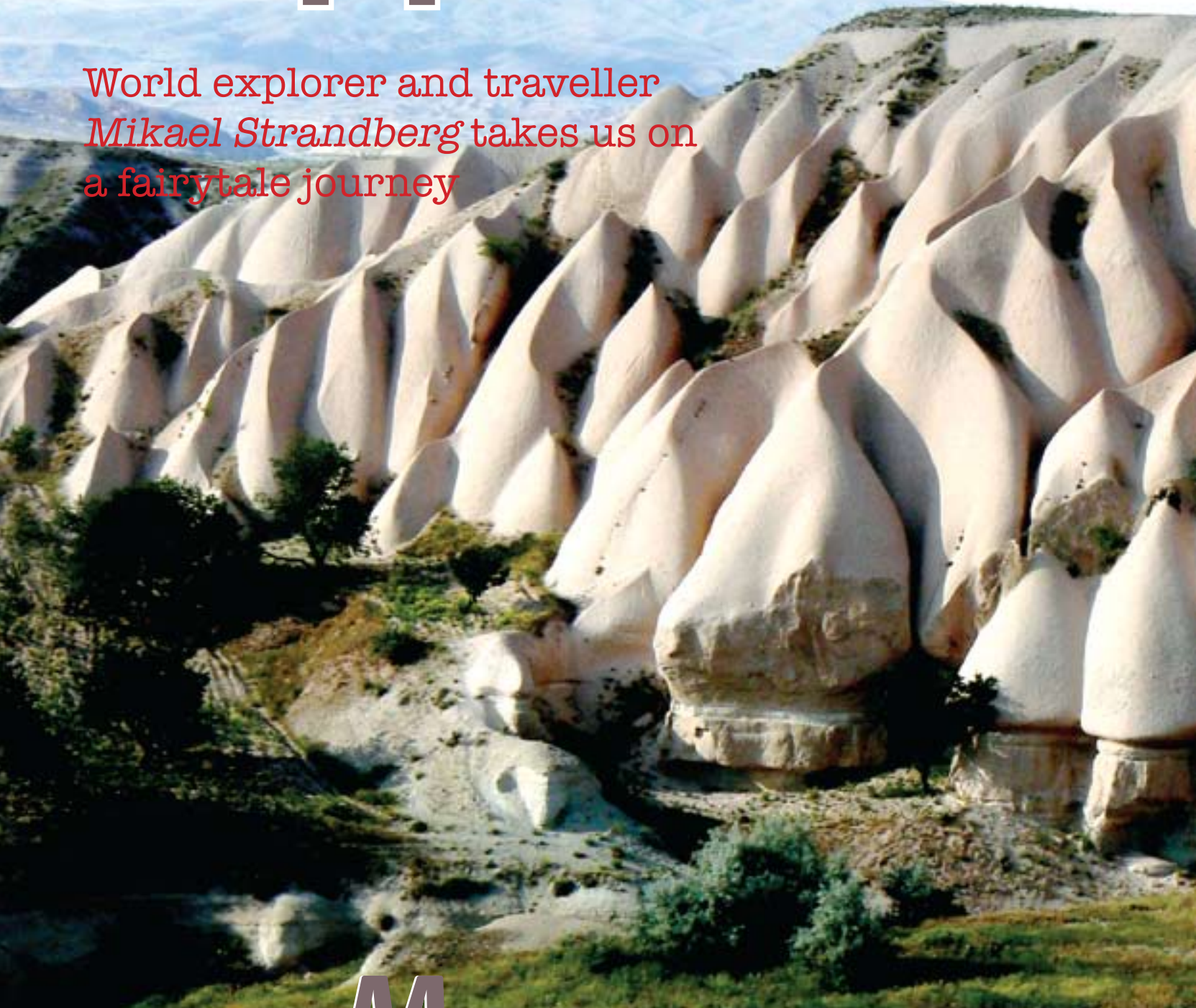


Cappadocia

World explorer and traveller
Mikael Strandberg takes us on
a fairytale journey



Mikael, you have been to 115 countries worldwide,” Ismail Oral at the local television station asked me in an interview, “but have you ever come across anything like this?” “I don’t think so,” I answered honestly and looked around me, “it is definitely one of the

wonders of the world and has to be seen by any traveller before he or she dies.”

I felt like I was walking through the middle of a moon landscape. A midget in a playground for giants, surrounded by



We had lunch in a restaurant carved out and located in one of the fairytale chimneys just outside the charming town centre of Göreme, and had another tasty Turkish meal. This time we enjoyed manti, a delicious dish consisting of small stuffed dumplings, blended in with a delectable garlic and tomato sauce. By many standards, this local cuisine is definitely one of the tastiest I have experienced in a while. And as tasty as the food is, as friendly and welcoming the local Anatolian people are.

The Hittites were the first people to enjoy and live in this fantasy landscape around 3,800 years ago. Since then many kingdoms and their people have had the fortune to live in this magical wonderland engulfed by pleasant climate. One of the most interesting and influential people was a group of Christians fleeing religious persecutions

I felt like I was walking through the middle of a moon landscape

during the Roman and Byzantine era as far back as 1,500 years ago. They built and carved out the most amazing underground cities, chapels, churches and monasteries in this soft lava; all of which are hidden away inside this amazing landscape.

“I don’t dare crawl into one of those tunnels!” hollered one elderly German tourist and quickly spat out, “it stinks of death!” Ismail smiled and showed me the way down into the Derinkuyu Underground City, a place where few tourists venture inside. It didn’t smell of death at all, it was just extremely earthy. Derinkuyu is the biggest and deepest of all the underground cities in Cappadocia. Fluorescent lights dotted along the walls aided me find my way as I used the rope hanging off the walls for balance.

“There are eight floors and the depth is about 85 meters,” Ismail explained, as we kneeled down and crawled through the tight tunnel. What an extraordinary feeling of relief once we were able to stand up again, inside what

eroded hills, twisted towers, giant boulders, tall spires, caves, chimneys and an array of geographic oddities which also gave me a strong feeling of being in a fairytale.

“This is the work of three volcanoes

that scattered debris all over the Central Anatolian plateau around 30 million years ago,” Ismail continued. “Wind and rain played their part to make this more fantastic than any other place on earth. And man, of course, has done his part to shape it as well!”



used to be a storage room used for religious studies. We continued down another vertical staircase, which lead us to another stunning chapel. Amazing to think this remarkable world was hidden away until a French priest rediscovered it in 1907. It is considered that around 40,000 people could hide away in one of the underground cities! But Cappadocia continued to stay out of the tourist radar until the late 70s.

“I came here with my family in 1970 since my father was looking for work, but we didn’t have any money, so we made our home in this cave,” explained Dogan, the modest coffee shop owner, while we chatted on the bottom floor of a six-storey fairy chimney called The Cave Man, just a stone’s throw from the magnificent rock village of Uchisar. “And I remember the first tourists who came a few years later. It was three

Eroded hills, twisted towers and tall spires gave me a strong feeling of being in a fairytale

hippies from Germany who stayed in our cave for many months. Things have really changed since then,” he continued.

They certainly have. Cappadocia is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Turkey hosting up to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. This number is mild in comparison to the coastal tourist spot Antalya, a stunning town situated 550kms south of Cappadocia, boasting over nine million visitors every year.

I’m not one to get lost in the crowd so I was very pleased to find that Cappadocia still retains that ‘unspoilt by tourism’ feel, which is startling due to the fact that there is so much more to do in Cappadocia than along the coast. I would personally rate it as one of the ten most interesting places on earth. To fully understand and appreciate this fairytale world, one has to find a secluded place to soak it all in. With such a wide area to explore, these spots are certainly not



lacking. For an even more special getaway, take a hot air balloon ride to gain that perfect bird's eye view.

Best of all, though, are the local people. They are among the friendliest, most generous and interested people I have ever come across in my life. Sure, most of the time, many of them hope to sell you one of the local trinkets, but they never do it aggressively. The most popular trinkets seem to be jewellery in the shape of the Turkish evil eye. Negotiating with the Cappadocian sellers is quite enjoyable and they appreciate you haggling with them. Although this is part and parcel of the local customs, the people are extremely hospitable and warm.

Not an hour passes by without being invited for a Turkish cup of sweet tea. So friendly that if you stand too long in one place, as I often do while trying to figure things out, they come up to you and ask if they can be of any assistance. Once the conversation starts flowing, funnily enough if it leads to global matters, the discussion eventually ends up on the Dervish.

The Dervish are a group of Sufi mystics who use a powerful whirling dance to send them into a deep trance to further understand

religious matters. Today, one can go to a historical caravanserai, like in Göreme, and see a group of male dancers perform this magic dance accompanied by mystic

Sufi music. I recommend this as the perfect way to finish off a visit to one of the most fantastic places on earth. Once you set foot here, you will never want to leave!

Must see attractions

Göreme Open Air Museum: Get astounded by the rock-hewn churches and the radiant frescos adorning inside.

Underground cities: Corridors are narrow and some ceilings are very low but exploring the underground city is remarkable.

Ürgüp and Göreme: Enjoy the local food, local wine and local atmosphere in these picturesque village.

Trekking or horse riding through the **Ihlara Valley:** Explore nature and the beautiful churches dotted throughout this stunning valley.

Hot Air Balloon ride: What better way is there to fully grasp this fairytale world than floating through the air in a hot air balloon!

Facts for the visitor

Best time to go: Cappadocia is generally cooler than the popular coastal areas of

the Mediterranean and the Aegean. April to mid June and September to October are the best months to avoid the intense heat and summer crowds.

What to wear: Modest, seasonal appropriate clothes are suggested for visits to Cappadocia. Long trousers are recommended for those who want to explore cave dwellings as some crawling may be necessary and the tufa surfaces can be quite rough. Be sure to bring a wide-brimmed hat, suntan lotion and comfortable shoes.

Getting there

By Plane: The closest airport to Cappadocia is in Kayseri, 75kms from Yunak Evleri.

By Bus: There are regular buses to Cappadocia from most cities around Turkey. All the buses are of luxury standards and are air-conditioned.