

6.4 VASCO Travel: Restoration of the Sarica Church in Cappadocia



Description of Good Practice

To contribute to local development and improve co-operation with local communities, VASCO Travel, which offers travel services and tours in Turkey for about 200,000 customers per year from Austria, Germany, Slovakia and Hungary, has initiated and financially supported the restoration of Sarica Church in Cappadocia, central Turkey. Sarica Church is a soft limestone carved structure, typical of rock cut churches in Cappadocia. The restoration project was considered necessary to preserve the church, as the soft limestone was being destroyed by moisture and humidity, and a large crack had developed in the building's structure.

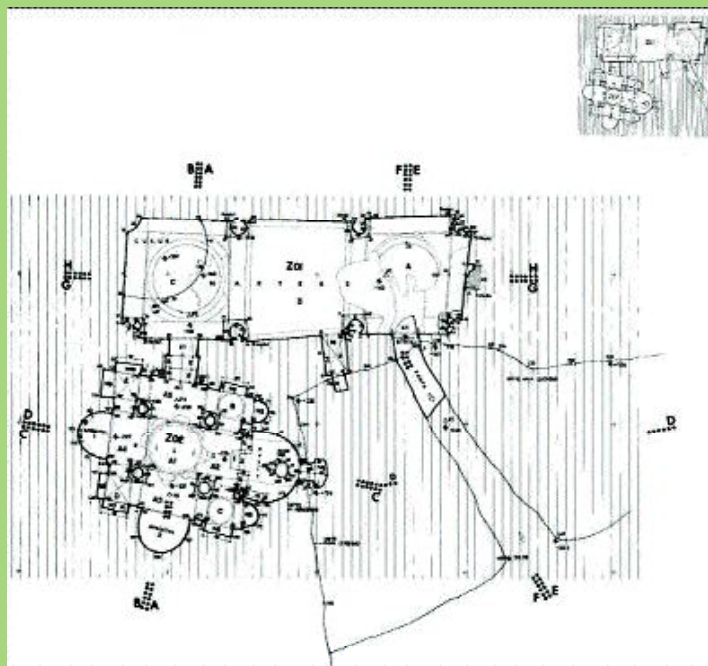
Although Sarica Church was not originally on VASCO's itineraries, in summer 1996, a VASCO tour of Cappadocia with the Austrian Federation of Seniors came across the church by chance and recognised its need for preservation. VASCO's representatives realised that the church could disappear in a few years, as water was filtering in from the roof, destabilising the whole structure. As Sarica was a small-scale rock cut church, VASCO's General Manager decided to contribute directly to its conservation by financing the restoration work.

The project began in 1997, with the collection of church documentation phase, and the restoration work started in August 2001. Restoration plans were submitted to and approved by the State Monument Protection Board. During the restoration of the church, a building that once served as a dining room for the monks was discovered directly next to the church, and it is now being restored. This additional work has caused the restoration project to take longer than anticipated and required additional funds from VASCO.

Implementation

The restoration activities were co-ordinated by KA.BA Conservation of Historic Buildings and Architecture Ltd, a restoration company based in Ankara. The company was selected after consulting with experts at museums and universities. Within VASCO, the General Manager was personally in charge of the project and oversaw the whole process. On-

site management was handled by KA.BA, which reported on a periodic basis to the General Manager. VASCO supported the work of KA.BA's staff of architects, workers and civil engineers. In addition, an associate professor of Byzantine Art History from Hacettepe University in Ankara and an expert on Cappadocian architecture served as advisors during the restoration process.



PLANS FOR THE CHURCH RESTORATION



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE SARICA CHURCH DURING RESTORATION

VASCO invested about US\$150,000 in this project, including fees for all the workers, experts and architects; these funds came from VASCO's corporate budget. To help create wider support for the project, VASCO also used the name of Magic Life International, an affiliate company, which is widely known in the area.

VASCO's itineraries in Cappadocia now include a guided visit to the church, with a detailed explanation on the restoration efforts. Once the overall project is completed, a permanent exhibition will be available to all visitors on the restoration and rock cut type churches.

Benefits

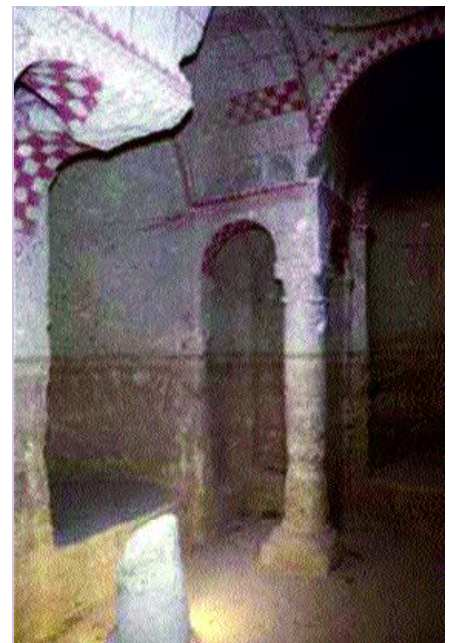
The benefits of VASCO's support for the restoration of Sarica Church have included:

- The destruction of a historical cultural monument, part of the cultural heritage of Turkey, has been prevented.
- The attention surrounding this project has attracted tourists to the site, reducing the concentration of visitors at some other crowded nearby sites and contributing to the overall site management of Cappadocia as a whole.
- VASCO has received very positive feedback from the tourism industry: an article was published in the magazine of the Turkish travel agencies and the project has brought a high level of prestige to the company.
- The Turkish Ministry of Culture highly appreciated the project, as Sarica is a unique example of rock cut churches in Cappadocia. The restoration has helped VASCO earn the confidence of official agencies including the Ministry of Culture and the State Monument Protection Board, facilitating some of the company's other bigger cultural tourism projects.
- VASCO employees are proud of the project and of being a part of this endeavour.

Comments

The Sarica Church restoration project was the very first of its kind in Cappadocia undertaken with funds from the private sector. Private investment was needed for the restoration, as the Turkish government is only able to fund small projects. However, the Government did contribute to the project by streamlining bureaucratic processes.

The church restoration also offered the opportunity to further bridge a cultural gap, as visitors brought to Sarica were surprised that, in a Muslim country like Turkey, an old Orthodox Christian church was restored by a Turkish company. After September 11th, these themes are very often discussed during excursions and trips.



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE SARICA CHURCH DURING RESTORATION