Güzelyurt
Cave Churches

Monastery valleys filled with cave churches and its own an underground city.

“Güzelyurt became famous with the spread of Christianity in Anatolia, especially during the time of Gregory of Nazianze the Theologian (4th century) distinguished scholar and Church Father who played an important role in the development of eastern monastery life. He was born in 328 close of the village of Güzelyurt which has been identified as ancient Karbala,” says the Karbella Hotel Guest Information guide.

“Güzelyurt used to be inhabited by both Greeks and Turks until 1924. At the end of the Greco-Turkish war (1919-1922) it was agreed to an exchange of populations. The Greek inhabitants were resettled to the villages of Kozan and Kastoria in Greece, and Turks from Salonica were settled in Güzelyurt.

The Karbella Hotel was originally built by the Greek community in the heart of the village in 1856. It served as a monastery and a religious school. A second building was added in 1913. Since the Greeks left, the building has been used as a primary school, a police station and a movie theater. The monastery is a listed historical building that belongs to the local council and the Ministry of Culture. It was restored as a hotel in 1985 by the Architecture faculty of the University of Yildiz from Istanbul.

Today, inhabitants of this traditional village work in agriculture and stock breeding. Many work in the major cities as stone masons. In the old village you can see houses carved out of the rock as well as traditional Greek houses with sculpted facades.

Take a walk in Kör Sokak (blind street) at dusk and you will see the “cow parade” in the old village’s streets. After a day in the pastures, the cowherd brings them back to the village and each cow heads to its barn on its own. With a bit of luck, you might see women baking bread in the neighborhood oven or in autumn you might see women preparing bulgur (cracked wheat) or pekmez (grape molasses.) The colorful market is on Monday mornings.

Monastery of Analepsis (Ascension)

Perched on a rocky outcrop over the village lake, the The High Church and the Monastery of Analepsis (Ascension), Yüksek Kilise, dates from the 19th century. This site is also thought to have been an important Neolithic site from the 4th or 3rd millennium B.C. because of the great amount of prehistoric tolls and obsidian found at the foot of the monastery. There is superb view of the village, the lake and Hasan Volcano which is 3268 meters high (10,721 feet.)

Costs - $125
Includes one night double occupancy hotel within walking distance of Monastery Valley, 2 lunches, dinner, breakfast, guided tour of Ihlara Valley, transportation and driver.

Getting There - About 3.5 hours from Incirlik.
38° 16' 40.17" N
4° 22' 19.02" E

Physical Difficulty - MEDIUM.
Varies from cobblestone walks, to climbing hills and walking on rocky terrain.

Bring a flash light.
As part of our Western Cappadocia Cave Churches hiking trip, you can hike along this 4.5 kilometer long valley strewn with about 50 rock churches and monasteries from the Byzantine period. It is within walking distance from the hotel, and you can go on your own, or pay a guide from the Karbella Hotel and the price includes a sack lunch.

“The Greek cave houses are a typical example of Cappadocian architecture from the beginning of the 20th century. At the end of the valley, you can climb up towards the village of Sivrihisar and from there, walk onto to Red Church set in impressive surroundings.”

**The “Red” Church:**
**The Church of St. Panteleimon**
“This is one of the oldest built churches (as opposed to rock churches). The crossed shaped church and it’s octagonal dome are built of large blocks of dark red stone. It stands on it’s own against the backdrop of the Meledniz Mountains. It is said that it was here that St. Gregory of Nazianzus spent the latter part of his life and that the church was built on the site where he was buried. For those who don’t want to hike the entire Monastery Valley, you can drive the six kilometers from Güzelyurt.

**St. Anargiros Church**
The Saint Anargiros Church is carved out of rock and has a dome and 4 columns. You can still see the frescoes in the dome that date from 1877. The Anargyres were doctors revered in all of the Near East. The rooms carved around the church were used to receive patients and pilgrims that came format he Saint Anargiros festivities. Make sure you climb the stairs that lead above the church; you’ll be rewarded with a panoramic view over the village and the St. Gregory Church.”

**Saint Gregory of the Naziansus Church (Cami Kilise)**
“Saint Gregory of the Naziansus church was built in the 4th century by the emperor Theodosius. It has the same architectural design as Saint Sophia in Istanbul but smaller. The church has been restored several times by the Greek community and after they left in 1924, it was converted into a mosque. The Greeks took with them the icons and hold objects from the church. The original mount and clapper of the churches golden bell still remain in the church, but the bell itself is now in Afyon Museum. A brink minaret replaced the bell tower. Inside the church, one can just see traces of frescoes that are covered with whitewash. The sculpted wood decorations, the iconostasis and the throne were a gift from Tsar Nicolas the 1st in the 18th century. The four big icons that were in the iconostasis, the Christ, the Virgin, the three Church Fathers (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Basil of Nyssa) and St. John the Baptist are now in the church in the village of Neo Karvali in northern Greece.

The Ottomans granted the Church the right to mint coins that were used not only within the community but also between the Greeks and Turks. The coins were minted in the rooms adjacent to the church. In the courtyard, there’s a staircase with 36 steps leading down to what is still believed to be a sacred spring.”
Ihlara Valley

“Ihlara Valley, is a 14 kilometer long canyon with a depth of approximately 100 meters is strewn with about one hundred churches and believed to have once been home to about eighty thousand people. There are 4 entrances to Ihlara valley. The first one is at the start of the valley in Ihlara Village. The second one opens to the 4th kilometer of the valley and it is the most popular entrance. It has more than 300 steps down to the valley. The third entrance is Belisirma village which allows you to enter the valley by driving. It is located at the 7th kilometer, and has restaurants by Melendiz River to have lunch. Most of the guided tours end their walking here after lunch. The last entrance is the end of the valley at the Selime Monastery. The best part of the valley is the first 7 kilometers from Ihlara Village until Belisirma Village where you can see most of the churches and natural beauty.

It is very pleasant to walk through the Ihlara valley by the vineyards, poplars and pistachio trees to the soothing sound of the rushing water surrounded by a rich wildlife of lizards, frogs, butterflies, birds and sometimes eagles and other mammals like lambs and sheep.

Most of the many cave churches in Ihlara Valley display scenes dissimilar to the scenes depicted in other Cappadocian churches. In fact, they are reminiscent of the early churches of Syria and the Coptic churches of Egypt. Some of the most important churches in the Ihlara Valley are:

Kokar Kilise (The Smelly Church)
The Kokar Kilise (The Smelly Church) is located in the first quarter of the valley between Ihlara Village and the main entrance. There are many frescoes covering the walls. On the left side, you can see the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Proof of the Virgin, the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi scenes. On the right, you will see the Last Supper, the Betrayal, Jesus being Led Away, Jesus before Annas and Caiaphos, the Crucifixion and the Entombment. On the door facing the entrance there is a Deesis above, with scenes of the Flight to Egypt. The Last Supper below was badly damaged when openings were made at a much later date for windows and a door. On the ceiling you can see the Ascension and the Pentecost together with a large Greek cross with the hand of God giving benediction in the center. On each side of the lower parts of the vaulting there are frescoes depicting the apostles standing and seated.

Purenli Seki Kilisesi (Church with the Terrace)
Also located in the first quarter of the valley, this church is around 100 meters from Kokar Kilise. You have to climb about 25 meters above the level of the river. The church is covered by frescoes classified as “archaic” but characterized by exquisite details, a strong sense of design and amazing freedom of expression.

Agacalti Kilise (Church under the Tree)
Turn right at the bottom of the stairs from the main entrance and you will find yourself 10 meters from the church. This church is quite different from the other churches of the Byzantine world of the 10th and 11th century Cappadocia, with its harmoniously contrasted colors of red, green and yellow, the subjects of its paintings and its decoration of flowers, rosettes and checkerboard patterns, all betraying strong eastern influence. The church, also known as the Church of Daniel or the Church of Pantassa, has a free cross architectural plan. On the wall opposite the entrance there is a fresco of Daniel in the Lion’s Den. The left cross-arm contains the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity and the Magi. The right cross-arm contains the Flight into Egypt, the Baptism and the Dormition. The Dormition of the Virgin (Koimesis) is unique as far as Cappadocia is concerned. It is composed of two scenes. In the first scene, Mary is lying on a bed, with Christ accompanied by St. John sitting on one side of the bed to recover her soul. In the upper scene Christ is shown holding his Mother’s soul, with an Angel behind him.”