

STORY JAMES BAINBRIDGE

## Buried treasure of ancient cities

The Global Business Finance and Economics Research Conference will be held in Istanbul from 11 to 14 August – and if you want a lightning dip into some culture, here are the destinations to visit.

### Princes' Islands (one night)

Come August, temperatures in Turkey soar above 30°C and the Anatolian plateau sizzles. Luckily, the Princes' Islands are a short, breezy journey across the Sea of Marmara from Istanbul. Such proximity to the big city has seen this nine-island archipelago, south-east of Istanbul between the European and Asian shores, host a range of characters over the centuries. In Byzantine and Ottoman times, princes, sultans and courtiers who had fallen from favour were exiled here, giving the islands their English name. The Turkish is more prosaic: Adalar (the islands).

Today, the four main islands are hugely popular daytrip destinations; on summer weekends, the ferries fill with Istanbul sipping cay (tea) and watching the seagulls swoop. You can bypass the crowds by hopping aboard during the week, or later on a Sunday. The ferry service started in the mid-19th century and the islands became popular among the Ottoman elite, including Greek, Jewish and Armenian businessmen. This heritage is visible at the first two stops: Kinaliada, with its Armenian church on the left of the ferry pier, and Burgazada, with a synagogue and hilltop chapel.

Disembark at the second-largest island, Heybeliada (2.5sq km). The Turkish Naval Academy dominates the shore to the left of the pier; turning right takes you along the waterfront promenade, where sunny cafes and restaurants abound. Inland are steep streets of 19th century timber summer mansions, some still used as getaways while others sink into picturesque decay. The Halki Palace Hotel's pool is tempting, but just as beguiling are the paths that lead through the pine groves – and uphill to Heybeliada's major landmark, the Hagia Triada Monastery. With an internationally noted library, the late 19th century building stands in a spot occupied by a Greek monastery since the Byzantine era.

There are no cars on the islands, but you can rent a bike or take a kucuk or buyuk tur (small or big tour) in a fayton (horse-drawn carriage). On busy days the multicoloured carriages stream around Buyukada, the largest island at 5.5 sq km (its name means 'big island'). Staying on Heybeliada is recommended as it's more tranquil, but Buyukada is worth a stop for sights, including the ferry terminal. Built in 1899, the Ottoman kiosk-style building leads to gingerbread villas on the hillsides, waterfront restaurants and the Greek monastery of St George, with panoramic views of nearby islands. The new Museum of the Princes' Islands (admission US\$2.60; open 10am-7pm Tue-Sun; [www.adalarmuzesi.org](http://www.adalarmuzesi.org)) has 160 exhibits covering the archipelago's colourful social and cultural history.



### Cappadocia (two nights)

Formed by volcanic eruptions, Cappadocia's unique landscape of flowing valleys and fairy chimney rock formations hides a treasure of extraordinary details in the rocky valleys.

As if the landscape wasn't fantastic enough, the locals sharpened chisels and cut cave homes in the soft rock. The small holes riddling the fairy chimneys and cliff faces are pigeon houses, traditionally used to collect the birds' droppings for use as fertiliser. Many of the troglodyte dwellings have been converted into boutique hotels, offering features such as cave hamams (Turkish baths), bedroom walls lined with strata, rock-cut fittings and Anatolian cuisine. They're ideal in the August heat: volcanic rock keeps rooms cool in summer and warm in winter.

The first sight to see is the World Heritage site Goreme Open-Air Museum (admission US\$10; open 8am-5pm daily; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/357>), one of the monastic settlements established by Byzantine Christians. Cappadocia was a refuge for early Christians, who were persecuted by the Romans and later Muslim raiders from Persia. They cut churches and living quarters, mostly dating to about the 11th century in Goreme, and left behind frescoes of Biblical scenes. The best-preserved, most vivid frescoes are found in the Dark Church (admission a further US\$10), where the lack of light has kept the designs looking fresh and colourful. Scenes such as the birth of Jesus, with an ox and ass poking their noses into the manger, cover the pillars and vaulted

ceilings, along with winged angels and the church's founders. Another fascinating former monastic complex is Ihlara Valley, with cave churches in the base of towering cliffs, overlooking walking paths along a tree-lined river. The valley is 75km south-west of Goreme, and the route passes Kaymakli and Derinkuyu (admission US\$10 each; open 8am-5pm daily), the largest discovered underground cities.

When the Byzantine Christians faced attack they vanished into subterranean hideouts, for months at a time, that could accommodate thousands. The cities are up to eight levels deep, with narrow passages connecting the floors like hamster tunnels. As you descend you pass stables where the animals were tethered, churches with altars and baptism pools, walls with air circulation holes, granaries with grindstones and blackened kitchens with ovens.

The ventilation shafts were disguised as wells and chunky rolling-stone doors served as last lines of defence. Claustrophobics may prefer to go horse riding, allowing you to reach parts of the valleys untouched by tour groups. Even total amateurs can tackle steep tracks on these sure-footed animals.

Whatever your fancy, start the day with a hot-air balloon flight. Cappadocia is one of the world's best places to try ballooning, with consistently favourable conditions. Watching the sun rise over the valleys and drifting with the wind between the fairy chimneys, spotting vineyards and rock-cut castles, is a sublime experience. ■

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### GETTING THERE

TOOLS & TIPS



### THE PRINCES' ISLANDS

#### Getting there:

Roughly hourly ferries ([www.ido.com.tr](http://www.ido.com.tr)) leave from the Adalar Iskelese terminal in Kabatas. They stop at Kinaliada, Burgazada, Heybeliada and, after an hour, Buyukada, then return to Kabatas. The single fare from Istanbul is US\$5.

**Getting around:** A fayton tour costs US\$15 to US\$35.

#### Where to stay:

The Halki Palace Hotel ([www.halakipalacehotel.com](http://www.halakipalacehotel.com)), charges from US\$185 for a double room.

**More information:** [www.istanbulislands.com](http://www.istanbulislands.com)

### CAREER TO CAPPADOCIA

#### Getting there:

Turkish Airlines ([www.thy.com](http://www.thy.com)) has daily flights between Istanbul Ataturk and Nevsehir, Cappadocia, for about US\$130 return.

#### Getting around:

Hotels offer airport transfers (US\$10). Car hire from US\$30 per day. Day tours cost about US\$45. Mustafa of Heritage Travel (US\$65 to US\$140 per person, ([www.goreme.com](http://www.goreme.com)) is recommended. Horse riding from US\$20 per hour, ballooning from US\$215 per person.

#### Where to stay:

Kelebek Special Cave Hotel ([www.kelebekhotel.com](http://www.kelebekhotel.com)) Double room/suite from US\$70. Koza Cave Hotel ([www.kozacavehotel.com](http://www.kozacavehotel.com), [www.booking.com/hotel/tr/koza-cave.html](http://www.booking.com/hotel/tr/koza-cave.html)) Double room/suite from US\$115.

**More information:** [www.goturkey.com](http://www.goturkey.com)

