

WHAT LIES BENEATH

With a place in both ancient and modern history, underground cities offer a fascinating insight into man's ability to adapt over the years.



The ancient city
of Derinkuyu





Historically, some obvious answers to life's challenges have been found in going underground. All over the world, examples of cities within cities, or cities underneath cities to be precise, can be found.

The subterranean locations highlighted here were built for explicit purposes, like defending inhabitants from the dangers of armed conflicts or as shelter from extreme weather conditions and natural disasters. Each is an extraordinary example of life beneath the earth's surface.

🇹🇷 DERINKUYU

Location: Cappadocia, Turkey

History: People often make interesting discoveries when they renovate their homes. A batch of decorative tiles found behind the fireplace perhaps or some old tools under the cellar floor – but a vast underground city? That's precisely what happened in 1963, when a Turkish man knocked down a basement wall in his house and discovered a large room and a further tunnel, which eventually unfurled into the ancient city of Derinkuyu. One of the largest underground cities in the world, this vast subterranean living space, comprising 18 storeys that burrow 85 metres down into the earth, was created during the Byzantine era in 780-1180AD as a refuge from wars.

This ingenious and cavernous network could have housed 20,000 people and it featured living quarters connected to shops, schools, churches, communal areas, wells, kitchens, stables and even escape routes should intruders ever penetrate the heavy stone doors.

Around 600 entrances have been found and each storey could be closed off individually. Numerous subterranean tunnels stretch for kilometres and connect Derinkuyu with other underground ancient cities in the region of Cappadocia. To date, around half of Derinkuyu is accessible and the site is a major tourist attraction in the region.





🇬🇧 EDINBURGH VAULTS

Location: South Bridge, Edinburgh, Scotland

History: In the late 18th century, Scotland's vibrant capital was growing apace and two bridges were built to manage the expansion, North Bridge and South Bridge. The latter, first proposed in 1775, crossed the Cowgate gorge between High Street and the growing University of Edinburgh, and opened in 1788. As the bridge did not span water, the space beneath its 19 arches was considered valuable commercial space.

However, the various businesses that inhabited the 120 vaults did not stay for long. Shoddy workmanship meant there was poor waterproofing and the vaults flooded. By 1795 businesses abandoned the spaces and the city's poverty stricken moved in. The dark and damp honeycomb of enclosed rooms became home to those on the fringes of society.

Robert Louis Stevenson described the vaults in his 1878 book *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*. He wrote: "...under dark arches and down dark stairs and alleys... the way is so narrow that you can lay a hand on either wall. There are skulking jail-birds; unkempt, barefoot children; an old man, when I saw him last, wore the coat in which he had played the gentleman three years before; and that was just what gave him so preeminent an air of wretchedness".



Fire and structural collapses finally saw life abandon the labyrinthine dwellings below Edinburgh's street level and most of the vaults were torn down or built over in the 20th century. In the 1970s, Marlin's Wynd, which was once busy with fruit sellers and book merchants, was found virtually intact underneath the Royal Mile's Tron Kirk. Now these splendid vaulted cellars are a unique setting private functions.





🇨🇦 RÉSO

Location: Montreal, Canada

History: RÉSO comes from the French word réseau, meaning network, and it is the name of one of Montreal's most famous attractions – an underground maze of 32 kilometres of tunnels with more than 120 exterior access points. Criss-crossing the depths of Montreal's streets in and around the downtown area, RÉSO has a residential section, a broad range of retail shops and facilities, restaurants, hotels, galleries, seven metro stops, plus several cinemas and a library.

Constructed in the early '60s, these winding interconnected thoroughfares in this massive underground mall provide vital respite from Montreal's incredibly harsh winters. Shopping is the main sport but there's also a variety of entertainment options, ranging from artworks to public squares for people watching and cultural centres.

The brainchild of Canadian modernist urban planner Vincent Ponte, RÉSO was built in an effort to contain street-level traffic and to help locals escape -20°C temperatures – the tunnel system was created for easy and warm circulation around the new modern downtown.

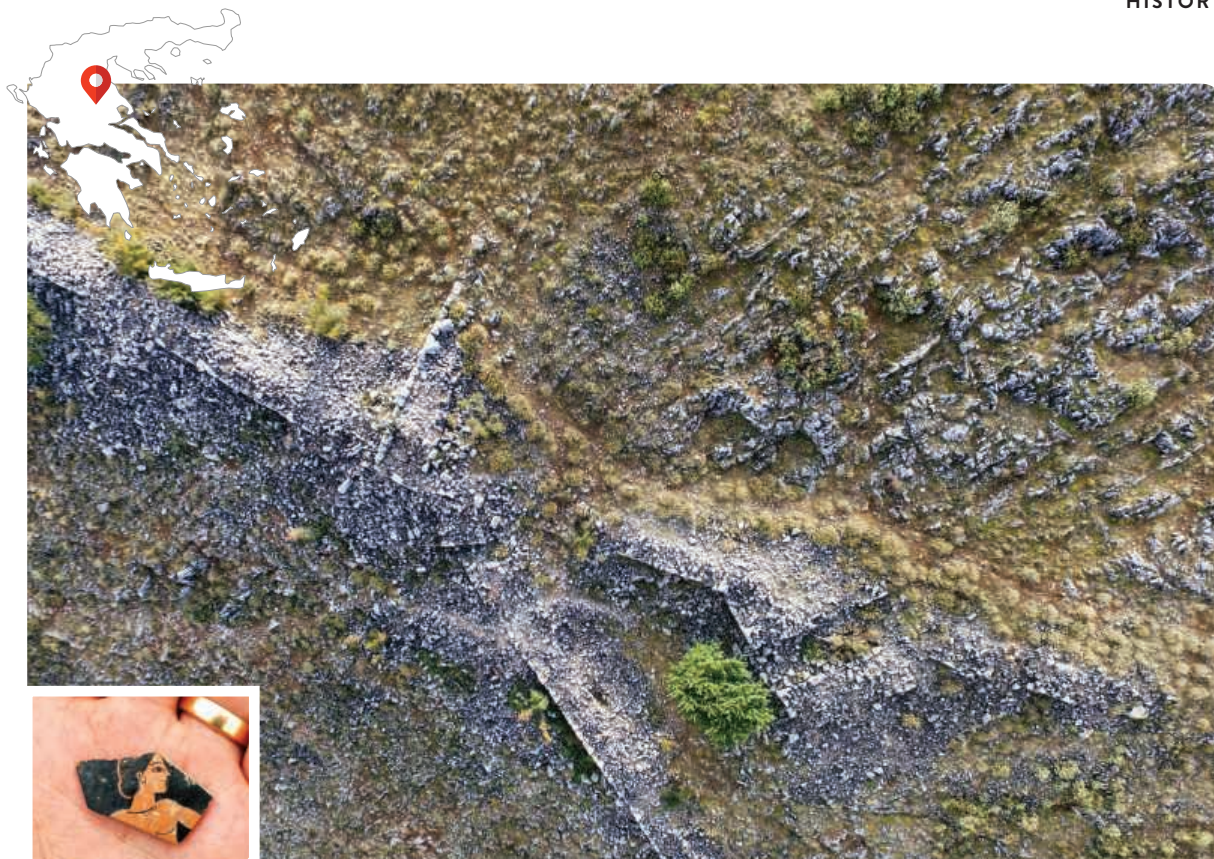


🇨🇳 DIXIA CHENG

Location: Beijing, China

History: Built in the 1970s by order of Chairman Mao Zedong, the "Underground City" was created in a climate when China feared nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union. Dixia Cheng was constructed as a





safe haven in the event of nuclear fallout. The sprawling complex wasn't merely built as a shelter but rather was designed to sustain a way of life. Schools, restaurants, cinemas and even a roller-skating rink were the standard distractions put in place in case Armageddon was raging outside.

By the year 2000, still virtually untouched, the site showed significant signs of decay and disrepair and so the government approved a massive restoration project to transform it into a modern tourist attraction.

More than 300,000 local citizens, including volunteer school students, originally built this Cold War era complex, which spans an area of 85 square kilometres. The tunnels reportedly link together various landmarks in the Chinese capital, including key governmental buildings such as the Zhongnanhai and the Great Hall of the People, as well as military bases in the outskirts of the city. The China Internet Information Center states that the tunnels "link all areas of central Beijing". Dixia Cheng has been closed for renovation since 2008.

🇬🇷 VLOCHÓS

Location: Thessaly, Greece

History: The most recent discovery of an underground city, made in 2016, Vlochós is being studied by a team of archaeologists from the University of Gothenburg.

Robin Rönnlund, PhD student in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History at the university says: "A colleague and I came across the site in connection with another project, and we realised the great potential right away. The fact that nobody has ever explored the hill before is a mystery. What used to be considered remains of some irrelevant settlement on a hill can now be upgraded to remains of a city of higher significance than previously thought."

Located about five hours north of Athens, the previously unknown ancient city of Vlochós is spread across and around the Strongilovoúni hill on the great Thessalian plains and can be dated to several historical periods. Rather than traditional excavating, the Swedish team use methods such as ground-penetrating radar that enable them to leave the site almost exactly how they found it.

Rönnlund is buoyant about what remains to be uncovered and explains: "We found a town square and a street grid that indicate that we are dealing with quite a large city. The area inside the city wall measures over 40 hectares. We also found ancient pottery and coins that can help to date the city.

"Our oldest finds are from around 500 BC, but the city seems to have flourished mainly from the fourth to the third century BC, before it was abandoned for some reason, maybe in connection with the Roman conquest of the area." ↑

