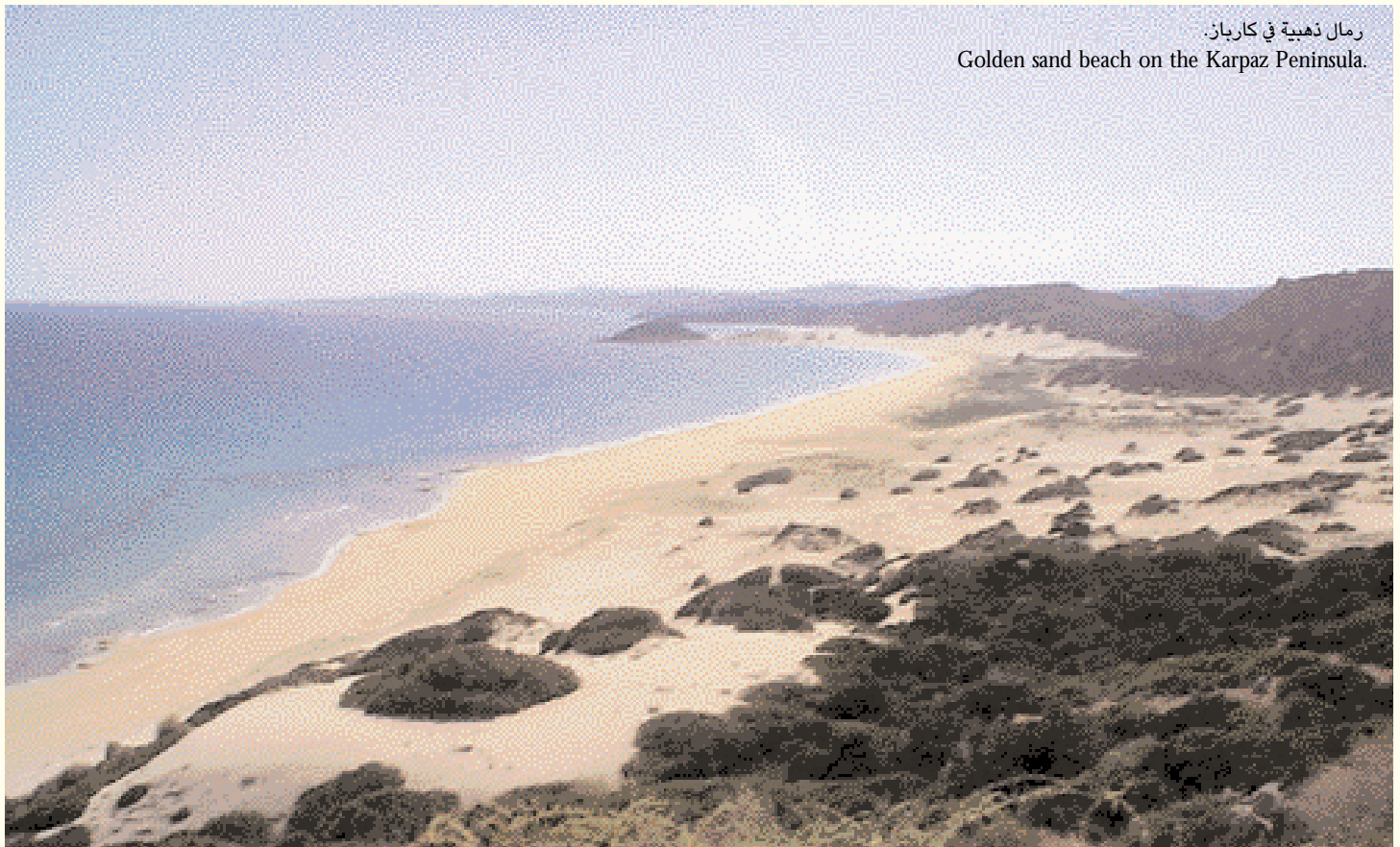
The island of Cyprus has a total area of

3,571 square miles. Its population is estimated at 793,000. Prior to 1974, the country experienced a long period of intercommunal strife between its Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. In response, the U.N. Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) began peacekeeping operations in 1964. The island has been divided since the Turkish military intervention of 1974, following a coup d'etat directed from Greece; the southern part of the island is under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, while the northern part is ruled by a Turkish Cypriot administration. In 1983 that administration proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of

Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC"). The "TRNC" is not recognized by the United States or any other country except Turkey. A buffer zone patrolled by the UNFICYP separates the two parts.

The embargo means no direct flights. Anyone flying to the island must first land in Turkey, even if it is only for 45 minutes spent on board the aircraft, and then continue the journey.

But, contrary to hostile propaganda, the north of the island is not a military zone and visitors have always been welcome. It is possible for EU citizens to travel from the south to the north of the island and vice versa. The ➤



رمال ذهبية في كارباز.
Golden sand beach on the Karpaz Peninsula.

same goes for non-EU citizens as long as they have a valid visa.

Ms Ozkan is sad there was no unification but she is doing her best to make the most of a less than ideal situation and promote the north as the 'authentic Mediterranean', a non commercialized Mediterranean just as it was during the 70s. No queues, no burger bars, no massive construction – the people are friendly, the beaches are clean and a holiday can combine sun, sea and culture, and of course delicious, home-made Turkish food. North Cyprus has five distinct areas: the West around Guzelyurt is the most fertile market-garden region with citrus groves and cultivated vegetables.

The long northern coastline is backed by Besparmak (Five Fingers) mountains with their dramatic wooded slopes and craggy summits. Sandy beaches and rocky coves await discovery along this shore and the Venetian harbour town of Girne (Kyrenia) sits in the centre. The finger of the Karpaz Peninsula points to Syria. This is both a remote and beautiful landscape with deserted beaches and ancient villages with once-grand basilicas, tombs and ruins which reflect a rich, cultural heritage: the Romans, Egyptians, Greeks, Venetians, French and Turks have all left a rich mixture of archaeological, architectural and cultural legacies.

The eastern coastal area of Gazi Magusa Bay is one long, very fine beach, safe for bathing and snorkeling. It is also the area for shopping and recreation.

No direct flights means there are few human visitors flying into north Cyprus every summer – just under 70,000 in 2003 from the UK. But the birds make up for the lack of humans – about 100 million birds from some 250 species touch down on this garden island enroute from the Near and Middle East to Europe. Their visit is part of the rich natural heritage that an island with the diversity of North Cyprus has to offer from the top of its 3000-ft plus Mount Selvii to the bottom of its gentle sloping coastal waters where the famous turtles make their homes. Most spring visitors are fascinated by 30 varieties of orchids not to mention the citrus groves of Guzelyurt where the scent of lemons, limes and pomegranates fills the air.

If the quick pace of life in the West makes life on earth hell than North Cyprus could be the heaven many tourists are seeking. The Karpaz Peninsula is the region for people who like their seclusion to the exclusion of almost everyone else. Although

remote today this panhandle of land that points to Syria has a busy history that left the landscape littered with ancient villages, basilicas and tombs as well as the once –important Roman city of Carpasia (Karpaz).

The eternally optimistic Ms Ozkan is convinced that direct flights to North Cyprus are on the horizon. But even without direct flights getting to North Cyprus is almost as

easy as visiting the southern part of the island. All national carriers, Turkish Airlines and Cyprus Turkish Airlines as well as ONUR Air operated by Travel World International in London have scheduled flights to Istanbul, Antalya and Ankara. From Turkey to Ercan the airport of North Cyprus there are daily frequent connections and the refrain extended to visitors is always welcome, welcome, welcome – and it is from the heart. ■



Ms. Leyman Ozkan (right) with Mrs. Ayse Donmezer, the former Minister of Economy in the TRNC government.

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