

Derinkuyu Underground City

On land | Turkey | 8th century BCE-1923 | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

Derinkuyu goes about 85 meters underground, deep enough to hide thousands of people and their animals.

Read the story

Cappadocia's soft volcanic rock is easy to carve. People here have been digging homes and shelters into it for thousands of years. Derinkuyu may have started as small cellars, possibly as early as the 700s BCE.

During the Byzantine era, from about 780 to 1180 CE, it was dug much deeper. When raiders came, families could hurry underground with their animals and food. Huge round stone doors, like giant wheels, could be rolled across tunnels to block enemies.

The city had air shafts, wells, kitchens, stables, wine presses, storage rooms and a chapel. It even connects by a tunnel several kilometers long to another underground city, Kaymakli. Christians used it as a refuge into the 1900s.

How it ended

Derinkuyu was never destroyed. People used it as a refuge for centuries, until the local Christian population left the region in 1923. Then it was forgotten until its rediscovery in 1963.

Key words

- refuge: a safe place to hide from danger
- ventilation: a way of letting fresh air in and stale air out
- volcanic tuff: soft rock made from volcanic ash

Wow facts

- Rolling stone doors weighed hundreds of kilograms and could only be opened from inside.
- A tunnel may connect Derinkuyu to another underground city about 8 kilometers away.
- Air shafts kept the city breathable, even many levels deep.

Talk about it

1. What would you need to bring if you had to live underground for a few weeks?

2. How did the people of Derinkuyu solve problems like air, water and safety?

Try this

Draw a map of Derinkuyu Underground City as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. How was Derinkuyu rediscovered in 1963?

- A. A man found it behind a wall in his house
- B. A satellite photo
- C. A dog fell in
- D. An earthquake opened it

2. What blocked tunnels from enemies?

- A. Rolling stone doors
- B. Water
- C. Fire
- D. Glass

3. Why was the rock good for digging?

- A. It is soft volcanic rock
- B. It is ice
- C. It is sand
- D. It is wood

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/derinkuyu-underground-city/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. A man renovating his home knocked down a wall and found a tunnel.
2. A. Huge round stone doors could be rolled across tunnels.
3. A. Cappadocia's volcanic tuff is soft and easy to carve.