

### Pigeon Valley Viewpoint and view of Ortahisar Castle

Ramazan wanted to show us more beautiful views, so, as I mentioned, although not on our itinerary, we stopped at the Pigeon Valley Viewpoint, Esentepe Panaromic view point and view of Ortahisar Castle

At the Pigeon Valley Viewpoint we had a bird's eye view of the dovecotes carved out of the rocks. The place is covered in pigeons and a lone tree is covered in evil eyes (turns out we would see this at other spots as well, but this was our first and the most beautiful). We also had a spectacular view of the old abandoned fairy chimney cave homes and old Greek houses and the castle of Uchisar. This tall volcanic-rock outcrop is one of Cappadocia's most prominent landmarks and visible for miles around. Riddled with tunnels, it was used for centuries by villagers as a place of refuge when enemy armies overtook the surrounding plains.



Turns out we had seen this from our balloon that morning, with the sun glistening on the houses, but at the time I didn't know what I was taking a picture of.

### Esentepe Panaromic Viewpoint

Esentepe Panaromic view point, our next stop, was the best spot for a panoramic view of Goreme Valley.

The village is full of fairy chimneys, some of which have been converted into cave homes. We also got another view of the volcano.





## SadeF Restaurant

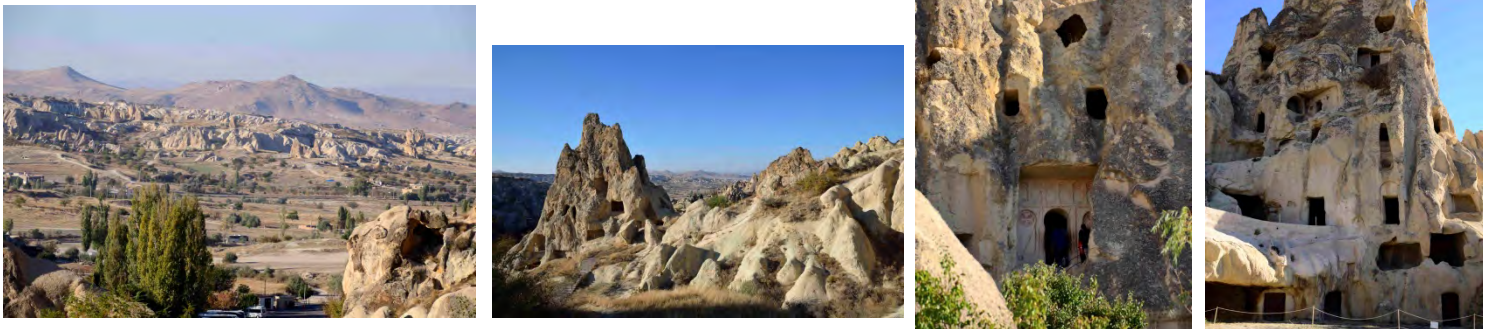
And lunch at Sedef Restaurant for another wonderful Turkish meal, this time Turkish pizza and my favorite, yogurt with cucumbers and garlic. And then they brought us dessert on the house.



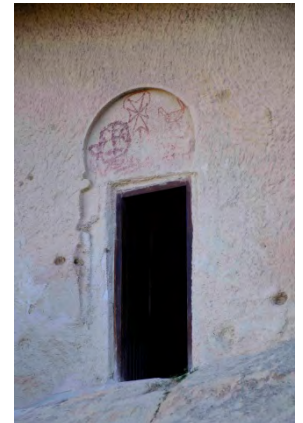
## Goreme Open Air Museum

From here we headed down into Goreme to the Open Air Museum. When I first heard the name, I pictured a farm, with cows and geese and panorama's depicting everyday life. Boy was I ever wrong. The Goreme Open Air Museum, a Unesco world heritage site, houses the world's most important Byzantine cave churches in what was once remote valleys where monks and nuns pursued monastic life from the 3rd century on although most of the churches are from the 10-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. We saw the best preserved Byzantine cave wall paintings and frescos from the Iconoclastic period through to the end of Seljuk rule. Icons with scenes from the Old Testament and the New Testament above portraits of Church Fathers and saints. Photographs inside the churches was not allowed, but Ramazan had a book with photographs of the frescos and I took pictures of the pictures.

We followed the cobble stone path until we reached the Aziz Basil Şapeli, dedicated to Kayseri-born St Basil, one of Cappadocia's most important saints. There were large dining rooms with long stone tables and stone benches where the monks ate. In the main room, we could still see the fresco of St Basil, a Maltese cross along with St George and St Theodore slaying a (faded) dragon, symbolizing paganism. On the right of the apse, Mary holds baby Jesus with a cross in his halo. The pagans and Christians lived and prayed together. We will see this again when we visit archeological sights on the west coast of the country.

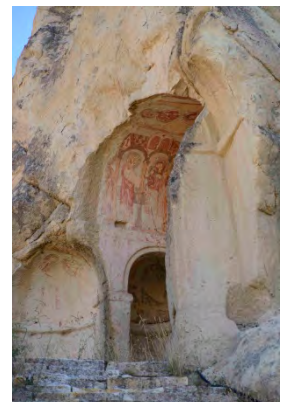




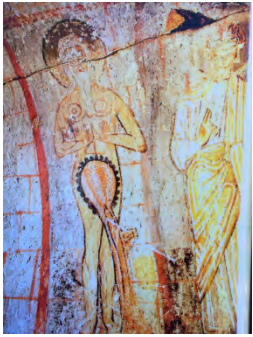


### Dark Church (Karanlık Kilise)

There is a stunning, fresco-filled Dark Church (Karanlık Kilise) which originally had very few windows, thus the name. But this this lack of light preserved the vivid blues and reds of the frescoes. One walks away from here in awe of what those generations were able to do and how the caves and the paintings have survived. With the lack of control over these sites, I hope it does not start to crumble and fade.







### Tea Break with view of Ortahisar Castle

After hiking up and down through there for over an hour, it was time for a tea break. So we sat across the valley from Ortahisar Castle, taking in the details of the cave homes on the side of the mountain. Ortahisar means middle castle as it is central among the towns in this area. It is known for its friendly people, picturesque stone houses, narrow streets and churches as well as the castle-like rock formation which sits on top. The mountain is honeycombed with caves and tunnels all camouflaged by nature.



## Urgup's Fairy Chimneys



There was one more stop for the day and that was to see Urgup's Fairy Chimneys, the symbol of Cappadocia, famously called "The Three Beauties." These are three fairy chimneys which look like a father, a mother and their child and not too far away are two more, squatter chimneys, called the grandmother and grandfather. The sun was already setting, the volcano was in the distance and it was beautiful, although difficult to photograph.

And then it was back to our cave hotel and time to say good-bye to Ramazan and Sadun, our driver. Ramazan and I exchanged emails and I think we will stay in touch. I rather like the idea of visiting his hotel once it is complete.



## Zeytin Restaurant

Dinner had been suggested at Muti by Prokopia Restaurant a Turkish fusion restaurant, but we asked Ramazan for a more low-key place where he might eat. Without hesitation he recommended Zeytin (which means olives). It was a ten minute walk down into the main part of town, on the main street filled with people and shops. Zeytin is a husband/wife operated small restaurant with about 20 tables. The wife was in the kitchen, cooking, which we could watch from the restaurant – the original open air kitchen. The husband greeted us, showed us some of the salads and vegetables available for dinner in a glass display, seated us, brought us menus along with freshly baked and cut bread, locally grown cucumbers, tomatoes from his garden, and a plate of pickled cabbage, tomatoes and pickles. We decided to have the lentil soup (a Turkish staple) and Testi.



Testi is a famous dish in this part of Turkey. It is a combination of lamb or beef or chicken or vegetables in tomato juices with peppers and other herbs, in a sealed pottery jar cooked in the oven. To serve the dish, a large knife is used, and with great flourish, the jar is cut to release the aromas. The food is then gently poured onto a serving dish.

Our host made a full show of serving the Testi. He brought it out still surrounded by flames. He took his large knife and banged it 3 times on the table, waiting for us to then clap three times (us and the whole restaurant



which was one other table of 5 people). He did that a few times. Then he hit the clay pot three times, we clapped, he repeated, we clapped, until when he hit the pot, the bottom flew off. I have the video!

And it was delicious.

