



THE WONDER OF CAPPADOCIA

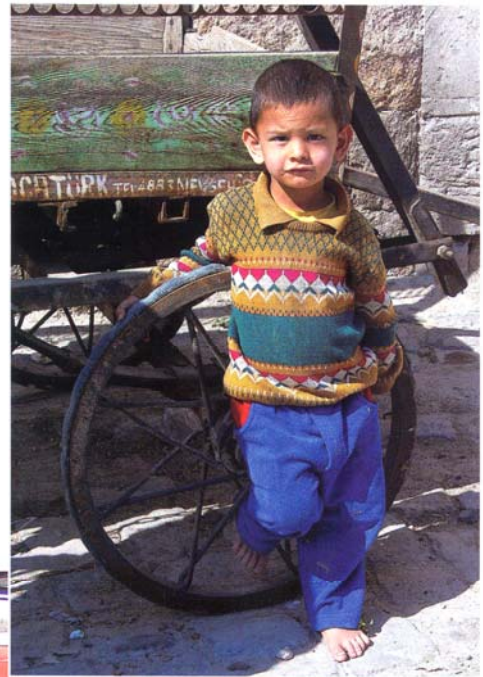
Many visitors to Turkey don't get to see Cappadocia. At most they stay for a night or two on their way to or from the beaches of the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts. Yet, those who do get a taste of this wonder of nature always wish they could stay longer and vow to return. Report and photography by Victor POLITIS.

I flew Turkish Airlines from Istanbul to Kayseri in early October. We had asked the hotel to find us a guide for just two days. Irfan picked us up at the airport and drove us to our hotel in the middle of a spectacular and otherworldly volcanic landscape. After one night in our cave suite and the next day touring nearby villages, we knew that 48 hours would not be enough.

I have been fortunate enough to set eyes on many impressive wonders of nature around the world, but never have I had a similar experience as in the infinitely unique Cappadocia. I was

passed through their land for thousands of years. Ancient Anatolian tribes, Assyrians, Hittites, Phrygians, Turkic tribes from Central Asia, Mongols, Persians, Syrians, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Slavs, Greeks, Romans and Western Europeans have left behind some of their traditions as well as their genes.

The name *Cappadocia* dates back to Persian times when the large region in the middle of Anatolia was called “katpatukya”, meaning Land of Beautiful Horses, animals favored by the Assyrians and the Persians. In recent times, when we speak of Cappadocia we refer specifically



Cappadocia's centuries-old way of life continues, seemingly indifferent to the encroachment of mass tourism.

La vie en Cappadoce se poursuit ici de la même manière depuis des siècles, apparemment insensible au tourisme de masse.



not surprised by the hospitality, but I discovered a special harmony between the shapes and colors of nature, and the pride and beauty of the people living and working here, which was more wonderful and inspiring than I had thought possible.

Cappadocians are as exotic as their surreal surroundings. They bear the influence of the many civilizations that have

to the unique landscapes of the valleys of Goreme and Urgup, with their natural pinnacles, known as “fairy chimneys”, and their more than 150 rock churches.

MAN ENHANCES NATURE

The formation of this strange landscape started during the third geological period, when three volcanoes located on the

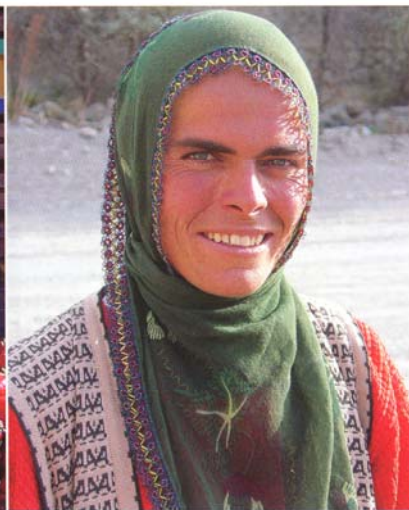
edges of this region began erupting frequently. The deposits of volcanoes ash, lava and basalt laid the foundations for today's landscape. Earthquakes, winds, rains and rivers caused the erosion that followed and contributed to form the valleys and “fairy chimneys” that we see today.

Nature is continuing to create new formations and climate continues to influence them.

Sharp temperature changes give rise to splits in the rocks, which fill up with rain water, which then freezes and cuts the volcanic surface, leading to the formation of separate hills.

during the Christian era, when many churches and monasteries were built. In order to protect itself against raids by Arabs and Persians, the Christian population built underground cities,

October is a busy time for the people of Cappadocia. They are busy with harvesting and preparing for winter. Still, they welcomed visitors into their homes and allowed them to watch in their backyard while they work the communal ovens and process raw material into food supplies for the coming winter.



ANCIENT TRADITIONS

Villages are the staple community unit in Central Anatolia, and the lives of their inhabitants are still greatly influenced by the cycles of nature. They are totally in-synch with the environment and nothing that they grow and harvest is left to waste. Indeed, the mineral-laden volcanic soil is extremely fertile, and the region of Cappadocia, despite its arid aspect, is prime agricultural territory with many fruit orchards and vineyards. Whatever is not fit for human consumption is used to either feed the animals or fertilize the land.

Near Uchisar is a valley that is known by many names – Valley of the Pigeon Lofts, Dovecote Valley, Pigeon Valley – but they all refer to the thousands of pigeon houses that have been carved into the soft tufa (rock deposits formed by springs, lakes, or ground) since ancient times. Although they can be found throughout Cappadocia, they are especially plentiful in

Not unlike the rest of Turkey, Cappadocia offers simple but great food. October is the month of harvesting, and the busiest time for a people that lives according to the seasons.

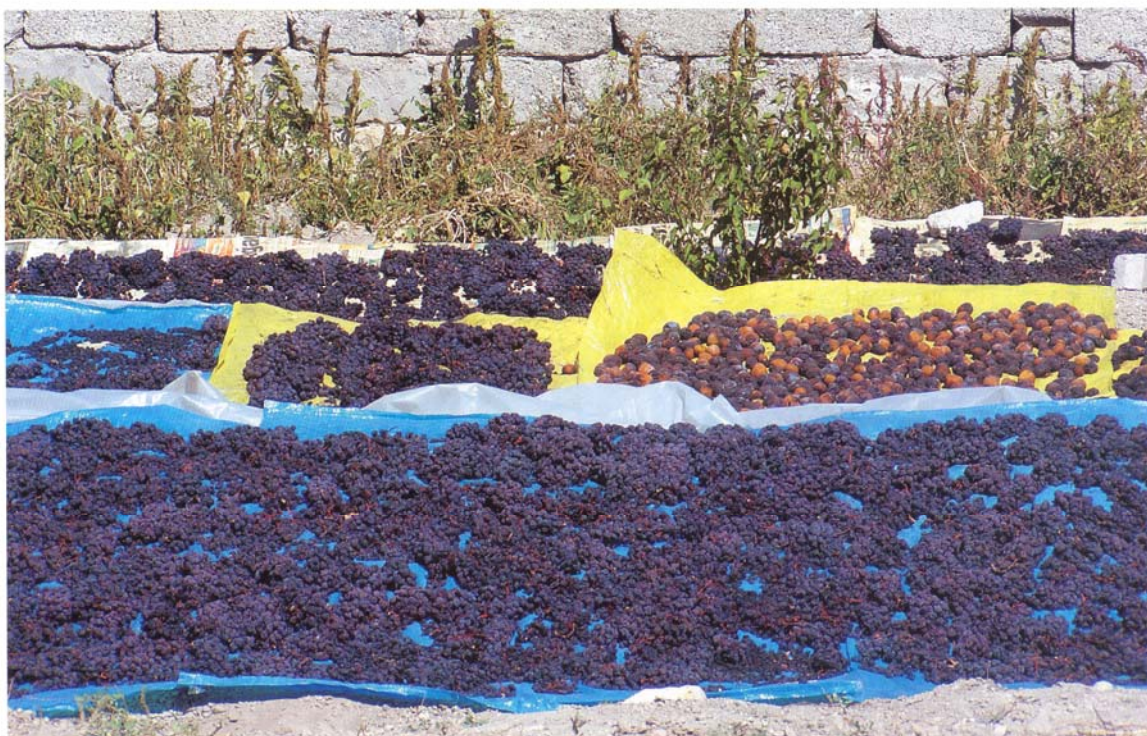
Comme le reste de la Turquie, la Cappadoce offre une cuisine simple mais alléchante. Octobre est la période des récoltes et le mois le plus chargé pour ces habitants qui vivent au rythme des saisons.

“Fairy chimneys” were formed when lava covering the tuff gave way along preexisting cracks of sloping areas and became isolated pinnacles. Sometimes they reach the height of 40 meters. The best examples between three ancient cities – Urgup, Uchisan and Avanos – founded by the Hittites.

The rock below the top layer of basalt is soft and can be easily carved. Communities took advantage of this to make their home in the rock pillars and under the ground. The area experienced important growth

which resemble labyrinths with innumerable rooms, narrow tunnels, wine making facilities, storage rooms and churches.

Famous underground cities like Kaymakli, which has been accessible only since 1964, and Derinkuyu, which used to accommodate up to 10,000 shelter-seekers in former times, must be placed on any traveler’s tour. And no-one can leave Cappadocia without visiting one of the many homes and churches carved in the rock; some are beautifully restored, while others are abandoned and have been returned to Nature.





this valley which must have one of the greatest collections of pigeon lofts in the world. They were carved wherever space allowed including abandoned caves and the walls of collapsed churches.

The “partnership” between local pigeons and their human neighbors dates back thousands of years, since pigeons have long been a source of food and fertilizer. The advent of chemical fertilizers, however, has reduced

the population’s reliance on pigeons; still, some farmers maintain their lofts because they insist that the reputation of Cappadocian fruits as the sweetest and most succulent in Turkey is entirely due to the pigeons’ droppings!

The culinary borders of Cappadocia are blurred, but many of the villages and towns have their own specialties and attractions, and not unlike the rest of Turkey, this region offers

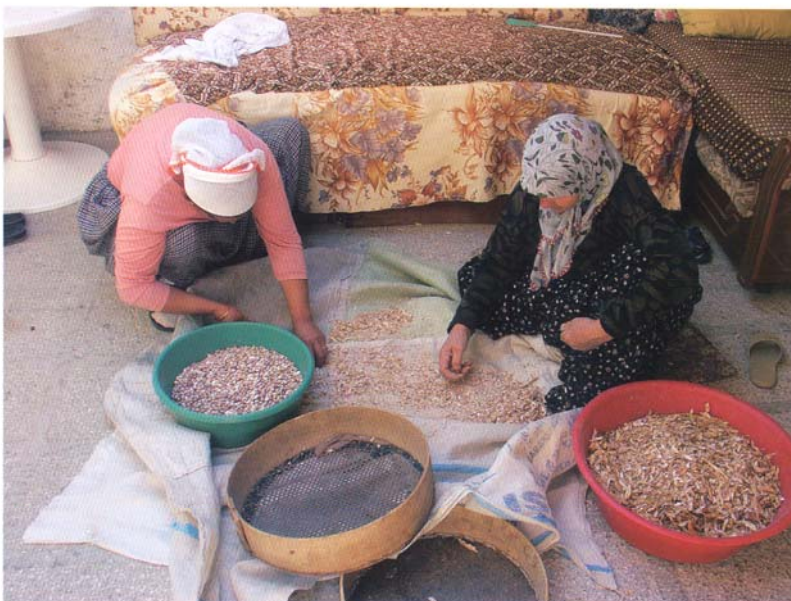
great food. The Tokat kebabi is a good example. Chunks of lamb, eggplant, potato slices and a head of garlic are placed on a skewer with a glob of lard on top. The kebabs are then grilled vertically to allow the lard to melt and dribble over the charring skewer. Tomato and chili are cooked separately since they need less time to cook.

The mouth-watering result is served on *pide* (thin pita-like bread) with a glass of ayran (yogurt drink), to cool the stomach from much-used hot sauce. This Tokati specialty is often accompanied by a *zile pekmezi*, a thick syrup commonly made of boiled grape juice and resembling black treacle, called *pekmez*, whipped with egg white.

Indeed, I often found myself in homes where women were boiling large vats filled with grape juice in their yards and in front of their houses. This centuries-old way of life continues, seemingly indifferent to the encroachment of mass tourism. I left this wonder of nature reluctantly, not only willing to return, but harboring the secret desire that I may – one day perhaps – settle there. ♦

The friendly and highly hospitable people of Cappadocia will often allow you to visit their homes and help them with their winter preparations.

La grande hospitalité des habitants de la Cappadoce fait que les visiteurs sont toujours les bienvenus pour assister aux préparatifs de l'hiver.



CAPPADOCE MERVEILLEUSE

Ceux qui ont la chance de découvrir cette merveille de la nature tombe en amour. Avant de la connaître, au plus y consacrez-t-on deux jours avant de se rendre à l'une des nombreuses plages de la mer Égée, ou sur le chemin du retour. Mais une fois initiée à cette harmonie délicate entre les formes et les couleurs de la nature, à la fierté et à la beauté des habitants, on ne peut que se jurer de revenir à Kayseri et consacrer à la Cappadoce le temps qui lui est dû.

Les Cappadociens sont aussi exotiques que leur environnement. Ils portent l'influence des civilisations passées fussent-elles anatoliennes, assyriennes, hittites, phrygiennes, turques d'Asie centrale, mongoles, perses, syriennes, arabes, kurdes, arméniennes, slaves, grecques, romaines ou européennes.

Le nom *Cappadocia* remonte à l'époque perse, lorsque la région dans son ensemble s'appelait *katpatukya* (littéralement «pays des chevaux magnifiques»). Aujourd'hui, lorsqu'on évoque la Cappadoce, on fait référence aux paysages uniques des vallées de Göreme et d'Ürgüp en Anatolie centrale – et à ses 150 églises rupestres.

La formation du sol est le résultat d'éruptions volcaniques, de tremblements de terre, des vents, des pluies et des rivières qui ont causé l'érosion et contribué à la formation des vallées et des «cheminées de fée», magnifiques sculptures naturelles qui peuvent atteindre jusqu'à 40 mètres de hauteur. Les plus belles se trouvent dans la région située entre trois villes antiques fondées par les Hittites: Urgup, Uchisan et Avanos.

Sous une première couche de basalte se trouve une roche plus molle. Les communautés indigènes y ont creusé leurs maisons à même



les flancs de collines. Les populations chrétiennes des premiers siècles de notre ère se sont ainsi protégées des incursions arabes et perses, créant de véritables labyrinthes souterrains.

De célèbres villes comme Kaymakli, accessible seulement depuis 1964, et Derinkuyu, qui pouvait cacher jusqu'à 10 000 personnes en cas de guerre, sont à visiter absolument. Bien que de nombreux tunnels, salles de stockage, pressoirs et étonnantes églises taillées dans la roche aient été abandonnés à la nature, beaucoup ont été magnifiquement restaurés.

Le rythme de vie des habitants de la Cappadoce évolue encore selon celui des saisons. Octobre est un mois chargé, celui où l'on fait les récoltes et prépare les stocks pour l'hiver. En effet, le sol environnant est très fertile, riche en minerais et les Cappadociens se vantent d'avoir de nombreux arbres fruitiers et vignes. Tout ce qui ne peut pas être consommé par l'homme sert à nourrir le bétail ou à fertiliser le sol – rien n'est jeté.

Et puis il y a les pigeons... Près d'Uchisar se trouve une vallée connue sous le nom de «Vallée des pigeons» ou «Vallée des pigeonniers». En effet, une relation symbiotique existe ici entre l'homme et le pigeon depuis plusieurs millénaires et la vallée recèle des milliers de

pigeonniers – l'une des plus grandes collections au monde.

Les pigeons ont ainsi longtemps été sources de nourriture et d'engrais. L'avènement des engrais chimiques a réduit la dépendance sur cette source naturelle, cependant de nombreux paysans poursuivent encore la tradition ancestrale, prônant la réputation de succulence et de douceur des fruits de Cappadoce n'est due qu'à l'engrais naturel de ces pigeons.

Comme le reste de la Turquie, la Cappadoce offre une cuisine simple mais alléchante. Les kebabs de Tokat en sont un bon exemple: des brochettes d'agneau, d'aubergines, de tranches de pommes de terre et d'ail, grillées à la verticale et arrosées de lard, de tomates et de chili. Le tout est servi sur un *pide* (pain libanais fin) avec un verre d'ayran, un boisson au yaourt qui calme les effets des piments. Le kebab est souvent accompagné en dessert d'un *zile pekmezi*, un sirop à base de jus de raisin mélangé aux blancs d'œufs battus.

Les amoureux du voyage vivront ici une expérience unique et l'hospitalité ne surprendra pas. La vie se poursuit de la même manière depuis des siècles, apparemment insensible au tourisme de masse et on y termine son séjour en flirtant avec l'idée – pourquoi pas? – de venir s'y installer un jour.

Cappadocia's unique landscape is peppered with natural pinnacles known as "fairy chimneys". Many are home to thousands of pigeons, whose droppings are used as fertilizer by local farmers.

Le paysage unique de Cappadoce est parsemé de sculptures naturelles connues sous le nom de «cheminées de fée». C'est ici que s'abritent les milliers de pigeons qui fournissent de l'engrais naturel aux paysans locaux.

