

Varosha - Cyprus ghost town

Admission is free and the people in uniform behind the barrier are friendly. You want to look in the backpack. Alcohol with you or a drone? The streets are newly asphalted and a contrast to the crumbling facades. Fresh white lines mark bike lanes. Bicycles can be rented right at the entrance.



Bicycles can be rented at the visitor entrance to the Varoscha quarter / © Photo: Georg Berg

Varoscha, once a fashionable hot spot on the Mediterranean, has been in a deep slumber for almost half a century. Magnificence and beauty can still be sensed. On [Wikipedia](#) there is a kind of inventory list. As of August 14, 1974, the district of the port city of Famagusta, which is called Varoscha, Varosia or Maraş in Turkish, had 45 hotels with 10,000 beds, 60 apartment hotels, 99 recreation centers, 21 banks, 24 theaters and cinemas and around 3,000 smaller ones and larger stores. Another 380 buildings were still under construction in 1974. The former tourist stronghold on the Mediterranean has been a restricted military area since the Turkish invasion in 1974. Since the end of 2020, a small part of the ghost town has been open to civilians. A walk not only into the past, because the bitter truth has been for a few weeks that a war in the middle of Europe is a reality again.



Cafe and snack bar on Democracy Street in the ghost town of Varoscha / Maraş / © Photo: Georg Berg

War in Europe – then and now

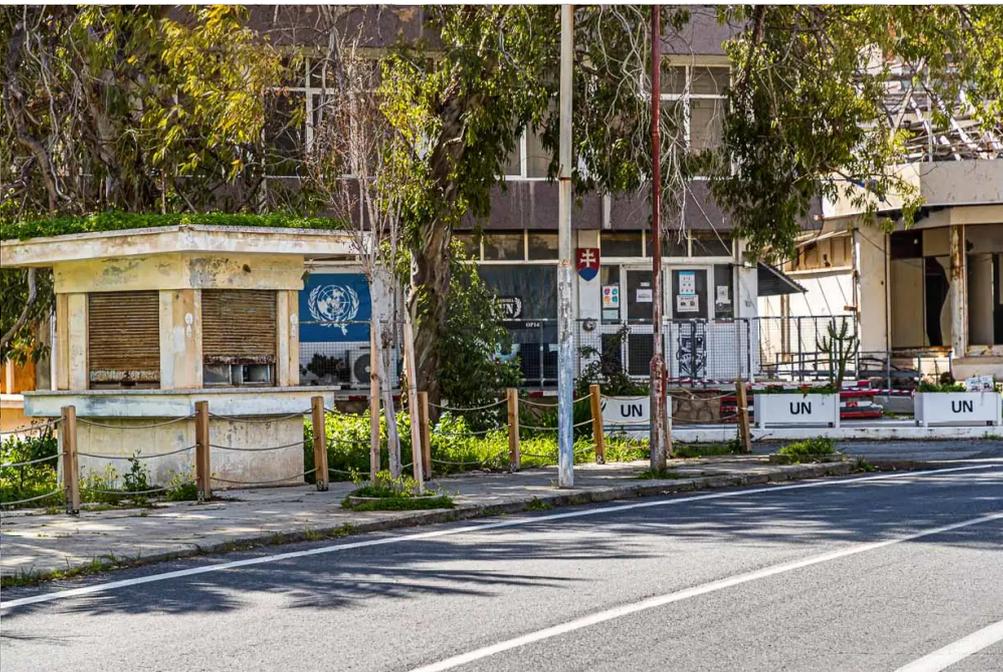
March 2022 - Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine is only a few days old. We walk the streets of a ghost town and look through windowless houses and crumbling facades. Cities I didn't even know the name of recently are running through my head. Kharkiv, Kherson, Mariupol. What does it look like there now? On August 14, 1974, people fled the holiday paradise of Varoscha. Residents, business people and tourists. At that time, Varosha was not bombed as heavily as many cities in eastern Ukraine are today. Varosha was neither totally destroyed nor rebuilt. If you walk through Berlin today, you will hardly find any traces of the Berlin Wall. If you go through Varosha, faded advertising signs, powerful,



If you look closely, you will see architectural classics. 1960s design never left here. Time has simply stood still, while politicians are still unable to agree on a new status for the district / © Photo: Georg Berg

Green Line - the divided island

In July 1974, the north of the island of Cyprus was occupied by Turkey after Greek putschists tried to force the island to be annexed to Greece. In November 1983, the *Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus* was unilaterally proclaimed for the northern part, but three days later the UN declared it invalid. In May 2004 the whole island of Cyprus became the *Republic of Cyprus* admitted to the EU. In fact, only the southern part of the island belongs to the territory of the EU. Turkey is the only country to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. International sanctions have prevented direct flights to Ercan Airport in Northern Cyprus for decades. Airlines are only allowed to fly to the north of the island with a stopover in Turkey. To this day, Varosha is used as a pawn for the lifting of such sanctions.



UN base / © Photo: Georg Berg

Since 1963, north and south have been separated by the so-called *Green Line*, which runs right through the capital Nicosia. UN soldiers have been stationed at this border since 1984 and are also present in the restricted area of the ghost town of Varoscha.

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has offered to return their properties to the original owners if sanctions are lifted as early as the 1990s. Given the complex interests of all those involved, it is difficult to judge whether the current opening in Varoscha is a harbinger of a creeping resettlement.





material

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