



By James Bainbridge

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CAPPADOCIA, TURKEY

- ✦ **POPULATION** 350,000
- ✦ **MAIN TOWN** NEVŞEHİR
- ✦ **LANGUAGE** TURKISH
- ✦ **MAJOR INDUSTRY** TOURISM
- ✦ **UNIT OF CURRENCY** TÜRK LIRASI (TL, TURKISH LIRA)
- ✦ **COST INDEX** BUS TO İSTANBUL TL50/US\$33, UNDERGROUND CITY ENTRANCE TL15/US\$10, DOUBLE ROOM/CAVE DORM WITH BREAKFAST TL78/25 (US\$51/16), TWO-HOUR HORSE RIDE TL50/US\$33

WIND OF CHANGE

With the slow pace of life in its villages, it seems like Cappadocia sees little change other than winds eroding the fairy chimneys (rock formations). However, as surely as Mt Erciyes towers in the distance, the modern world is encroaching here. If you want to live like a troglodyte, you should rock 'n' roll to Turkey now, before Cappadocia is changed forever.

Conservation efforts are made, but coach parties keep arriving. More and more hot-air balloons dot the sky on summer mornings, and the allure of tourist dosh is proving great in an area once devoted to agriculture. The pigeon houses on the rock faces, traditionally used to collect bird droppings for use as fertiliser, increasingly lie empty.

But Cappadocia is still worth the trek from İstanbul. Once you've left Göreme's Flintstones-referencing backpacker joints behind, and hiked into the valleys of wavy white rock, the 21st century feels like a distant world.

DEFINING EXPERIENCE

Bound out of your fairy chimney before the sun rises over the knobbly landscape to see it all from above on a dawn hot-air balloon ride. Back on terra firma, resist the temptation of a Cloud 9 cocktail and head along the quiet country roads to Soğanlı or İhlara Valley, where Byzantine monks carved churches into the cliffs. For some respite from the Anatolian sun, disappear into the subterranean cities where Byzantine Christians hid from Persian and Arabic armies. Crown the day with a wander through the valleys, and a long look at sunset from a panoramic restaurant terrace.



MARK AVELLINO ^{PH} LPI

TALK OF CAPPADOCIA'S AMAZING SCENERY AIN'T ALL HOT AIR

TOP-END CAVES

Cappadocia was once a classic backpacker hangout – a few free spirits have even swapped their rucksack for a fairy chimney home. However, it is becoming more of a midrange and top-end destination, and the accommodation reflects this. In the summer, daily flights between İstanbul and both Nevşehir and Kayseri, and regular flights between the latter and İzmir, enable folk with cash to jet between the must-sees.

PILGRIMS, POTS & PLONK

- ✦ From 16 to 18 August, thousands of Hacı Bektaş Veli devotees pay their respects at the 13th-century dervish's tomb, in Hacibektaş. After politicians have said their bit, two days of music, dance and superstitious rites ensue.
- ✦ The Avanos Handicrafts Festival, at the end of August in 2011, celebrates the town's main industry: pottery, made with red clay from its river.
- ✦ Cappadocia's fertile volcanic soil has long produced wine; Ürgüp's International Wine Festival raises a glass to the grape harvest in early October.



TURKEY'S WHIRLING DERVISH CEREMONIES WILL HAVE YOUR HEAD SPINNING

WHAT'S HOT...

Hot-air balloons and boutique fairy chimneys.

WHAT'S NOT...

Dossing in a musty cave and subsisting on local apricots.

KAMIKAZE JACUZZIS

Central Anatolia suffers from desertification and a water shortage, yet Cappadocia's accommodation owners keep installing jacuzzis and pools. Water has even been trucked to Göreme, which has about 100 hotels, hostels and pensions, from nearby villages. A recently introduced water system, whereby locals top up their accounts by paying at the *belediye* (town hall), is hoped to alleviate the problem. The municipal council also plans to tear down Göreme's wooden kiosk restaurants and move the *otogar* (bus station) to make room for a car park, signalling that tourism threatens to spoil much more than the village's sedate atmosphere.

RANDOM FACTS

- ★ Cappadocia's fairy chimneys and curvy valleys are made of tuff – compressed volcanic ash, from the eruption of Mt Erciyes.
 - ★ In Cappadocia's agricultural past, if a man didn't own a pigeon house, he would struggle to woo a wife.
 - ★ Visitors can watch whirling dervish ceremonies in the 13th-century Sarihan caravanserai.
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IMAGINATION VALLEY

The fantastic fairy chimneys in this area, which more prosaic locals call Devrent Valley, resemble everything from Napoleon's hat to a couple of kissing birds.

CAPPADOCIAN CHARACTERS

Since Christians sought refuge here between the 4th and 11th centuries, Cappadocia has been a distinct area. Its inhabitants are proud of the rural lives they lead in this unique setting, although the modern world is eroding traditions. Tourism has introduced some commercialisation, but the touts lack their İstanbul cohorts' persistence; if you don't buy that carpet, they will happily drink yet more *çay* (tea) and gaze at the fairy chimneys.

TROGLODYTE FARE

Cappadocia is a great place to try a dramatic central Anatolian speciality, *testi kebab* (pottery kebab). Meat or mushrooms, as well as vegetables, are cooked in a sealed terracotta pot, which is broken at the table. If the restaurant slow-cooks the dish in the traditional manner, you must order three hours before eating.
