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A Coffee House Culture here in Cyprus?

A place where people gather to post stories, and share local gossip and world news, where conversations circulate and fill the air in a rhythm entwined with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, what more can the aroma of coffee conjure up with the warmth of holding a comfortingly hot fresh cup?





Coffee house culture is all about the nature of the bourgeois, to the students meeting place, to lover's collective moments over a latte. Definitely the buzz of the traditional habit of coffee drinkers plays an important role in a culture just waiting to connect. The place to be seen in as with most new places. Limassol and Nicosia have a chain of modern coffee shops from *Starbucks*, *Costa Coffee*, *Lavazza* and the familiar *Illy*. A few amongst the chain of recognized world names in coffee shops and these are more popular than ever here in Cyprus.

From smokey cafés back in the late 50's, to the live beat of coffee drinkers of today, coffee has been roasted out on porches, over fireplaces and has (with time) played an important social role in the connection of the human race, many a decision has been reached over a coffee!



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Caution Hot Coffee!!!

Reaching their peak, change is brewing in attitudes towards coffee regarding the intake of caffeine, everything in moderation is softening with upscale coffee houses popping up on every neighbourhood corner, and the shift in attitude is welcome. An atmosphere that provides inspiration and distraction is a perfect combination. The media of today sees coffee more as a treat than just your morning pick-me-up. So naturally, the relaxing coffee experience, combined with a social gathering has become a habit most people follow. Artists from different media have been drawn to the subject of café scenes through film, canvas or local TV press release, bringing the observer into the relatively social scene adding another face to the coffee shop.

A recent Photographic Exhibition by Christina Drakos - a self-taught photographer from Limassol - brought the coffee shops of the world into focus at the end of last year awakening consumers to the stories behind the lattes they drink every day and giving the coffee beans a human face. 'Coffee Shops of the World' a collection of 38 photographs, captures in black and white, an ambience of social moments transformed through the dark to the light, a place where Christina disconnects with the rest. An exhibition that portrays the mystic moments of the relaxing coffee experiences, from the family-owned corner cafés that pepper the streets of the French capital, to the little village coffee shops of Cyprus that have been amongst Christina's recent theme. For the past ten years photography has been an important part of her life, in which her travels around the world have been her inspiration, through the lens she freezes the moments, yet allows the imagination to continue the story...



She has been an active member of the Cyprus Photographic Society and has exhibited her work in Austria, Slovakia, Australia, Yugoslavia, Brazil, Croatia, Scotland and China. In 1997 she published *'The Journey'*, a series of photos taken on her wanderings around the world. All proceeds from the book were donated to the Ayia Skepi Drug Rehabilitation Center in Cyprus. 1999 saw the publication of *'Angels of The Light'* with photographs of children from various countries. Her most recent book of *'Close Ups'* - dedicated to the memory of her father - allows us to see images and emotions to which we may have never before paid attention. It is in the dark room that Christina is transfixed in time, interpreting the light through her dialogue of collective moments.

A follow up to the exhibition was held at the Cyprus Hilton in Nicosia at the end of January and then throughout the month of February at Aglantzia at the Kafenio I Palia Platia - a recently renovated Coffee Shop. The modern coffee society here in Cyprus is very much in contrast with the traditional village coffee shops where everyone is addressed by first names, where village life holds close to its heart the people who work the land and the 'male only

territory' coffee shop gatherings after work, and collate over a strong Cypriot coffee and put the world to right over a game of *tavli* to almost all local gossip. The gathering of the older male generation over a *metrio* (medium sweet), *sketos* (unsweetened) or *glykos* (sweet) is a familiar scene in most villages, portraying faces that could tell a lifetime of stories. Your destiny read from a cup of Greek coffee is a common gesture as nearly always someone has the skill. Even if it is your destiny that lies in the bottom of your coffee cup, then so enjoy!

