

June 27

Cappadocia

A very long day. Valerie woke at 03.30 for her balloon flight. She tried to be very quiet but I still woke up. Even if she had been a phantom, however, it would have been no good as, two minutes after she left, the local Mosque sprang to life with the morning's call to prayers at 04.00.



Early morning view from the hotel

I managed to nod off again until 06.30, when Valerie reappeared, her flight having been cancelled due to excessive winds. We snoozed for an hour and then went down to breakfast.



A varied breakfast



Turkish tea and nibbles

The buffet was excellent, just like the one in Istanbul but even better. Lots of cheese, fruit, olives, honeycomb etc etc. There was even a specialist egg chef, plying his trade on an outside barbecue or similar. We ate plenty and then prepared to be collected at 10.00.



They have lots of roses in Turkey

Our bus with the same driver and guide as yesterday arrived and we set off to all sorts of places which have tended to merge into one another over time. The weather was glorious, the midday temperature being 33.



We rushed through the countryside

We drove for 30 minutes to the underground city of Kaymakli. The external trappings were those of tourist spots the world over, a large car park surrounded by stalls selling stuff.

The origins of the city dated from the 7th and 8th centuries BC, when the tunnels and caves were first constructed. They were then enlarged by the Christian community when they wished to take refuge from the invading Arab Muslims between the 9th and 12th centuries. Such was their desperation that, in some instances, they tunnelled down five or six storeys.



Kaymakli Underground City. A huge car park



The best security they could manage



With lots of stalls

Our voyage of exploration was fascinating but physically demanding. We had to follow our leader down very low and narrow passages, my hat saving my head on numerous occasions. A minor bump being much less of an issue than a serious graze.

Hollowed out of the rock were living areas, kitchen areas, wineries, churches and all of the essentials of what must have been a very precarious existence. This being a very famous historic site, there were people and guided groups everywhere. We all managed to move around safely, however. We emerged into the light after about half an hour, straightened our backs and were very grateful that we lived above ground.



We ventured down steps and tunnels ...



Farmland ...



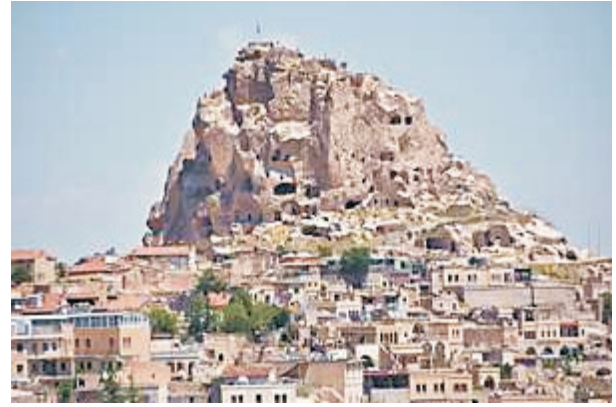
... into an underground church



... and rocky outcrops



Lots of people at Pigeon Valley



Uchisar "castle"



Lots of pigeon houses at Pigeon Valley

After a 20 minute drive through a mix of farm land and rough ground featuring rocky outcrops not unlike Central Otago, we reached Pigeon Valley, on the outskirts of Uchisar.



Lots of pigeons at Pigeon Valley

The town has a "castle", constructed out of the magnificent rock which towers over the landscape.

The valley is home to many pigeon lofts, which have been hollowed out of the soft rocks since ancient times. The birds were originally a source of both food and guano. The advent of chemical fertilizers has reduced the need for guano but many locals believe that it improves the quality of the local fruit.

We joined the crowds looking at the pigeons, failed to find any bargains at one of the souvenir stalls and had cold drinks and pumpkin seeds with Ayse, our guide. The cafe was cool and inviting and had lots of flowers as decoration.



Pigeon Valley Cafe

Another 20 minute drive took us to Avanos, on the Red River, named after the red clay which lines its banks.



The Red River

We had a good lunch at a café and I was able to try the lentil soup, which is featured on almost all menus. It was very smooth and contained a few lentils but lots of chicken stock. Very good, as were the accompanying kebabs and salads.



Lentil soup - at last

Suitably refreshed, we had another short drive to the Kapadokya Seramik factory on the outskirts of town.

We were given an excellent demonstration of teapot making on a foot powered wheel, told how it was a family business and watched one of the artists painting a Hittite wine jug. Brilliant technique!



Was this how my jug was painted?



The potter at work

We were then given the opportunity to buy things, which Valerie enthusiastically encouraged me to do. I was interested in buying some small olive bowls, which we found at the end of the guided tour.

Before then, we were taken into a room full of Hittite wine jugs. I bought one at huge expense - about £90 - and it was carefully wrapped. I was given a certificate to prove it was hand made. It certainly was a magnificent piece of china but who knows if it really was hand made.



This could be on the moon



The hands of the artist

Yet another short drive took us to an area of amazing fairy chimneys. These are rock pillars, which were formed when volcanic ash covered the area and hardened into "tuff". This, in turn, was covered in basalt. The tuff gradually eroded, leaving many tall columns capped with hard basalt. It is the tuff which has been excavated to produce the underground cities.



A landscape of fairy chimneys



This one looks like the Madonna & Child



A very strange shape



More caps in evidence



The caps which preserve the "chimnies"



Ayse - our guide



Some of the locals slept



Others were expected to work

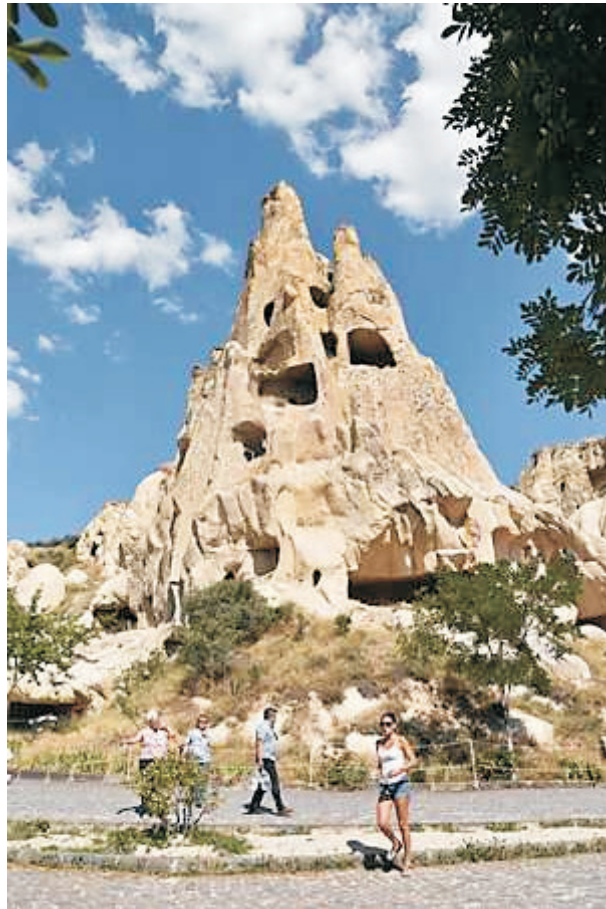
The landscape is amazing and, inevitably, was being viewed by lots of people. We explored the rocks, the local sleeping dogs, the camels and almost all the fun of the fair.



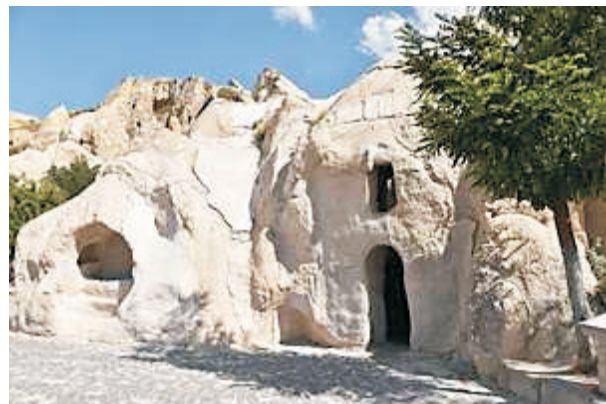
Another lunar landscape

The last stop of the day was at the Goreme Open Air Museum, an area full of early Christian churches burrowed into the rocks. Like much of the rest of the area, it is a World Heritage Site.

Many of the churches are superbly decorated with murals but photography wasn't allowed because of the potential for flash guns to damage them..



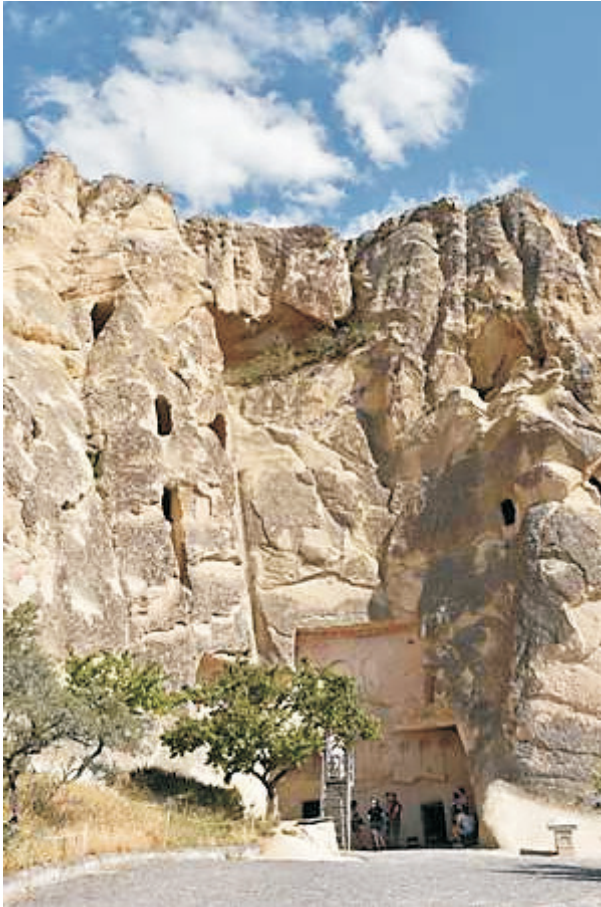
Buildings up on high



The rock is ...



... very easy to carve



The cliffs dwarfed the people

By now, we were exhausted and crawled back on board the bus for the ride home. It had been a long, hot and tiring day. Having been warned about the state of Valerie's back, our driver used extreme care to avoid the worst of the potholes and put in an impressive driving performance.



She joined us for dinner

After a suitable rest and some packing, Valerie had a swim in the open air pool.

We then dined on the terrace, accompanied by a very waif like but demanding pussy cat. She was probably the mother of the healthy looking kittens which we had seen playing in the hotel gardens.

She dined well on almost all of the chicken which came with our chicken Caesar salad. Most of the rest of the meal was vegetarian and she didn't fancy that.



She didn't like the vegetarian stuff

June 28

Capadoccia to Bourne End

A typical last day with lots of travelling and no photos. The van collected us at 08.30 after another good buffet breakfast, and we drove back to Kayseri Airport in about an hour. Ayse helped us to check in and then left us to sit and chat until our flight departed.

We left more or less on time, landed at Istanbul more or less on time and fought our way through the crowds from the domestic to the international terminal. There, we waited for the flight to London.

This was on schedule and we and our bags arrived safely at Heathrow. The trains took us to Maidenhead, although the bridge at Hayes & Harlington did such damage to Valerie's back that we completed the last leg of the journey by taxi.

I think we had both enjoyed ourselves.