

Turkey: Historic Region of Hasankeyf to Be Flooded

The beautiful site of Hasankeyf is a favorite of many visitors to Turkey because of its historical value and insight into the local culture. However, the area is currently under threat from the creation of the Ilisu hydroelectric dam. Plans to build the dam were put on hold in 2008 because of concerns over environmental and cultural protection but it seems that it is once again on course to be completed and is about to wipe out this precious landscape. The proposals for the dam have been promoted as a great opportunity but they come at a large price to local history.



It is said that the creation of the new hydroelectric dam and 121-square-mile reservoir will increase the size of the region from 50.82 hectares to 284.86 hectares, provide new homes and employment opportunities and increase tourism thanks to new shopping malls and water-sports facilities. A new apartment complex is under-way and according to many this is a positive step towards bringing Hasankeyf into a new, modern era. Nevertheless, others disagree with this sentiment, particularly those that oppose the destruction of historic sites, which will surely come once the area is flooded.

Hasankeyf is rich in culture and historical sites; it was the capital city for the Ayyubids, an important hub for the Ottoman empire, and the 12th century Great Mosque and Artukid Bridge are among numerous structures that have been lovingly preserved. It is impossible to deny that this is an important area of world heritage with its own potential for tourism but if the plans for the dam continue then it could all be lost. The area was recently placed on the 'Most Endangered' list of historic sites by the Cultural Awareness Foundation to publicize its plight but the trucks are still rolling in and the construction continues.



The impact of this new dam will not simply raise the water level a little, a massive area will be submerged by an extra 200ft of water meaning that 80% of the monuments, approximately 200 sites, will be lost beneath the rising water and potentially forgotten. Many criticize the proposals, saying that in creating this new site for tourism and prosperity, Turkey is losing one with just as much potential and even more importance. There is still a lot to be learnt from the site because there has been little archaeological activity so far, but this will be impossible if the looming 2013 deadline is met.

It is possible that the area will not be lost entirely because there is talk of moving some of the artifacts from caves and mosques to a new museum and of relocating the Zeyne Tomb. This proposal may mean well but it does little to preserve the full history and overall spectacle that Hasankeyf currently provides and it offers nothing in the eyes of many of the region's defenders. The Cultural Awareness Foundation is not alone in this fight and there are many organizations joining the campaign to raise awareness for this endangered site. However, as the work continues it seems increasingly like a lost cause and that the undiscovered secrets of Hasankeyf will be lost to the rising waters.

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