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16 PAGES OF
SPORT
INSIDE



PLUS

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IS THE EASY TOPTION**

**NICE TAY TAY
FOR A WHITE
WEDDING**

SEE PAGE 2



MEMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES HAS BEEN PLACED ON LEAVE

SERVING IRISH SOLDIER SNARED IN PAEDO STING



Patrick O'Connell

A member of the Defence Forces has been placed on leave after he admitted sexual communications with children while on duty - as he was confronted in a paedophile hunter sting.

Video of the 47-year-old (left) being confronted in a Dublin park was posted by the online by the hunter group on Thursday afternoon.

In the 42-minute-clip, the Galway based father of six admits that he travelled to the park to meet up with two girls aged 13 and 14 and sent messages and videos while attending a Lewis Capaldi concert with his wife and while on duty in an army barracks.

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Travel

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Christopher Beanland

Cyprus has the most beautiful sandy beaches and rolling hills and a reputation for being a safe and sunny destination that caters for all kinds of visitors.

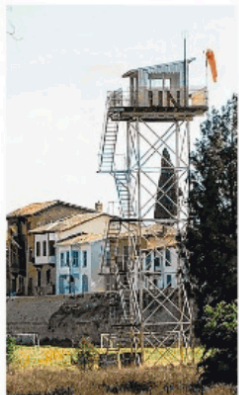
Mature couples enjoy calm winters away from the cold of home and chaotic teenagers go to Ayia Napa to party. Families can enjoy quiet resorts.

Cyprus's well-developed southern coast is like Miami – sprawling ribbons of hotels and apartment blocks stretch along the beaches.

Set off the south coast of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean, it has a Greek history and culture too.

But its location means it remains hot even in winter and is a popular year-round destination.

Step away from the usual tourist hubs of Ayia Napa and Larnaca and you can find an intriguingly different side to this fascinating island, espe-



The United Nations still has peacekeepers in Cyprus

cially if you're interested in history and culture.

Cyprus has loads of both, as the island mixes the history of Turks, Greeks and British.

Here's how to make the most of your holiday.

What to see

Since the 1974 civil war, the island has been partitioned into north and south.

For much of that time, Ledra Street was simply blocked off by the Green Line – the Berlin Wall-like situation cuts the capital, Nicosia, in two.

A few years ago, a checkpoint opened, allowing people to move freely between the north and south (remember your passport), and seeing both sides of Nicosia is fascinating.

The city doesn't receive a huge number of tourists, and you can enjoy wandering often empty streets near the Green Line and staring out towards the old airport – shuttered, abandoned and caught in a time warp and in geographical isolation in the buffer zone between the two sides.



Popular resort of Ayia Napa

You can't visit the airport, but a place you can visit since it opened to visitors a couple of years ago is the eerie ghost city of Varosha.

This was one of Europe's fanciest destinations in the 1960s, attracting celebrities including Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor and Brigitte Bardot.

Turks, and UN peacekeepers from Slovakia.

It's a very strange and incredibly fascinating place, but it's also controversial.

Some Greek Cypriots who mourn the loss of their hotels and houses here argue that it should not be turned into a tourist attraction like this.

I look back at the beach and the feeling of dread and desolation is something I will never forget.

Yet on the beach itself there's a weird normality – a snack bar has opened and a couple of old guys smoke cigarettes and drink beer, then a Finnish couple appear and

dream about – cute streets and shops selling lace tumble down a hillside, while shady cafes offer respite from the sun.

Climb to the small mountain above the town, which has a little chapel and big cross on top and get a great panoramic view.

day rooms to work on their creative endeavours.

When I'm there, a media company is holding an away day, and it all very much feels like a Soho Beach House.

Emilie designed the interiors, and it's a soothing mix of stripes, retro touches and low key flexes – fancy and impres-



Houses and narrow streets in Lefkara. Right, the delightful Agora hotel offers comfort and luxury at remarkably reasonable prices – and the staff are the salt of the earth



ABBA began here when its members were entertaining UN peacekeeping soldiers in the early 1970s, playing at Varosha's many discos and clubs in the basements of upmarket hotels.

Then, in the 1974 war and Turkish invasion of the North, Varosha was taken by Turkish troops and the Greek Cypriots were expelled.

The military have never left, and as I explore the eerily deserted streets, I see armed soldiers walking up and down –

Signs near the famous Toyota garage in Varosha with the Toyota lettering on top push the Turkish point that Britain and Greece dispossessed Turks of the land a hundred years ago.

The two sides are still at loggerheads, but the strange beauty of this 28 Days Later landscape of luxury and waste is incomparable.

I can't resist jumping in the sea beneath UN checkpoint 152 on top of an abandoned apartment block.

follow me into the sea for a refreshing dip.

The southern coast of Cyprus is its most famous attraction, but try driving away from the tourists and up into the mountains.

Here there are fewer people, and the temperatures are cooler too. It's perfect for a relaxing break, and shows you the hidden side of southern Cyprus.

Up in the hills, Lefkara is said to be Cyprus's most beautiful village.

It's certainly everything you

From here, various easy hikes head into the cool forested hills, from 5km up to 20km.

Where to stay

An afternoon relaxing by the Agora pool in Lefkara is not only rejuvenating, it could be creatively inspiring as well.

Over a cold drink, Anglo-Danish owners Aleksander Eng and Emilie Green Novel tell me how they deliberately bring over screenwriters and other creatives who get the use of some of the hotel's private

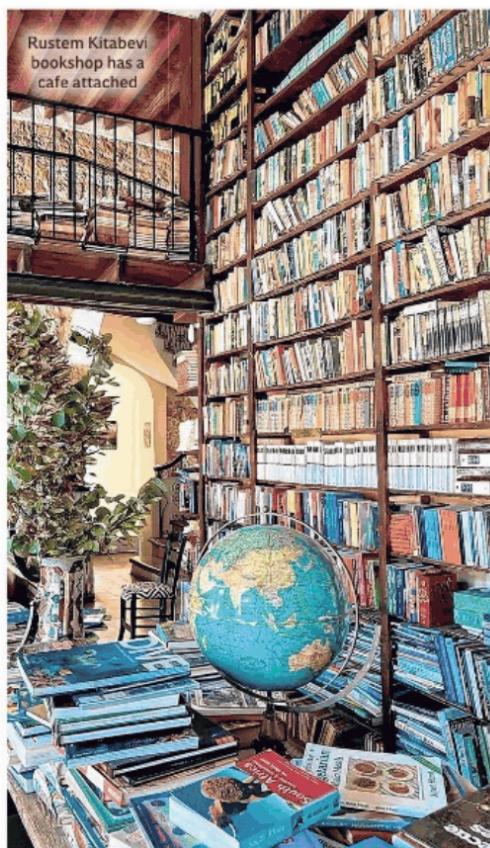
sive, yet also down to earth and with super friendly staff.

They're conscious of the environment and give you refillable water bottles and point to the taps dispensing ice-cold, filtered water – a much superior option to the hundreds of plastic bottles of water most hotels burn through every day.

The former town market building of Lefkara has been transformed, and the central plaza houses the perfect little unheated pool.

Brunch is something to

Travel



Rustem Kitabevi bookstore has a cafe attached

write home about too: lashings of local ingredients like tomatoes, olives and jams, fresh bread, cheeses – and they'll do you avocado toast too.

Rooms from about €120. See theagorahotel.com

Where to eat

Locatelli offers delicious Ital-

fect place for coffee and a salad lunch.

Rustem Kitabevi is atmospheric and highly photogenic, and they have the most fantastic cakes.

Where to shop

Every Day Is A Gift is a family-run shop that is a refreshing



Abandoned Toyota garage in the ghost town of Varosha

ian favourites on an open terrace at the Amara – don't miss the seafood pasta specialties, and the wine is top notch too. Sky 7 is a Michelin-starred occasion restaurant with incredible views over the Cypriot landscape.

If you want to try elevated versions of local cuisine, including fresh seafood served in imaginative ways and local lamb, this is the place.

Northern Nicosia is home to several beautiful bookshops with cafes attached – the per-

change from the mass-market stores.

Christos and Roi's family business specialises in beautiful handmade necklaces, earrings and bracelets.

In Nicosia, Ledra Street is packed with all the stores you could desire, from H&M to independent boutiques.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

Speak with your travel agent for details of holidays in Cyprus, which is a five-hour flight from Dublin.

Ruth Laws and Lauren Taylor

The Tour de France starts in Barcelona next Saturday and ends in Paris on July 26, with 184 elite cyclists taking part in the 21 stages over 23 days.

This year's event will showcase spectacular scenery in Spain and France, from sprints along the Mediterranean coast, long rides in the lush countryside and brutal ascents in the Jura and Vosges Mountains, Pyrenees and Alps.

Cycling can be an extraordinary way to see a destination in the name of slow travel and well-being and to gain a real sense of achievement at the end of each day.

Here are some of the places to explore on two wheels.

France

The ultimate homage to the Tour de France is riding through the country where it originated.

Headwater's five-day cycling tour takes you from the cobbled streets of Blois to the artsy Nantes via the famed Loire a Velo route.

Between the two cities, travellers can wander the timbered, historical town of Tours, marvel at Chaumont's fairytale chateau and soak up the tranquil atmosphere of the French countryside.

Of course, a trip to France wouldn't be complete without sampling red wine, so the self-guided tour also includes a stop at the medieval town of Chinon, where acclaimed vin rouge flows.

Book it: Five-nights self-guided Tour de France-Loire holiday from £1,319 (£1,531) per person. Departures until October, and then from April to October next year. See headwater.com.

Croatia – Montenegro – Albania

The Balkans are booming in popularity at the moment, and cycling is a great way to take in this part of the world.

This three-country cycling adventure with Explore Worldwide can also be done on e-bikes, making it more accessible.

Riders start in the historical city of Dubrovnik and combine coasting roads and mountain climbs and descents through Montenegro and into Albania, with plenty of cultural pit stops.

The trip takes in the Bay of Kotor, the Lustica Peninsula, Lake Skadar National Park and a final ride through the Albanian lowlands before finishing in Tirana, all with an experienced tour leader, transport and luggage support, so there's no need to carry much.

Covering a total of 235km, it's aimed at those with moderate fitness.

Book it: Cycle the Balkans – Croatia to Albania – for eight days from £1,420 (£1,648) per person, excluding flights. See explore.co.uk



Lake Skadar National Park is one of the scenic highlights of a cycling adventure in the Balkans. Above, South Africa's Garden Route



The Loire Valley offers perfect cycling terrain

Four fabulous cycling holidays to explore world on two wheels



Uzbekistan really is off the beaten track

Uzbekistan

This central Asian country has been emerging as an exciting destination for some time.

It offers true off-the-beaten track adventures through Silk Road cities, Islamic empires, Soviet heritage and unique architecture.

A trip with World Expeditions showcases a contrast of desert and mountain landscapes over 15 days.

In Bukhara, the group will be guided through an ancient maze of mud-walled homes, mosques and stone bazaars before seeing the blue-tiled Registan in

Samarkand and the traditional way of life in the Nuratau Mountains.

Rated moderate, there are eight days of cycling within the two-week time frame, two nights in a traditional home-stay and one night in a yurt camp.

Book it: From £3,850 (£4,468) per person, departing on September 16, then May 9 and September 19 next year. See worldexpeditions.com

South Africa

While many explore South Africa's spectacular Garden Route – which stretches 200km along the southern coastline – by car, an even better way to experience it might be with the wind in your hair.

That's the thinking behind Exodus Adventure Travel's 14-day cycling trip, beginning in Cape Town and ending in the charming coastal town of Knysna.

Along the way, travellers can sip award-winning wine in the Cape Wine-lands, admire mountain passes and venture into the Little Karoo desert.

Designed with Tarryn Povey, one of South Africa's top marathon mountain bikers, the trip also includes a quirky excursion to Oudtshoorn, the ostrich capital of the world.

Book it: Cycle the Garden Route from £4,849 (£5,628) per person. Departures from October to December, then January to November next year. See exodus.co.uk

