

# Lefke

## A quiet village for a restful holiday

By Karen Dabrowska



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Lefke, in one of the lushest and most fertile pockets of North Cyprus is a pretty unspoiled rural town. The head of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Sheikh Nazim lives here. The students at the European University of Lefke also live up the town. The main tourist attraction is the Ottoman mosque. Spending some time in the Turkish Cypriot countryside is an unforgettable experience.

Lefke's Islamic heritage consists of three mosques and 38 Ottoman houses, most in urgent need of restoration. In the main mosque's garden is the tomb of Piri Osman Pasa who died in 1839. The gardens of the mosque have a 175-year-old tree, Oriental Plane also known as Cinar Agaci. This magnificent specimen is guaranteed a long life by a law which makes it illegal to cut

down trees without official permission.

The second mosque, known as the middle mosque, is from the Ottoman era and the third mosque, the lower mosque, has been restored by Sheikh Nazim. More than 100,000 followers from every continent visit the Sheikh every year.

The second major institution in town is the European University of Lefke whose 900 students generate revenue of \$150 m annually for the government. The campus is modern, it is an internationally recognised university, which offers under and post graduate courses in most subjects.

Many of the older residents remember the town in its hey day when the Cyprus Mining Co-operation (CMC) was prospecting for gold, iron and asbestos. The company

arrived in 1916, built tasteful, small houses for its employees and stayed until 1974 when the island was divided into Greek and Turkish sectors.

The citrus industry is also suffering. In 1974 the town was producing 240,000 tonnes of citrus – today it is only producing 35,000 and the produce cannot be sold easily because of the embargo. There is an olive oil factory still living in the 1950s with antiquated machines and wheat production has become an activity of the past. There were once three water powered wheat crushing machines but they are no where to be found. Our guide, Senol Ciner, ends his tour of Lefke with a delicious lunch at the Isikcan Restaurant in the small fishing village of Gemikonagi a few minutes drive from Lefke. ■