

Cappadocia unique landscapes

Analyzing cultural community experiences

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In the heart of the Cappadocia region, Göreme is situated 200 kilometers to the southeast of Ankara. This small town was founded in a moon-like landscape of giant rock cones, which are locally called 'fairy chimneys'. The natural landscape of the Cappadocia region was formed by the out-spills and ash of two volcanoes that were later hardened and became tufa, a soft porous rock. Over millions of years, this rock has eroded to form natural cones and columns on the landscape. For centuries, inhabitants carved and hollowed these rocks to build cave-dwellings, stables, and places for worship. Göreme is one of these settlements in the region, which constitutes historic cave dwellings and a significant concentration of Byzantine monastic settlements. In the valleys of this region, there are more than 300 cave



Göreme Photo: D. De Gregorio

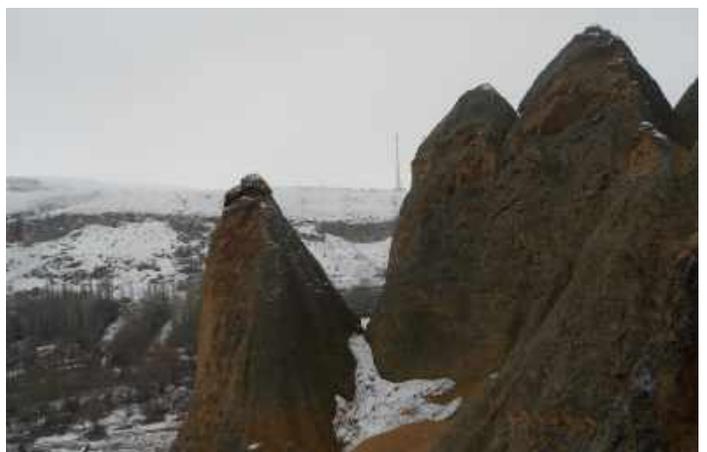
churches and monasteries built between the 9th and the 13th centuries. This small town was settled as a Turkish farming village on the ruins of an earlier Byzantine settlement. In 1950, the Turkish government turned a part of the valley into Göreme Open-Air Museum. Since then, the governments have continued to restore the natural, archaeological and historical heritage. In 1985, Göreme Open-Air Museum became a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS). Afterward, both the Open-Air Museum and Göreme National Park have become the main tourism destinations. Concomitantly, tourism has become the primary economic sector of Göreme and the Cappadocia region. The conservation efforts of the region have gone hand in hand with its local economic and spatial development. Similar to many towns in Cappadocia, Göreme has transformed rapidly with the emergence of cave hotels, boutique hotels, and pensions exhibiting traditional lifestyle, a variety of winery, restaurants, pottery and ceramics workshops, and souvenir shops. Local tourism development has continuously generated new businesses and activities. Besides underground heritage visits, horse and ATV rides on a two- or four-hour trail ride, trekking tours on many fascinating valleys and mountains, and balloon ride to experience the dramatic landscape of Cappadocia from the sky are some of these activities.



Göreme Photo: D. De Gregorio

Tourism has also led to the development of the entertainment industry (e.g., Turkish nights and pottery kebab tours for tourists), the gastronomy and wine culture, the art and cultural festivals, and sports events. The picturesque village life are other characteristics of Göreme and its surroundings. The villagers and farmers on the small volcanic areas still carry out their usual daily agriculture and husbandry activities within the Göreme National Park, in spite of the strict rules of the Turkish Conservation legislation that have made it more and more challenging to continue.

The economy of the Cappadocia region is very lively. The investments of the private sector have intended to attract more tourists, thereby increasing economic benefits to the region, while the possible adverse outcomes of this mass tourism have not been considered sufficiently. This necessitates the development of comprehensive, sustainable, and integrated heritage conservation and tourism management plans and programs, accompanied by integrated and long-run local development plans. Additionally, it is critical to raise awareness about underground built heritage and its tangible and intangible heritage values among local communities to complement the government's conservation endeavors. Local communities in Göreme have the potentials to start bottom-up initiatives, with the support of local and regional government agencies, **universities, private enterprises**, and voluntary groups.



Göreme Photo: D. De Gregorio