



Exploring an ancient underground community




The second week of a trip to Greece and Turkey with the Miami Ski Club included an exceptional extension from Istanbul to the Flintstone-type village of Cappadocia.

Formed by eruptions from ancient volcanoes, and sculpted by wind and water, the unusual peaks and gorges of the area were carved into extensive underground cities connected by small labyrinthine passageways around 4000 BC. The hidden cities were later occupied by the Hittites, who flourished from 1600 to 1200 BC, and by oppressed Christians in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Numerous subsequent groups took refuge in the caves before they were completely abandoned – as late as 1951, nearly 7,000 people lived there.

Some of underground communities were as deep as eight stories and contained dwellings with kitchens, sleeping quarters and thousands of pigeon houses. One of the greatest collections of pigeon lofts in the world, the recesses were carved into the soft stone wherever space allowed.

There are a number of underground churches and monasteries as well. The main church is spacious and airy, and its well-preserved frescoes are considered the best example of Byzantine art in all of Cappadocia.

Surrounding the caves of Cappadocia is a surreal landscape of natural formations known as Fairy Chimneys – also forged by the volcanic eruptions, wind and rain. A highlight of this trip was an early-morning air balloon ride over the convoluted terrain. The weightless tranquility of this experience can be seen through my photographs. 

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HISTORIC HIDEAWAYS

At last count, 7,000 people lived within these ancient caves (facing page).

Fairy Chimneys dot the eerie landscape, seen best from above (this page).

Cavernous Cappadocia