

# open skies

HELLO TOMORROW



**THE LOST WORLDS OF CAPPADOCIA**

# THE FORGOTTEN CIVILISATION

In the heart of Anatolia lies Cappadocia, a region forged by thousands of years of brutal weather, volcanic activity... and war







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**D**eep in the heart of central Turkey lies a remarkable land that brings to mind a world of sci-fi comic book moonscapes. This is Cappadocia, a region with terrain carved into the earth by over 70 million years of volcanic activity, wind, floodwaters and, for the last 2,000 years, human hands.

Found in Central Anatolia, it's home to stunning natural wonders and warren-like cave dwellings that burrow through the rock, the result of a layered, and often gruesome past. Historically, this was a danger zone between the warring empires of the Persians and Greeks, and so the inhabitants of this region sought refuge deep in the rocks. Later, some of the first Christian converts also found the cave dwelling a perfect hiding place, and came here to escape Roman oppression during the Byzantine era.

So fearful of the Romans were the early Christians that they resorted to building entire cities deep underground. The complex networks contain living quarters, workshops and places of worship, and are ingeniously devised to offer

the maximum protection from invaders. Some of these underground cities are so well hidden that they continue to be discovered to this day, and it's assumed that there are more still, just waiting to be unearthed.

The landscape is littered with cave houses. So much so that it's possible to find yourself the lone explorer of long abandoned troglodyte villages. Many of them, perched high in steep canyon walls or on cliff faces, offered extra protection from attack.

Not all of the cave houses have been abandoned, however. Many continue to be occupied by locals to this day, and visitors keen on the complete troglodyte experience can stay at homes that have been transformed into cosy boutique hotels and quaint restaurants.

What's truly amazing about Cappadocia is that, despite all that it contains, it's still possible to step off the well-trodden path. Here you can discover long-forgotten cave churches and ancient frescos created hundreds of years ago. And although the region is firmly on the tourist map, there's no museum or entry fee... simply the remnants of a civilisation left to return to nature.



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## BALLOONING

A popular way to explore the majestic terrain of Cappadocia is by hot-air balloon, great numbers of which leave from the main village of Göreme. It's an early start as the village comes to life to a soundtrack of flames filling fuelling balloons across the valley. There's a race to get up and flying before the sun rises – the prize being a breathtaking view as the first rays of sun hit the carved crevices of the canyons.

From below it's a surreal and spectacular sight to witness the pink early morning sky filled with balloons gracefully floating into the distance. Eventually, as they begin their descent back to earth, passengers' attention turns to the hearty breakfast that awaits them. The balloon operator, meanwhile, skillfully perches the balloon on a trailer, while the team expertly deflates and stores it away for the next morning.



## FAIRY CHIMNEYS



Another striking feature of Cappadocia's silhouette are tall mushroom-like pillars and minarets that rise from out from the ground. Known as 'Fairy Chimneys' they lend to an almost mythical element in the region. There are three volcanoes that border the region and their deposits of ash, lava and basalt have laid the foundations for this landscape. The rock below the top layer of basalt is extremely soft, enabling wind and water to create pinnacles that can measure up to 40 metres high. Some formations reveal different coloured layers that have been created by the heat difference of the lava layers. The lid, or top of the chimney, is made from a harder rock and protects the layers below from eroding completely.





## UNDERGROUND CITIES

Due to the soft layers of rock that lie under the surface, it was possible to dig down into the earth and create underground cities that offered security from invaders coming from above. There are several underground complexes in Cappadocia but the largest is Derinkuyu, which goes 60 metres underground and could house over 20,000 people along with their livestock and food.

The cities were connected to each other via long tunnels and Kaymakli, the next city, was accessible from Derinkuyu through an 8km tunnel. The cities were used even up to the early 20th century by Cappadocian Greeks, who used them to escape periodic waves of Ottoman persecution. The Christian inhabitants of the region were expelled in 1923 due to the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, at which point the tunnels were abandoned. They were to be rediscovered in 1963, when a resident of the area found a mysterious room behind a wall in his house.





## CHURCHES AND FRESCOS

The Open Air Museum at Göreme is a Unesco World Heritage Site and offers the most incredible chance to see frescos from the Byzantine period. This splendid cluster of artistry, with its rock-cut churches, chapels and monasteries, was a settlement that housed monks, and since the 17th century has been a pilgrimage site. The splendidly well-preserved paintings depict typical Christian scenes and it's possible to find examples that have survived for over 1,000 years.





