

Official Turkey again uses Greek Orthodox heritage in bid to attract visitors, pilgrims



Turkey's official tourism promotion agency this week featured the iconic Panaghia Soumela Monastery in northeast Asia Minor on its website – yet another instance where tourism officials in the predominately Muslim country use Orthodox and Hellenic monuments and cultural treasures to attract tourists and pilgrims.

Restoration works at the monastery have been completed, with Turkish media saying the cliff-side complex, considered the cradle of Greek Orthodoxy in the historic Pontus region, will reopen to visitors at the end of July.

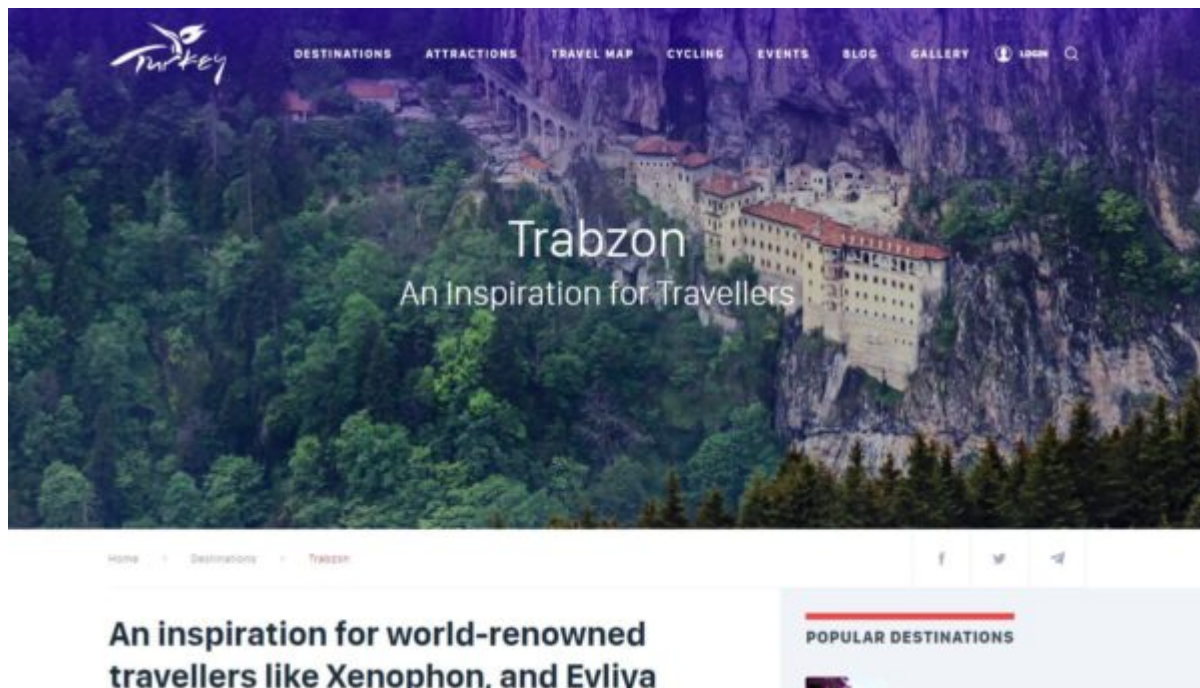


Still in the same area, and specifically in the Black Sea port city of Trabzon, Turkey's culture and tourism minister is expected to inaugurate the restored Hagia Sophia Cathedral in the city, an emblematic Orthodox cathedral built in the 13th century and a foremost example of Comnenus-era ecclesiastical architecture.

A screenshot of the official Turkey tourism website. The header features the 'Turkey' logo and navigation links: DESTINATIONS, ATTRACTIONS, TRAVEL MAP, CYCLING, EVENTS, BLOG, GALLERY, LOGIN, and a search icon. The main banner image shows the Trabzon city walls built into a cliffside, with the text 'Trabzon' and 'An Inspiration for Travellers' overlaid. Below the banner, a breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Destinations > Trabzon'. A social media sharing bar includes icons for Facebook, Twitter, and a share icon. The main content area has the headline 'An inspiration for world-renowned travellers like Xenophon, and Evliya'. To the right, a section titled 'POPULAR DESTINATIONS' is partially visible.

Similar to the more well-known Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, the Erdogan government has for years pressured to reconvert this cathedral into a mosque, from its current status as a museum.

The local chamber of architects, among many others, has demanded that Trabzon's Hagia Sophia remain exclusively a museum, so visitors can appreciate the rare frescoes and other treasures of Orthodox ecclesiastical art restored and maintained at the cathedral.



Regarding this week's decision by Turkey's highest administrative court over whether the iconic Hagia Sophia of Constantinople can be reconverted into a mosque, the German mass daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* quoted Turkish author and Islamic studies scholar Cemil Kilic. The latter explained the reasons why the Erdogan administration wants to reconvert the greatest of all cathedrals in eastern Christendom back into a so-called "imperial mosque".



As he said "...No one needs the Hagia Sophia as a mosque... there are numerous places of worship in Istanbul," using the modern-day Turkish name for the ancient Bosphorus metropolis.

Kilic added that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan merely wants to shore up support among his more religiously fervent voters, as well as to deflect public opinion from the economic downturn in Turkey in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

