

Coober Pedy: The town that is literally down under!



Coober Pedy - groundlevel. Credit: abc.net.au

Coober Pedy, a small town in South Australia, is called 'Kupa Piti' in the indigenous Arabana language. It means "white man in a hole" and that is literally what happens here. The residents live mostly underground! Considering that the ground temperature in the day is 45C, it seems reasonable. But let's go back a few million years to see why people were drawn to this town and their unusual dwellings.

150 million years ago, the Coober Pedy region was underwater. As the water receded and the water table got lower, silica solutions were deposited in cavities in the ground. Over the years these have formed into gleaming opals, Australia's most famous gem. But these



An opal. Credit: Wikicommons

lay buried for a while. Man roamed here in the form of the Aboriginal people who lived as hunters and gatherers in this wild

desert. Finally, like in so many places, the white man came. One man, John McDouall Stuart owned Stuart Range Opal Field and with his fellow miners christened the town, Coober Pedy.

Another name that is legendary in these parts is Willie Hutchison, a restless teenager who wandered away from a campsite and found, what is still, the biggest opal found in the world. No wonder the town is the Opal Capital of the World. Hundreds more came in search of the treasure and that's when they had to literally face the heat. Necessity is the mother of invention and they sure did something creative - they built underground homes!



An underground church. Credit: tripadvisor.com

Underground, the temperature is a cool 24C. What started as small, basic dwellings have now become homes with multiple rooms and passageways. Some even have swimming pools! The town also has underground hotels, churches and a museum. The residents think nothing of their odd abodes but it is a huge tourist draw!

Opals are still the town's mainstay with many most of the residents employed in the business. They even have a Coober Pedy Opal Festival every March. If you are keen you can get a Precious Stones Prospecting Permit in the opal fields for about £40. Anyone can try their luck!

Coober Pedy is truly the town down under in the land Down Under!



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