



# Cappadox Festival, Turkey

The incredible lunar landscape of Cappadocia is just one of the reasons to visit its burgeoning annual music festival. **Rhiannon J Davies** reports

Cappadocia is such an extraordinary place that, for many travellers, it's already on 'the list'. Famous for otherworldly rock formations, Byzantine frescos and troglodytic cave dwellings carved out of its soft volcanic landscape, it has long been popular with nature, hiking and history enthusiasts alike. For music lovers, there's now another reason to visit this lunar-like setting.

The first ever Cappadox Festival was held in 2015; it was a three-day celebration of the Cappadocian landscape through a carefully scheduled programme of music, contemporary art, outdoor activities and foodie events. Following a resounding debut success (one pesky thunderstorm aside), it has now become an annual event and a firm fixture in Turkey's cultural calendar.

Set among the striking beauty of Cappadocia, in the very heart of Anatolia in central Turkey, the majority of the events are held in the small town of Uçhisar. Surrounded by national park, and crowned with a dramatic rock known as Uçhisar Castle, the town itself

seems to spill down its steep sides, gathering at the bottom and giving the 'castle' an island-like appearance. This already picturesque setting is helped by holding the event in May when the entire region is carpeted in lush green and ablaze with wildflowers.

The geological formations and the hollowed-out cave houses and hotels that make Cappadocia so unique do not just provide a backdrop to events, but are incorporated into the festival itself. A memorable moment of 2015 came when world-renowned percussionist, Mino Cinelu, performed an intimate gig in an old linseed press. Going beyond a simple appreciation of the natural acoustics, he set off, smiling, on a journey to explore the sounds of the room itself, creating an organic soundscape by playing on the surfaces he found.

Cappadocia's natural environment is an integral part of both the programming and the attraction of Cappadox. Of course, it's no coincidence that Cappadox happens in such a spectacular location. Rather, it was a chance for

Turkey's leading integrated art, culture and entertainment company, Pozitif, to realise a long-held dream. "Cappadocia's extra-terrestrial landscape and the history embedded in it is magic," says co-founder, Ahmet Uluğ. "We wanted to use this magic as a canvas to inspire and enlighten via music, arts, food, outdoor and mind and body activities. It is an experiment to open our senses and enliven our existence. We hope that our events will be 'once in a lifetime' experiences."

Cappadox offers a pick-and-mix festival format that allows guests to work out their own personal programme from the packed schedule of ticketed and free events. The days are mostly given over to the non-musical aspects of the festival: sunrise yoga on a high plateau, guided nature trekking, outdoor picnics, wine and cheese tastings, and a chance to explore the contemporary art installations that incorporate the landscape – all accompanied by the ceaseless chorus of chirping birds and buzzing bees. There are some daytime concerts too. Watching Mercan



Dede perform his multi-layered, Sufi-tinged music to a bleary-eyed, but mesmerised crowd as the sun spilt gold over this awe-inspiring landscape was an unforgettable experience. The scene was made even more spectacular by the sight of hundreds of hot air balloons rising out of the rose-tinted dawn, a daily event that is one of Cappadocia's biggest tourist draws.

The close of the day also offers the chance to watch the colours change over Cappadocia's undulating curves and 'fairy chimney' dominated geography. Uluğ shares a special moment from Cappadox 2016: "We were shooting a sunset video with the Sun Ra Arkestra on an ancient site. Marshall Allen, their 92-year-old leader, was inspired by the location and we had a great session making the best of the golden hour. After the sun disappeared behind the hill and structures, the Arkestra kept playing, and we kept shooting. Then, the sun's rays fell again upon the band through a crack in the rocks and the Arkestra immediately turned towards the soft light and started chanting. You could hear and sense that they were in contact with Sun Ra."

These artists represent just a small fraction of what's on offer. "We have a very eclectic music policy, which reflects our 27 years of history in the field," says Uluğ. "It's about balancing traditional and ethnic with the avant-garde and contemporary or the more ambient styles with louder electronic music elements." This year's line-up looks set to follow in this tradition with Portuguese *fado*-inspired Dead Combo, Bavarian electronic music maestro Acid Pauli,



Lebanese-born Yasmine Hamdan, jazz virtuoso Lars Danielsson teaming up with Martinican pianist Grégory Privat and multi-instrumentalist Peter Broderick all joining a carefully selected pick of homegrown Turkish talent such as Kaan Tangöze, Büyük Ev Ablukada and Kalben.

The evening concerts gather the largest crowds, for creative collaborations in the shadow of Uçhisar castle. Yet, following these, it is the late-night venue that is perhaps the most truly breathtaking. A short walk into the mouth of one of Cappadocia's many valleys, through colourfully up-lit volcanic rock formations, funnels the crowd into a



Far left: The striking peak, known as Uçhisar Castle  
This page: the incredible rock formations of Cappadocia are integral to the festival programme

naturally-created clearing in the rocks. Here, Istanbul favourites including Gevende and İnsanlar, as well as jazz maestro İlhan Erşahin have provided the night owls with atmospheric music to dance to.

Besides the music, foodie and outdoor events, the festival features installations and exhibitions that reflect Turkey's burgeoning contemporary art scene. This year's theme, 'Ways Out from the World' is inspired by Turkish author Sami Baydar's book of the same name, and Fulya Erdemci, Cappadox's contemporary art curator explained more. "It doesn't refer to escapist strategies, but it is rather an invitation to get as courageous as the imagination goes. Informed by the urgency of undoing the ways we know, we need to imagine and invent unprecedented 'languages' to conceive the world-to-come."

What's yet to come for the festival remains to be seen. Although the team behind it has decades of experience, at just three years in, Cappadox Festival is still in its infancy. This means that it is still largely undiscovered by the international crowds and the audience is mostly made up of the sophisticated artsy Istanbul set taking a welcome chance to get out of the city and mingle in a whole new setting. If you haven't been to Cappadocia yet, and want a chance to see a whole new side of Turkish contemporary culture, you might want to go now, before everyone else finds out. ♦

**+ DATES** This year's festival is May 18-21  
**+ ONLINE** [www.cappadox.com](http://www.cappadox.com)