

Historical Overview - Step through time in Famagusta

Early History

Built on or near the settlement known in antiquity as Arisnoe, the small fishing village that became Famagusta may have been founded by Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt around 285 BC. At present, there is no archaeological evidence of urban activity before 1191 within the old walls.

Byzantine Period (AD 324-1191)

Ammochostos, which means "buried in the sand" in Greek, is first mentioned as a place name in the 7th century. Although the material evidence is lacking, it seems likely that – as the island's only natural deep-water harbor – the area of Famagusta would have been a fishing port of the eastern coast. No monuments or churches from this early period survive. However, the small, much-altered Franco-Byzantine church known as St. Symeon Chapel possibly stands on earlier foundations dating to the Byzantine period.

Early Frankish Period (1191-1192)

Latin rule in Cyprus begins in 1191 with the arrival on the island of England's Richard I (1157-1199), better known as the Lionheart. As the story goes, Richard was traveling by sea to the Holy Land during the Third Crusade when the ship of his younger sister Joan and fiancé, Berengaria of Navarre, was forced ashore by a storm. Snubbed and harassed by the island's self-appointed ruler, Isaac Comnenus, Richard famously came to their rescue, defeating the rogue emperor in a near-bloodless battle and conquering the Byzantine province in a matter of weeks. Moving on, he then sold it to the order of the Knights Templar who, lacking in funds and far outnumbered by an unruly population, gave it back in 1192.

Lusignan Kingdom (1192-1489)

The island was then sold to the French crusader Guy de Lusignan, former King of Jerusalem. With Guy's death in 1194, his older brother and successor Alamey was quick to secure the legitimacy of his reign. A Latin Catholic hierarchy was installed over the Greek Orthodox Church and an archbishop was installed in Nicosia with bishops in Paphos, Limassol and Famagusta. Alamey was then crowned as the first ruling monarch of the new Kingdom of Cyprus.

Dating as far back as 1196, the town of Famagusta is mentioned repeatedly in written documents. However, its importance as a fortress city and first-rate port effectively began in 1291 with the fall of Acre, and with it the last crusader possessions in Syria and Palestine. Those surviving Christians who remained in the East – the now dispossessed Latin nobles, merchant class, and various knights and clergy – relocated an mass to Cyprus, settling mainly in Famagusta. This influx of refugees initiated a period of spectacular development for the town as a commercial center and new crusader stronghold. Famagusta had thus become the most easterly outpost of Latin Christendom in the Mediterranean, and riches derived from trade with the East poured into the city.

The 1300s witnessed Famagusta's medieval fortification by Henry II (1285-1324): a wall went up around the burgeoning center and the existing castle was redesigned and strengthened. Master masons were imported from the West to begin construction on a new Latin cathedral dedicated, as was its predecessor, to St. Nicholas the Confessor. In its wake, churches, convents and monasteries built in a regional Gothic style originating from both Western Europe and the Holy Land sprang up by the dozen. By the 1330s, owing to the phenomenal success of its merchant class, Famagusta's wealth and munificence had become legendary, often outshining even that of the European courts it aspired to emulate. Indeed, included among the numerous traders were Syrians, Armenians, Italians, Greeks and Jews, all procuring extraordinary profits. Two of the most successful of these groups were the Syrians and the Genoese, whose monuments – built to proud ends – define Famagusta's landscape to this day (see the Nestorian Church and St. George of the Latins).

Walking Tour of Famagusta



Famagusta

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HISTORICAL

TRAIL

Famagusta

Explore an outdoor museum...



Appreciating Cyprus' multicultural past is one way of ensuring a more peaceful future. This brochure was developed to highlight Famagusta's unique place in the region's history and to increase the awareness of residents and visitors alike regarding the importance of preserving its rich cultural heritage for future generations. It was developed by the Supporting Activities that Value the Environment (SAVE) project. SAVE works to build local capacity to better protect and manage Cyprus' cultural and natural resources. SAVE is implemented by International Resources Group (IRG) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



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Ottoman Period (1571-1878)

The Ottomans arrived in 1570 and had conquered all of Cyprus by 1571. Nicosia fell within seven weeks. Famagusta withstood a year of siege and incessant bombardment, during which time scores of historic buildings were damaged or destroyed. The Church of St. George of the Latins in direct line of fire from the Cantalial bastion, which marked the Ottoman Turks' main position of assault, was terminally weakened, and is believed to have collapsed a century or so later during an earthquake. Judging from the distance to which the vaulting was thrown away from the foundations, St. George of the Latins – which may have been used as a storage depot for munitions – is thought to have exploded after being bombarded. The once splendid royal palace was reduced to rubble. It was a legendarily heroic defense. The Venetians were rumored to be outnumbered by as many as twenty to one and to have endured over 100,000 Ottoman cannonballs. Upon entering the surrendered city and realizing the immense size of the party of its defenders, the Orthodox Church was granted back their confiscated property. The feudal system, which had kept common Cypriots tied to serfdom for centuries, was abolished and replaced with limited personal rights for the lower classes who could own and sell property. In the long run, this enabled some upward mobility, though Cyprus' countryside was now desperately poor and in ruin, with most of its leaders and the educated class gone for good.

Famagusta within the walls, however, was closed to non-Muslims. Some repairs were made to the fortifications in order to rectify damage sustained during the siege, and a number of public works projects were initiated early on to improve the city's communal facilities – most notably the efforts of Ajda Cater Papa aimed at improving freshwater distribution to Famagusta's now overwhelmingly Muslim residents. However, the city appears for the most part to have been left quietly to decay, serving no significant purpose either in commerce or government. Indeed, it was considered remote enough for the Turkish nationalist poet Namik Kemal to be exiled and imprisoned there in 1878.

The history of modern Cyprus begins in 1878, the year the Ottomans gave the island over to British control as a diplomatic move in exchange for their support against Russian encroachment in eastern Anatolia. (The island was officially annexed in 1914, becoming a Crown Colony in 1925.) Most Cypriots preferred Western rule to that of the Ottomans. Modernization brought important social changes, such as improved health and welfare, an increase in life expectancy, and new opportunities for education. However, it is a matter of opinion as to whether historic Famagusta benefited in any way from British investments in reviving the city's ancient harbor – indeed turning it into a modern industrial port – and constructing Cyprus' first railway linking Famagusta to Nicosia and Morphou. Sadly, the railway was short-lived and industrialization meant dramatic alterations needed to be made to Famagusta's medieval fabric. A number of new gates were cut through the ancient walls in order to access the port and accommodate traffic. Ancient and medieval stonework – which had been piled up around the town since the Ottomans had taken over 300 years before – was collected and shipped off to Egypt to be used in the construction of the Suez Canal. Britain's principal concern and interest in the region, indeed, a vast quantity of pre-made stones, as well as precious antiquities were looted from the island during this period, initiating the first antiquities laws protecting Cyprus' fragile cultural heritage.



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Venetian Colonial Rule (1489-1571)

Although the Lusignan James II (1460-1473) succeeded in expelling the Genoese from Famagusta in 1464, nearly a century of occupation had taken its toll. Indeed, James' subsequent marriage to Caterina Cornaro (1474-1489) – a Venetian, and the kingdom's last monarch – was, like most royal marriages, a purely diplomatic tactic intended to gain the Genoese occupation of Famagusta marked a period of swift decline during which the once magnificent city succumbed to deterioration and relative impoverishment. As quickly as it had begun, Famagusta's brief but spectacular Golden Age came to an end. The invaders destroyed the personal property and wealth of the town's nobility and merchant class alike, forcing a drastic decline in non-Genoese trade. Moreover, Genoa's aggressive attitude towards its neighbors and rival trading partners – in particular the Republic of Venice – deterred most Western merchants from reinvesting in the city.

British Colonial Rule (1878-1960)

At the close of the 15th century, Venice was a massive maritime power controlling a major part of trade between Europe and the Near East. This was mainly (although, not exclusively) due to its possession of a large number of territories along the east coast of the Adriatic Sea, in southern Greece, and even within Ottoman-controlled Constantinople. However, Venice soon recognized the dual imperative of reviving the island's economy while improving its defenses against the inevitable aggression of competitors. Indeed, Famagusta's medieval fortifications were in need of repairs and updating. Gunpowder had been introduced in Europe in the intervening years, and the old walls were no match for cannon and artillery. Thus commenced the seemingly overwhelming task of modernization – it is thought that no less than twenty Renaissance military architects were brought in for the job. Rumor has it that even Leonardo da Vinci may have lent his expertise.

However, despite this major undertaking, it does not appear as if any significant development occurred within Famagusta itself during this period. Some houses were certainly built, the royal palace was substantially remodeled, and certain churches were enlarged or altered. Yet, within the walls, the overall appearance of the city remained essentially Lusignan. Appearances aside, the Venetian presence marks an important period of recovery for Cyprus. It is well documented that Venice made great efforts to repopulate the island, which had been devastated not only by the Black Death of 1348, but also by recurrent outbreaks of the plague in the 15th century. Although the principal motives for this policy were to increase the profitability of her newly acquired colony – population expansion was clearly necessary for increasing agricultural production and revenues from taxation – Venice also understood the importance of maintaining the general prosperity of the island.



'It is the richest of all cities and her citizens are the richest of men.'

Ludolf von Sudheim, De Terra Sancta, 1336



Famagusta Historic Trail

1. Venetian Fortifications: Land Gate and Ravelin
2. Kızıl Hamam (Scarlet Bath)
3. Kuru Çesme (Dry Fountain)
4. Nestorian Church
5. Church of St. Anne
6. Tanners' Mosque
7. Carmelite Church
8. Armenian Church
9. Martinengo Bastion
10. Kertikli Hamam (Notched Bath)
11. Diamante Bastion
12. Church of St. Fotu
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1. Venetian Fortifications: Land Gate and Ravelin

The original entrance to the Land Gate and its numerous corridors have been cleared of great quantities of earth and rubble, revealing a maze of secret passages.

The Venetian walls and fortifications that surround the historic town are a superlative example of Renaissance military architecture. They were built between 1495-1564, incorporating the existing medieval Lusignan walls and towers, which were dramatically reduced in height, remodeled and strengthened. The great bastion of the Land Gate – also known as Limassol Gate – was one of two original entrances to the walled city (the other, the Sea Gate to the northeast, offers access from the port). It is protected by the impressive ravelin, inside which is a labyrinth of ramps, steps and rooms. The Land Gate was renamed Akkule or the 'White Bastion' by the Ottomans, as it was from here that the Venetians waved the white flag of surrender at the end of the siege of 1570-71.

It is said that in 1571, after weeks of battling and tunneling under the walls, the Ottomans finally managed to gain access to the ravelin. The Venetians, determined to withstand the advance, blew up their own secret passage under the walls, burying a thousand Ottoman soldiers in the rubble, as well as 100 of their own men.

Visitor info: The tourist information office is housed in the masjid (Muslims often refer to the mosque by its Arabic name, masjid).

2. Kızıl Hamam (Scarlet Bath)

The foundations of this 16th century Ottoman bathhouse, or hamam, are visible to the right at the corner of Suphi Ezel Street, on the way to the Carmelite and Armenian Churches.

3. Kuru Çesme (Dry Fountain)

This unrestored 17th-century Ottoman fountain is incorporated into the Venetian walling, just down from the Kızıl Hamam on the opposite side of Kuru Çesme Street.

4. Nestorian Church

A short detour off the main road and across the small parking lot to the right, leads to the so-called Nestorian Church. The identification of this building as such is based solely on medieval sources which testify to the extraordinary wealth of the Nestorian merchant community of Famagusta. Syriac inscriptions associated with the church's remaining wall paintings would appear to support this. However, no surviving document directly identifies the edifice as belonging specifically to the Nestorian community.

The church was built in the mid-14th century and greatly enlarged not long after by the addition of two side aisles and apses to the north and south. Note on the northwest side the rather European-looking belfry arcade. Although structurally enhanced in the 1930s, the church has remained intact throughout the centuries.

The Nestorian Church now houses a cultural center of the Eastern Mediterranean University, and an Anglican church service is held on Sunday mornings and holidays.

5. Church of St. Anne

The small and well-proportioned Church of St. Anne presents a number of distinctly Gothic elements. It closely resembles the Carmelite Church in style and, therefore, probably dates from the same period of the 1300s. Due to its location in what is thought to have been the sector of the city inhabited by Oriental Christians, it may well have been a Maronite church. However, it is well documented that there was also a Benedictine nunnery of this name in medieval Famagusta, and so it is also very possible that this is the remains of their church.

6. Tanners' Mosque

This 15th century former church is known today as the Tanners' Mosque. Judging from its location in the Oriental sector, it likely originally belonged to one of the groups of Oriental Christians, such as the Melkites or Jacobites. It was converted into a mosque by the Ottomans. It presents a mixture of local Gothic (Cypriot) and regional Crusader styles.

7. Carmelite Church

In a field across the road from the Tanners' Mosque are the ruins of the Carmelite Church. It is here that St. Peter Thomas, Carmelite Friar, Patriarch of Constantinople and papal legate to the East, was buried in 1366. Fragments of the church's medieval paintings are still visible, showing, where discernible, Latin rather than Orthodox influences. The earliest sections of the church are believed to date from the second quarter of the 14th century.

8. Armenian Church

Adjacent to the Carmelite Church is the smaller, better preserved Armenian Church. Judging by style, it appears to date from the 1360s. Little remains of its interior decoration, but Armenian inscriptions can still be made out on the exterior walls.

9. Martinengo Bastion

A short walk up the rampart just behind the Armenian Church takes visitors to the top of the Martinengo Bastion. Here one obtains a sweeping view of the dry moat and modern town.

10. Kertikli Hamam (Notched Bath)

Heading back to town, along Nami Efendi street, one passes through a residential area. The Kertikli Hamam is a 16th-century bathhouse which was built by the Ottomans not long after their arrival. Evidence suggests that it was built on the foundations of a medieval structure. Although ruinous, its six well-proportioned domes are still intact.

11. Diamante Bastion

The Diamante Bastion is situated at the northern corner of the town, where the walls of Famagusta turn to face the sea. Climb here - with caution - for a view of the harbor.

12. Church of St. Fotu

Turkish legend calls this site St. Fotu, a name associated with 'light'. The name suggests a reference to the Church of St. Clare, which was tied to a convent of Franciscan nuns known as 'Poor Clares' which existed in Famagusta in the 14th century.

13. Church of St. George of the Latins

Although now in ruins, some of the finest medieval carved stone ornamentation in Cyprus can be found at St. George of the Latins. The church dates back to the first decade of the 14th century (between 1302 and 1307), and the superb quality of the masonry and workmanship suggests that it was built by master masons of the cathedral workshop who were trained in the Cologne tradition. Note the intricately carved capitals and remains of the church's once elegant vaulting. It is likely that this was a Genoese church, belonging to the influential Genoese merchant community of Famagusta, which had established itself in the town at an early date, and thrived after the fall of Acre in 1291.

14. Citadel / Othello's Tower

During the British period, the south-west corner tower of the Citadel came to be known as Othello's Tower in homage to Shakespeare's tragic hero, a 16th-century Venetian captain and Moor, stationed 'somewhere in Cyprus'.

Famagusta's medieval castle or Citadel overlooking the harbor. Built first by the Lusignans during the reign of Henry II (1285-1324), it was later enlarged, altered and greatly reinforced by the Venetians. Entrance is at the southwest corner through an arched gate adjacent to what is known today as Othello's Tower, so-named for Shakespeare's tragic hero.

15. Sea Gate

A commemorative plaque dated 1496 and naming the Venetian Captain of Famagusta, Nicola Priolo, decorates the Sea Gate's exterior entrance to the town.

The Sea Gate is one of two original entrances to the walled city (also see the Land Gate). Although medieval in its origins, it gets its distinctive appearance from the Venetians, having been remodeled together with the Citadel and city walls in the 16th century.

The present iron-clad wooden gate is an Ottoman replacement, whereas the heavy iron portcullis, which could be raised and lowered by chains, is original and dates back to the Venetian period.

Adjacent to the inner side of the Sea Gate is a large stone lion, also probably dating back to the Venetian period.

Visitor info: Climb here for sweeping views of the harbour.

16. Hospital of St. Anthony

Just south of the Sea Gate and adjacent to the city walls are the remains of the Hospital of St. Anthony. Massive granite columns taken from nearby Salamis can be seen broken and scattered about the grounds.

Encased within the distinctly Venetian-looking exterior is the original medieval fortress. This is the oldest surviving Lusignan building in Famagusta. Its main features include a rectangular plan with a large, central court and, on the north side, a series of five high vaulted chambers that make up the Great Hall. In an adjacent chamber to the southeast, note the low arched passage at the back that leads into the depths of the northeast sea-side bastion.

17. Canbulat Gate and Bastion

This gate is named after Canbulat, the Bey of Kilis, one of the heroes of the Ottoman siege of Famagusta. It houses the hero's entombed remains and has become a place of pilgrimage for modern-day Turks visiting Cyprus. Legend maintains that a fig tree grew up over the tomb, the fruits of which were believed to promote fertility in the women who visited. The gate also houses a small museum with displays of artillery, traditional costumes, Ottoman tiles and Venetian pottery.

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Climb to the upper levels of the embattlements for fine views of the city and harbor. From the northeast tower you can catch a glimpse of the modern port below and the ventilation shafts – designed to carry away smoke from cannon and artillery – that drop down to medieval passages.

It is rumored that the Venetians filled many of the Citadel's ventilation shafts with earth and rubble to prevent cannon balls from penetrating them. Legends persist to this day that these buried chambers may contain hidden treasure, left behind by the Venetians when they surrendered to the Ottomans.

Be sure to see the marble plaque above the entrance gate to the Citadel. It shows in carved relief the winged lion of St. Mark – symbol of the Venetian Republic – standing adjacent to one of the original Lusignan towers that protected the town prior to the Venetian fortifications. It commemorates 1492, the year the Citadel was enlarged and remodeled and names the then prefect of Famagusta, Nicola Foscarini.

Visitor info: There is a small fee for admission to the site.

18 & 19. Church of St. Zoni & St. Nikolaos Church

Heading northwest from Canbulat Gate, on the way back to the center of town are two small and closely situated Franco-Byzantine-style churches. To the north are the ruins of St. Nikolaos Church; to the west is the better-preserved St. Zoni. Both are typical of Orthodox churches built in the later medieval period, incorporating elements of regional Gothic architecture into their otherwise Byzantine forms. Note, for example, the pointed arch of the south door of St. Zoni. Both churches may well stand on earlier foundations, though archaeological evidence confirming this has yet to be uncovered. It is very likely that these sites were abandoned or used for other purposes in Ottoman times, as contemporary authors tell us that Christians were excluded from the walled town during this period. However, the Greek Cathedral and the chapel of St. Symeon continued to be owned by the Greek church.

20. Church of St. George of the Greeks

Due to its location at the edge of the Greek quarter, the church was heavily bombarded during the siege of 1570-71. Note how the exterior of the apse has been pitted by cannon balls.

Built in the 1360s, this once magnificent cathedral presents a rare example in the East of an Orthodox church built in the 'Cypriot' Gothic style of the Lusignans. However, by virtue of its functioning as the Orthodox cathedral of the town, it also incorporates some minor functional elements borrowed from local Byzantine architecture. Moreover, incorporated, relic-like into its south aisle is an older and much smaller Franco-Byzantine church. This is widely assumed to be St. Symeon's Chapel, due to the number of 16th century sources that refer to the existence of a church of that name in connection with the larger cathedral of St. George. It is also thought by some to be the original Greek cathedral and the medieval seat of Famagusta's Orthodox bishopric, possibly having once contained the tomb of St. Epiphanius.

Visitor info: The site is now gated and a car park is situated adjacent to the west end.

21. St. Nicholas Cathedral / Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque

The centuries-old tree in front of the main door is an East African fig (Ficus vycornurus). It is thought to have been planted when the cathedral was built in the early 14th century.

Famagusta's former St. Nicholas Cathedral of St. Nicholas is widely agreed to be one of the most splendid and beautiful of the Frankish buildings that survives in the Near East. It was here, between the years 1291 and 1373, and after having first been crowned as kings of Cyprus in the capital, that the coronation of the Lusignan rulers as kings of Jerusalem took place. And it was here that the island's last monarch, Queen Caterina Cornaro, yielded to the monopolizing powers of the Venetian Republic and abdicated peacefully in 1489.

The cathedral's construction began around 1300, on the site of its predecessor of the same name. Of the remaining Gothic-style churches in Famagusta, it is the one most closely related to the most innovative and interesting architectural developments that were at that time taking place in the West – particularly in the Rhineland.

The cathedral marks a departure in style from the plainer and more solid forms of the 13th century that are exemplified by Nicosia Cathedral and Bellapais Abbey Church. It set a decorative and architectural standard of building which was followed throughout the island from the 14th century onward.

Although heavily bombarded by Ottoman cannon on the exterior, the building nevertheless retains much of its original style and elegance, as is exemplified by its west facade. Three elaborately carved portals with tracery-filled, openwork gables face the town's main square and former royal palace. To the left of the facade are a small Ottoman tomb dating to 1700 and a small shrine. The old Venetian loggia, which faces the ancient fig tree, is now used by the faithful for ritual ablutions.

The mosque is commonly called Agia Sophia, like the great Semeliye mosque of Nicosia (formerly the Latin Cathedral of St. Sophia), having received the dedication to Lala Mustafa Paşa.

Visitor info: Visitors are allowed inside the mosque between times of prayer. There is a small charge for foreign visitors.

22. Namik Kemal Square

At the northeast corner of the square is an elevated bronze bust of the Turkish poet Namik Kemal. Kemal's patriotic writings became a source of inspiration for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the 20th century leader of the Turkish nationalist movement and founder of the modern Republic of Turkey.

Famagusta's picturesque central square has witnessed much history. Here, during an outbreak of the plague in 1362, the papal legate, Peter Thomas, led his procession of barefooted followers from the cathedral into the town. In 1372, a large number of Genoese were killed in a riot that took place at the coronation of Peter II – an incident that ultimately led to Cyprus' war with Genoa. That same year, St. Bridget cursed first the Latins for their excesses, and then the Greeks for remaining outside the Catholic faith. And in 1571, when the Ottoman general, Lala Mustafa, finally took Famagusta, the Venetian Captain Marcantonio Bragadino was tortured and flayed alive before a crowd gathered before the cathedral.

Today, the square is named after the 19th century Turkish poet Namik Kemal (1840-1888), considered by many to be the Shakespeare of Turkish literature.

23. Venetian House

This house is one of the few domestic buildings in Famagusta that retains sections dating from the Venetian period. Its north-facing entrance and facade present a solid and orderly appearance typical of the Italian Renaissance. It has been known in the past as the Queen's house as it is believed that the last Queen of Cyprus, Caterina Cornaro, lived here just prior to her abdication in 1489.

24. Twin Churches

Built unusually side by side, it has been traditionally assumed that these two churches once belonged to the two military orders of the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaller. Their identification is based on the singular evidence of a coat of arms – a shield with a cross resembling the heraldic device of the knights of St. John – which has been added above the south door of the smaller of the two buildings. This identification however, has recently been called into question, as the churches could be assigned to one or more of several Latin nunneries or other churches in the city, or possibly to a private Genoese family.

The larger of the two buildings to the north appears to be earlier; the smaller, a single-celled chapel to the south, is probably late 14th century.

25. Ağa Cafer Paşa Hamam

This early Ottoman hamam was built by Ağa Cafer Paşa in 1601 within the grounds of the Franciscan monastery; the changing-room is part of an earlier medieval building, distinguished from the later construction by a distinctly Frankish cross-vault.

26. Franciscan Church and Monastery

Dating with some certainty from the late 13th century are the ruins of the Franciscan Church, one of the earliest of the Latin ecclesiastical buildings in Famagusta. The site, immediately north of the Venetian Palace, was once a substantial complex of buildings, which together comprised a monastery covering a generous area within the city. The plan of the present church resembles that of the slightly later Carmelites, with its three-sided apse and later added side chapels that extend north and south from the central bay of the nave. Note the medieval stonework piled up outside the west door.

The Franciscans formed one of the oldest and most important Latin religious orders in Cyprus. It is believed that they were already established in Nicosia by about 1230. St. Francis himself visited Cyprus on his voyage to the Holy Land during the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221).

Overall, the church's architecture is simple, yet elegant. Its interior plan consists of a nave with two aisles leading to a central apse and two apsidal chapels. The aisles are divided into five bays each. It appears that this church was already out of use during Venetian times, which is thought to have contributed to its fine state of preservation, having been spared from destruction by the conquering Ottoman militia.

It was the second church after the cathedral to be taken over, becoming the Sinan Paşa Mosque in 1572. In British and more recent times it has been used as a storage depot and even a library.

27. Venetian Palace

Three rounded arches are flanked by four massive granite columns taken from Salamis. Over the central arch is a coat of arms belonging to Giovanni Renier, Venetian Captain of Cyprus in 1552.

Only the grand east facade and back walls of the courtyard remain today of the Venetian Palace. Originally a royal palace of the Lusignans, this site became the official residence of the acting Venetian governor – the *Palazzo del Provveditore* – beginning in 1489. In the 16th century, the palace was substantially remodeled, its Gothic features being replaced with the simple and solid forms of the Italian Renaissance. Inside the courtyard are several contemporary cannon, a neatly piled collection of cannon balls, and pieces of a large granite column. The architectural remnants were taken from Salamis.

Although its central sections were completely destroyed during the Ottoman siege, its facade nonetheless survives as a very rare example in Cyprus of 16th century Venetian architecture.

28. Ağa Cafer Paşa Çesme (Ağa Cafer Paşa Fountain)

In the northwest corner of Namik Kemal Square, to the right of the Venetian facade, is the Ağa Cafer Paşa Fountain, one of the many Ottoman fountains that still adorn Famagusta. It is believed to have been installed in 1597. Ağa Cafer Paşa was a well-known, 16/17th century Ottoman governor who set out to improve freshwater distribution to the inhabitants of Famagusta. The Roman sarcophagus is thought to have come from Paphos, moved to the palace by the Venetians.

29. Namik Kemal Prison & Museum

Known as the Shakespeare of Turkish literature, Namik Kemal was exiled to Cyprus after offending the Turkish Sultan in his memorable work, *Vatan Yahut Silistre*. He was imprisoned in the present building from 1873-1876. Today, the house adjacent to the prison is a museum dedicated to Kemal's life and works.

Visitor info: Opening hours are roughly from 9 am to 4:45 pm daily. A small fee is charged for admission.

30. Church of Sts. Peter & Paul

Celebi Mehmet Efendi, an 18th century Turkish diplomat who died in 1732 is buried just beyond the exterior south wall and buttressing.

Across a narrow street parallel to the south side of the royal palace, is the site historically known as the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. Although theories abound, a positive identification of this building has so far eluded scholars.

It is one of the largest, and best preserved of the regional Gothic-style churches in Famagusta, closely resembling the Greek Cathedral in plan, and dating with a high degree of certainty from the same decade of the 14th century (c.1360). The north portal to the nave is clearly from an earlier building, and possesses some positively splendid 13th-century carved stone ornamentation. Although the east-end enclosure wall is contemporary with the church's original construction, the south-wall buttressing appears to have been added at a later date. Two elegantly carved, white marble Ottoman tombs can be found on the building's south side. These are 18th-century.

31. Venetian / Chimney House

This site is known as both the Venetian House and the Chimney House. Although its exterior walls are Venetian, its interior is distinctly Turkish. Within the spacious courtyard is a renovated Turkish hamam.

32. Unnamed Churches

In the 14th century, Famagusta boasted half a dozen Latin nunneries, each of which would have possessed a small Gothic church. Very little is known about these unnamed churches, but it is very probable that one or more are linked to the Cistercian or Benedictine convents that are known to have been active in the city during the medieval period. Beautiful Gothic details still remain, and a quick glance is well worth it.

33. Church of Sts. Peter & Paul

It is one of the largest, and best preserved of the regional Gothic-style churches in Famagusta, closely resembling the Greek Cathedral in plan, and dating with a high degree of certainty from the same decade of the 14th century (c.1360). The north portal to the nave is clearly from an earlier building, and possesses some positively splendid 13th-century carved stone ornamentation. Although the east-end enclosure wall is contemporary with the church's original construction, the south-wall buttressing appears to have been added at a later date. Two elegantly carved, white marble Ottoman tombs can be found on the building's south side. These are 18th-century.

Overall, the church's architecture is simple, yet elegant. Its interior plan consists of a nave with two aisles leading to a central apse and two apsidal chapels. The aisles are divided into five bays each. It appears that this church was already out of use during Venetian times, which is thought to have contributed to its fine state of preservation, having been spared from destruction by the conquering Ottoman militia.

It was the second church after the cathedral to be taken over, becoming the Sinan Paşa Mosque in 1572. In British and more recent times it has been used as a storage depot and even a library.