



Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan

Go Beyond Tour | 24 Days | Physical Level 3

Baku - Galaba - Sheki - Akhasheni - Signaghi - Tbilisi - Gudauri - Mt Kazbegi - Kutaisi - Mestia - Ushguli - Akhaltsikhe - Dilijan – Tsakhkadzor - Goris - Yerevan

This 3-country journey travels via the spectacular High Caucasus Mountains and the lowlands of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia on an unforgettable 24-day cultural experience. Start on the Caspian Sea in the exciting Baku and travel through the wine fields in Georgia, see impressive church and monasteries, ancient cave towns, remote villages to meet fascinating locals. Follow in the footsteps of Silk Road merchants and medieval Crusader Knights on your Eurasia adventure.

- Sample traditional Georgian cuisine and the country's signature wines
- Travel Silk Road caravan routes to discover ancient caravanserais and temples
- Learn about the world's first Christian nation in Armenia
- Tour the Zoroastrian Ateshgah Fire Temple in Baku
- Marvel at the Swiss Alps like scenery in Svaneti and Mt Kazbegi
- Learn about the Soviet Union at the Joseph Stalin Museum in Gori



Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) and Local Guides
- Visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

Go Beyond Tours:

Venture off the beaten track to explore fascinating destinations away from the tourist trail. You will discover the local culture in depth and see sights rarely witnessed by other travellers. These tours take you away from the comforts of home but will reward you with the experiences of a lifetime. These tours include:

- Walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

Physical Level 3:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

The Eurasia Explorer: Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan tour is rated as a **physical level 3** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it's more about spending time in vehicles rather than hiking or travelling to remote locations. You'll be getting on and off coaches, walking around the sights and climbing some steps.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time
- Most overland journeys are comfortable but there are a few transfers on mountainous (but safe) roads

Of course, our National Escort and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

Country Profile: Azerbaijan

Oil-rich Azerbaijan has redefined itself over the past two decades from a struggling newly independent state to a major regional energy player. Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence in 1918 and became the first democratic Muslim state. In 1920 the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The modern Republic of Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence on 30 August 1991, shortly before the dissolution of the USSR in the same year.

Country Profile: Georgia

Situated at the strategically important crossroads where Europe meets Asia, Georgia has a unique and ancient cultural heritage, and is famed for its traditions of hospitality and cuisine. Over the centuries, Georgia was the object of rivalry between Persia, Turkey and Russia, before being eventually annexed by Russia in the 19th century. The country broke away from the Soviet Union and became an independent state in 1991.

Country Profile: Armenia

Independent from the Soviet Union since 1991, Armenia is a landlocked country with Turkey to the west, Georgia to the north, and Azerbaijan to the east. Armenia boasts a history longer than most European countries. One of the earliest Christian civilisations, Armenia's first churches were founded in the fourth century. In later centuries, it frequently oscillated between Byzantine, Persian, Mongol or Turkish control, as well as periods of independence.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 24 days in duration including international flights. Due to flight schedules passengers may arrive/depart on Day 2. Travellers booked on 'Land Only', the price includes visa fees and your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 2 in Baku and end the tour on Day 23 in Yerevan. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances, we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

Itinerary – Eurasia Explorer: Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan

Day 1: Fly to Dubai

Fly overnight to Azerbaijan via Dubai.



Day 2: Baku

Upon arrival this morning and after collection of your luggage, you will be met in the arrival hall by your local Azerbaijan National Escort from Wendy Wu tours. Together with all other group members, transfer approximately 30 minutes to your hotel. Your room will be ready for check in on arrival.

The remainder of the day is at your leisure to rest before an early evening welcome meeting.



Later, visit Martyrs' Lane, known as 'Shehidler Khiyabany' among locals. Walk through the Alley of the Martyrs to find a beautiful view overlooking Baku's coastline. Move to Icheri Sheher, the old part of the city and Shemakha gate where you'll have dinner.

Destination Information

Baku – Azerbaijan's capital is the architectural love child of Paris and Dubai...albeit with plenty of Soviet genes floating half-hidden in the background. Few cities in the world are changing as quickly and nowhere else in Eurasia do East and West blend as seamlessly or as chaotically. At its heart, the Unesco-listed Old lies within an exotically crenelated arc of fortress wall. Around this are gracefully illuminated stone mansions and pedestrianised tree-lined streets filled with exclusive boutiques.

Day 3: Baku

In the morning continue touring this grand city by visiting the Shirvanshah's Palace, Caravanserai, Maiden Tower, the Carpet Museum and main market square, which has numerous art studios and souvenir stalls. Finish the sightseeing tour with Nizami Street and Fountain Square in the new part of Baku.

After lunch, you will have some free time to wander the city's streets before dinner this evening.



Destination Information

Shirvanshah's Palace – A 15th-century palace built by the Shirvanshahs and described by UNESCO as "the pearl of Azerbaijan's architecture". The complex contains the Divanhane (main building of the palace), the burial-vaults, the shah's mosque with a minaret and Seyid Yahya Bakuvi's mausoleum.

Maiden Tower – The Maiden Tower is a 12th-century monument located in the Old City of Baku. It is one of Azerbaijan's most distinctive national emblems and is thus featured on Azeri currency notes and official letterheads. The Maiden Tower houses a museum and has great views of the minarets of the Old City.

The Carpet Museum – Displaying and explaining a superb collection of Azerbaijani rugs, this 2014 museum building is itself designed like a stylised roll of carpet.

Day 4: Baku

Travel to the Absheron Peninsular and visit Yanardag Fire Mountain, also known as Burning Hill, where natural gas has been ablaze for hundreds of years and visit the Ateshgah Fire Temple.

Zoroastrians from India travel thousands of kilometers to Ateshgah to worship the fire coming out of the earth.

Visit Mardakan medieval fortress and after lunch, drive to Gobustan National Park to visit the Petroglyph Museum and explore rock carvings dating back to 10,000 BC.



Drive to the mud volcanoes in Qobustan Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which is home to almost half of the world's mud volcanoes.

Destination Information

Yanardag Fire Mountain – Yanar Dag is a natural gas fire which blazes continuously on a hillside on the Absheron Peninsula. Flames jet into the air 3 metres from a thin, porous sandstone layer. Unlike mud volcanoes, the Yanar Dag flame burns fairly steadily, as it involves a steady seep of gas from the subsurface.

Ateshgah Fire Temple – This castle like religious temple is often called the "Fire Temple of Baku". Based on Persian inscriptions, the temple was used as a Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian place of worship. "Atash" is the Persian word for fire.

Qobustan Reserve – Gobustan State Reserve preserves the ancient carvings, mud volcanoes and gas-stones in the region. It has more than 6,000 rock carvings, which depict primitive people, animals, battle-pieces, ritual dances, bullfights, boats with armed oarsmen, warriors with lances in their hands, camel caravans, pictures of sun and stars, on the average dating back to 5,000-20,000 years.

Day 5: Galaba

Travel through the Caucasus Mountains in the northwest of Azerbaijan through a dry landscape that gives way to a densely forested mountain area. Visit the historical Juma Mosque and take part in yoghurt-making in a local home in Shamakhi.

On the way, stop at Diri Baba Mausoleum in the village of Maraza. Enjoy a scenic drive through Girdimanchay River Canyon to visit Lahich.

Lahich, an ancient village with charming cobbled sidewalks, is famous for its medieval water supply and sewage systems, as well as its traditional jewelry, handicrafts, copperware, carpets, pottery, daggers, and iron tools workshops. This quaint, 5th-century corner of the Caucasus Mountains is rich in historical and architectural value.



Arrive in city of Galaba where you will spend the night.

Destination Information

Diri Baba Mausoleum – The mausoleum stands in a square located on a glyptic cliff. The building is two-storeyed and is the first store has a hall covered with an ogive, which has a passageway to an octahedral cupola from a small vestibule. Stairs leading to the hall of the second store have been carved on the cliff.

Lahich – This small village of 900 people is a notable place in Azerbaijan, with its authentic handicrafts traditions, particularly related to copper. The village's carpet and rug crafts are also well known in Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus.

Galaba – Two-thousand-year old Galaba - the most ancient city of Azerbaijan, was for 600 years the capital of ancient Caucasian Albania and was mentioned in the works of 1st century historian.

Day 6: Sheki

This morning you will explore Galaba which is a beautiful part of Azerbaijan with a rich and ancient history. Besides visiting the Historical Museum of Galaba which house many historic artefacts from the area, you also see the renowned ruins of the ancient walled city, Chukhur Galaba, which dates back to the 4th century BC.

From here, continue on to Nidj village and meet the native Udin people. The Udin people are considered to be the descendants of the people of Caucasian Albania. Currently, they live in Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. The total number is about 10,000 people, their religion is Christianity. Later you will arrive in Sheki and visit the colourful Sheki Bazaar. Here, you can find virtually everything you may want to eat: local fruits, berries, spices, freshly baked bread, honey, cheeses and Sheki sweets. Also visit Sheki Palace and the village of Kis.



Destination Information

Palace of Sheki Khans – Explore the magnificent medieval fortress walls, the Palace of Sheki Khans is quite impressive. Walk across rainbow-coloured floors created by the colourful frescoes, and then visit handicrafts workshops and caravanserai.

Mountain village of Kis – You will enjoy your time at the picturesque mountain village of Kis with its beautiful Albanian church.

Day 7: Akhasheni

Leave Sheki and head towards the border with Georgia. Your local Azerbaijan National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours will take you to the Georgian border where you'll be met by the Georgian National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours.

From the border, drive through the Eastern part of Georgia, which is famous for its viticulture and winemaking traditions.

First explore a traditional market in Georgian border town of Lagodekhi. Visit a local family, explore the gardens and vineyards and then enjoy a lunch of delicious homemade food, wine and Georgian 'Chacha'



Enjoy the picturesque landscapes of vineyards and wine-producing villages en route to Khareba Winery where you will try the local wines. Visit Gremi Fortress, the Chavchavadze Estate Palace in Tsinandali before arriving at your hotel in Akhasheni.

Destination Information

Khareba's Winery - Khareba's Winery unique wine cellar is located in a tunnel carved out of the rock. Originally built for military purposes, today the tunnel is used to store Kakheti's finest wines. Kakheti is the most important wine region in Georgia in quantitative, qualitative and even historic terms. Almost three-quarters of the country's wine grapes are grown here, on land that has been used for viticulture for thousands of years. Georgia is said to be the true birthplace of wine.

Day 8: Sighnaghi / Tbilisi

Continue to the beautiful 18th-century town of Sighnaghi, known for its quaint stone walls, small houses with terracotta roofs and decorated balconies. Admire the picturesque views of the Alazani Valley and Great Caucasus mountains.

Continue to Bodbe Convent – according to legend, this is the burial place of St. Nino, who converted Georgia to Christianity in the 4th century.

Arrive in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, in the late afternoon and have dinner in the atmospheric old town.



Destination Information

Sighnaghi – Sighnaghi Royal Town, which is surrounded by defensive walls with 23 towers, was an important trading centre on the Great Silk Road.

Tbilisi – Tbilisi's eternal charms of a dramatic setting in the deep valley of the swift Mtkvari River, picturesque architecture, an ever-lively arts and cultural scene, and the welcoming Georgian lifestyle have been added a whole new 21st-century dimension of inviting cafes and restaurants.

Day 9: Tbilisi

Take a morning sightseeing tour of Tbilisi. Start at the 13th century Metekhi Church and the monument to Vakhtang Gorgasali, the legendary founder of Tbilisi. Visit Narikala Fortress to enjoy a breathtaking panoramic view of the city. Walk down to the district of sulphur bath houses and pass by the only mosque in Tbilisi.

Stroll through the Sharden area, full of narrow streets with cozy cafés, wine tasting bars, and souvenir shops, and breathe in the history of Old Tbilisi.

Also visit Sioni Cathedral, Tsminda Sameba Cathedral, Anchiskhati Basilica, and the famous Rezo Gabriadze Theatre's clock tower, before crossing the Bridge of Peace to Rike Park.



Tonight, you will sample the delicious Georgian cuisine. After dinner there is free time to wander the old districts of the city, which are structured like terraces, and walk through the narrow streets to appreciate the colourful houses, patterned balconies and revamped modern architecture.

Destination Information

Narikala Fortress – Dominating the Old Town skyline, Narikala dates right back to the 4th century, when it was a Persian citadel. Most of the walls were built in the 8th century by the Arab emirs, whose palace was inside the fortress. Subsequently Georgians, Turks and Persians captured and patched up Narikala.

Tbilisi Old Town – The Old Town, is still redolent of an ancient Eurasian crossroads, with its winding lanes, balconied houses, leafy squares and handsome churches, all overlooked by the 17-centuries-old Narikala Fortress. It still retains a village-like feel with their narrow streets, small shops and community atmosphere.

Day 10: Mt Kazbegi / Gudauri

This morning you will be driven to visit the 3,000 year-old ancient capital and religious centre of Georgia – Mtskheta.

Spend time visiting the cities historical sights including Jvari church (6th century) and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11th century) where the Robe of Christ is buried. Both Jvari and Svetitskhoveli are UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Continue to the Ananuri Complex, a former residence of Argveti Dukes, which features churches and towers dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries and beautifully overlooks Jinali Reservoir. Next, drive over the Cross Pass and make a short stop at the Soviet-era “People’s Friendship” mountain view point, which overlooks a deep gorge of the Caucasus Mountains.



In Kazbegi, reach Gergeti Holy Trinity Church (located at an altitude of 2,170 m) and enjoy breathtaking views of Mount Kazbegi. Before returning to Gudauri we will visit a local master who will tell us more about Georgian icon painting and ‘Tekka’ (felt) making.

Destination Information

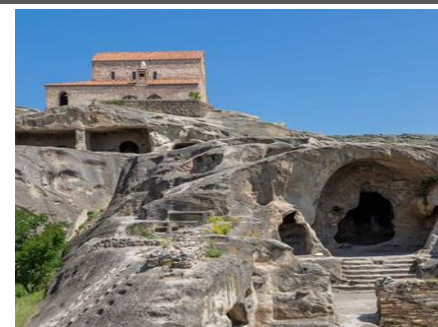
Mtskheta & Svetitskhoveli Cathedral – Mtskheta has been Georgia’s spiritual heart since Christianity was established here in about 327 and holds a near-mystical significance in Georgian culture. With an alluring setting where the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers meet, the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is still the setting for important ceremonies of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Ananuri Complex – This fortress is a classic example of traditional Georgian architecture in a beautiful location, enhanced by the Zhinvali Reservoir spreading out below. Within the fortress is the 17th-century Assumption Church, which is covered with wonderful stone carving, including a large cross on every wall.

Day 11: Kutaisi

Travel back along the scenic Tergi river to Stalin’s hometown of Gori. Visit the Stalin Museum, which includes more than 60,000 artifacts, the tiny house where Stalin was born, and an impressive bulletproof train that Stalin used to travel to Yalta and Potsdam.

Visit the historical place of Uplistsikhe Cave Town (1st millennium BC). Uplistsikhe is the place where the Great Silk Road used to pass.



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Visit wendywutours.co.nz

This is an old and interesting complex with dwelling quarters, wine-cellars, bakeries, a three-nave basilica church hewn out in rock and even an antique theatre.

Continue to the pretty city of Kutaisi, the second largest in the country. Kutaisi is more than 3,000 years old, connected to the legend of Jason and the Argonauts, along with his mythical Golden Fleece.

Destination Information

Stalin Museum – The museum remains, much as when it opened in 1957, a reverent homage Stalin who became a key figure of 20th-century world history, although guides do now at least refer to the purges, the Gulag and his 1939 pact with Hitler. The visit includes the tiny wood-and-mudbrick house where Stalin lived.

Uplistsikhe Cave Town – This fascinating and once enormous cave city sits above the Mtkvari River, with expansive views along the Mtkvari valley. Between the 6th century BC and 1st century AD, Uplistsikhe developed into one of the chief political and religious centres with temples dedicated to the sun goddess.

Kutaisi – Capital of several historical kingdoms within Georgia, Kutaisi is today being revitalised after years of post-Soviet decline. Georgia's parliament was transferred from Tbilisi to brand-new quarters here in 2012.

Day 12: Mestia

Travel to Okatse Canyon, which involves a 2 hour pedestrian route passing through Dadiani Forest and finishes with panoramic views over the canyon. Here, you can explore the Okatse Waterfall, the Dadiani Forest and the Satsiskvilo Valley.

Visit the 19th century Dadiani Palace in Zugdid and afterwards, get ready for the most exciting part of your trip – a journey to Svaneti – the region of the highest mountains and glaciers and the most abiding ancient traditions.

Arrive in Mestia, in the Upper Svaneti region which is your base for the next 2 nights. Explore the famous watchtowers that sit in the valley looking out to the stunning mountains in the distance.



Destination Information

Svaneti – Svaneti is the highest inhabited area in the Caucasus and is divided in two parts: Upper Svaneti and Lower Svaneti. Mestia, in Upper Svaneti is surrounded by mountains, medieval-type villages and distinctive tower-houses. The area is home to the Svans, a proud people with a long history of survival in this isolated part of Europe, who speak their own language.

Day 13: Mestia

This morning you will visit Lakhiri village and take part in a short hike through a picturesque valley to view the Chalati Glacier. Today's hike requires a good level of fitness and appropriate footwear and clothing. There is the option to remain in Lakhiri until the group return. Enjoy the spectacular scenery and return to Lakhiri to take part in a class that produces khachapuri, a famous Georgian dish of cheese-filled bread.



Destination Information

Georgian cuisine – Georgian food is one of the world's most underrated cuisines, featuring flavors from Greece and the Mediterranean, as well as influences from Turkey and Persia. Other than the cheese-filled bread Khachapuri, other famous Georgian dishes include Khinkali: a dumpling made with a variety of fillings, Mtsavadi: marinated skewer of lamb, pork, veal or chicken, Sulguni: a semi-soft cheese, Khis Soko mixed mushroom stew, Kharcho and Chaqapuli meat stews and all washed down with fantastic Georgian red wine.

Day 14: Ushguli

This morning you will drive on to a village called Mulakhi. All the villages around here are dotted with stone watchtowers built during the middle ages to defend against invaders. Twenty metres high, with openings at the top for firing on enemies, they looked like clusters of giants.

Continue on and reach Ushguli, which is declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. In the town you will visit the 12th century Lamaria church, visit the Queen Tamar's tower and the Ushguli museum.

In the evening, you can walk around the village and get familiar with the daily life of the local people.



Destination Information

Ushguli – The village is located at 2200m and is the highest continuously inhabited village in Europe. The village is most famous for its abundance of watchtowers and this is where you get the view of the highest mountain in Georgia the 5,068 metre high Mt. Shkhara.

Day 15: Kutaisi

This morning, you'll travel to Kutaisi.

You'll have some free time to explore the cobbled streets of the town before dinner this evening.

Please note that the drive to Kutaisi today will last between 6-8 hours depending on traffic.



Destination Information

Kutaisi – Capital of several historical kingdoms within Georgia, Kutaisi is today being revitalized after years of post-Soviet decline. Georgia's parliament was transferred from Tbilisi to brand-new quarters here in 2012.

Day 16: Akhaltsikhe

Make your way up to the ruins of Bagrati Palace, followed by a trip to the stunning Gelati Monastery. Georgians have always had a talent for choosing beautiful locations for their churches and this famous monastery complex, on a wooded hillside 8km northeast of Kutaisi, is an outstanding example.

Afterwards, you will visit Prometheus Grotto, one of Georgia's natural wonders. This cave is rich in petrified waterfalls, stalactites, stalagmites, underground rivers and lakes. Your morning will finish with a drive to Borjomi Spa resort, famous for its mineral water 'Borjomi'.

Visit the small park and taste the fresh mineral water.

In the late afternoon, continue to Akhaltsikhe, where you will visit the multi-cultural complex of 'Rabath'. Wander the Rabat Fortress (Old Town) with its rare examples of darbazebi (traditional Georgian houses), castle, mosque and synagogue.



Destination Information

Borjomi Spa resort – Borjomi is a resort town in the picturesque Borjomi Gorge. The town is most famous for its mineral water industry, which is one of the main exports of Georgia. Borjomi is also home to the most extensive ecologically-themed amusement park in the Caucasus.

Akhaltsikhe – Akhaltsikhe means ‘New Castle’ in Georgian and is dominated by the Rabati castle that overlooks the Potskhovi River. The castle and the old town was lavishly restored a few years ago, helping to turn a town into a very attractive stop en route to Armenia.

Day 17: Dilijan

This morning you will visit Vardzia, is a magnificent cave town from the 12th century and is one of the highlights of the trip.

Afterwards your local Georgian National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours will take you to the Armenian border where you’ll be met by the Armenian National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours.

Following your change of National Escort, you will drive to the city of Gyumri. Here, you will enjoy a walking tour through the streets and admire the 19th century buildings.

Arrive in Dilijan, one of the most important resorts in Armenia, often referred to as the ‘Little Switzerland’ of Armenia, with magnificent views to the forested surroundings. You can also take a photo stop at Old Dilijan, complete with craftsman’s workshops, gallery and a museum.



Destination Information

Vardzia – Vardzia stretches over half a kilometre along the river Mtkvari and has 19 tiers and used to house around 3000 caves. The complex also includes dwellings quarters, small hall-type churches, refectories, wine cellars, pharmacy, etc. There is also a church hewn out of rock with amazing 12th century frescoes.

Day 18: Tsakhkadzor

Following breakfast at your hotel, explore the beautiful town of Dilijan.

Later, you will drive to 13th century Haghartsin Monastery, a stunning example of the medieval Armenian architecture nestled in lush woods. You will then enjoy lunch with a local Armenian family and visit the 12th century Goshavank Monastery located in picturesque surroundings.

After lunch, drive to Lake Sevan, the second largest alpine lake in the world and known as the ‘Emerald of Armenia’. You will visit Sevanavank, a beautiful monastery on the peninsula, once a strategic shelter for Armenian Kings. Continue to Tsakhkadzor where you will spend the night.



Destination Information

Haghartsin Monastery – Hidden in a verdant valley 13km northeast of Dilijan, Haghartsin ('Dance of the Eagles') was built between the 10th and 13th centuries and has three churches: one named for Gregory the Illuminator; another for the Virgin Mary (Surp Astvatsatsin); and the third for St Stephen (Stepanos).

Lake Sevan – Set 1900m above sea level, the great blue expanse of Lake Sevan is 80km long by 30km at its widest. The largest lake in the Caucasus, it's also one of the largest freshwater high-altitude lakes in the world. Its colours and shades change with the weather and by its own mysterious processes, from a dazzling azure to dark blue and a thousand shades in between.

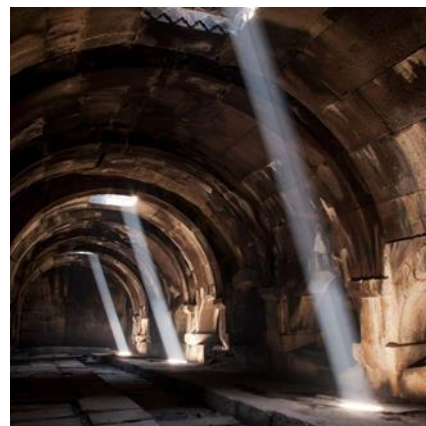
Day 19: Goris

This morning visit Noratus Medieval Khachkar Field, a fascinating medieval cemetery, known as 'Forest of Khachkars'. 'Khachkar' (cross stone) is a typical monument of Armenian sculpture representing an ornamented stone with a cross in the centre.

Continue to the southern town of Goris via Selim Caravanserai, an important trading post on the Great Silk Road which has welcomed travellers along the highway through the mountains of Selim (Sulema).

Visit the mysterious Karahunge Observatory, known as the Armenian Stonehenge. The scenery and mountain setting provide the perfect canvas and backdrop to such a unique and impressive array of history, carved in stone.

Arrive in Goris in the late afternoon.



Destination Information

Noratus Medieval Khachkar Field – 'Khachkar' (cross stone) is a typical monument of Armenian sculpture representing an ornamented stone with a cross in the centre.

Karahunge Observatory – One of the greatest stories of prehistoric Armenia relates to the Army Stones, a riddle hidden between a marvellous construction of megaliths. According to researchers, Karahunge Observatory could be among the world's oldest astronomical observatories and is at least 3,500 years older than British Stonehenge.

Day 20: Yerevan

Travelling northwards from Goris to Tsaghkadzor we visit the breathtaking Khndzoresk Village.

Continue to the complex of Tatev Monastery which is an architectural masterpiece dating from the 10th century and is often referred to as a 'monastery built on the edge of nothing'.

You will visit Areni Winery for a wine degustation with Armenia's best wines coming from this region.



Lunch today is in a local home, where you will have opportunity to see how to distil vodka, enjoy homemade vodka and wine, and learn how to make Armenian cheese by burying it in the ground.

Finally, you will visit Noravank Monastery – a great religious and cultural centre of 12th century which is located in a seemingly inaccessible location amidst impressive red cliffs and stunning mountains.

You will then continue to the capital city of Yerevan arriving in the early evening.

Destination Information

Khndzoresk Village – Situated on the steep slopes of Khir Dzor is the 1000-year-old Khndzoresk cave village, today around four hundred natural and man-made dwellings remain etched in the hillsides. 63 metres above the ground Khndzoresk Swinging Bridge runs over a deep canyon connecting the old and new villages.

Tatev Monastery – You will reach the Monastery via the world’s longest aerial tramway called ‘Wings of Tatev’. Afterwards, you will be driven to the Vayots Dzor region, the agricultural heart of the country, inhabited since the Bronze Age. The region also prides its old wine making traditions.

Yerevan – Leave your preconceptions at home, because Yerevan will almost certainly confound them. This is a city full of contradictions – top-of-the-range Mercedes sedans share the roads with Ladas, old-fashioned teahouses sit next to chic European-style wine bars; and street fashions range from hipster to babushka.

Day 21: Yerevan

Your day will begin exploring the vibrant city of Yerevan with your guide. Originally established in 782 BC, Yerevan is a thriving city with the excitement, hustle and bustle of a modern capital.

You will start your exploration from the Republic Square, the masterpiece of the architect Alexander Tamanian, and then continue to the Opera House, a stunning architectural piece and the hub of Yerevan.

You will then visit Cafesjian Center for the Arts and depart for Echmiadzin, the spiritual centre of all Armenians and the seat of the Armenian Catholicos.



As you return to Yerevan, you will stop at the ruins of Zvartnots – the pearl of 7th century architecture, inscribed in UNESCO’s World Heritage list. You will then return to Yerevan and visit the History Museum of Armenia.

Destination Information

Cafesjian Center for the Arts – Also known as the Cascade Complex, this is an open-air museum of modern art with a massive stairway. The complex links the historic residential and cultural centres of the city with a vast area of waterfalls and outdoor gardens.

Echmiadzin – Echmiadzin Cathedral is the oldest standing church in Christendom built in 303 AD over a pagan fire altar. This landmark is protected by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Day 22: Yerevan

Depart for Garni Village to visit Garni Temple dating back to the 1st century and have lunch at a local family house where you will learn about Armenian flatbread making techniques.

After lunch, you will visit Geghard Monastery and visit the Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex and Museum on Tsitsernakaberd Hill.

Next, visit the Cascade Monument, which was the main symbol of the city's 2,780th anniversary and has the equivalent number of stairs – this enormous staircase is 500 meters high and 50 meters wide.

From the top of the monument, enjoy a breathtaking city view that includes the Opera House, Mount Ararat, Swan Lake, Republic Square, and Abovyan Avenue, all of which we'll see as we walk the streets of Yerevan.

Enjoy a farewell dinner tonight reliving the wonderful memories had on tour. Late this evening you will be transferred to the airport for your return flight to New Zealand that is scheduled to depart very early the next morning.



Destination Information

Garni Temple – The 1st century citadel and pagan temple of Garni is a picturesque monument of the Hellenistic period and an impressive piece of ancient Armenian architecture. Here you will have an opportunity to enjoy the charming melodies of Armenian 'duduk' woodwind instrument by a local performer.

Geghard Monastery – The spectacular towering cliffs surrounding the monastery are part of the Azat River Gorge, and are included together with the monastery in the UNESCO World Heritage Site listing. Some of the chambers within the monastery complex are entirely dug out of the cliff rocks.

Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex and Museum – The Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex is dedicated to the memory of the 1.5 million Armenians who perished in the first genocide of the 20th century, at the hands of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The Genocide Museum's mission is rooted in the fact that understanding the Armenian Genocide is an important step in preventing similar future tragedies, in keeping with the notion that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.

Days 23-24: Yerevan / Fly to New Zealand

You will board a very early morning flight to New Zealand via Dubai arriving the same or following day

Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan Travel Information

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Azerbaijan. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork if applicable and submit the visa application on your behalf. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it from the date of entry into Armenia.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa. Currently a visa is required for New Zealand Passport holders. Your travel consultant will inform you if any changes are applicable prior to your departure.

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia National Escort

As this is a multi-country trip, you will have an Azerbaijan Wendy Wu National Escort meet you at the Baku airport and guide you through Azerbaijan before meeting the Georgian Wendy Wu National Escort at the Georgian border. The Georgian Wendy Wu National Escort will guide you through Georgia before meeting the Armenian Wendy Wu National Escort at the Armenian border. The Armenian Wendy Wu National Escort will check you in at the Yerevan airport, Armenia and bid you farewell.

Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

Eating in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia

The South Caucasus is a land of breathtaking views, ancient culture, temperamental people and colorful national cuisines. The countries of this region have much in common: their histories and fates intertwined throughout the centuries. Still, each country and cuisine is unique in its own right.

Caucasians are noted for a creative and masterful cuisine that cooks evolved over the years by using fragrant herbs and spices and tart flavors such as lemons and sour plums. With healthful yet delectable ingredients like pomegranates, saffron, rose water, honey, olive oil, yogurt, onions, garlic, fresh and dried fruits, and a variety of nuts.

They love their meats dishes, stews, cheese bread and all that hearty red wine. This 24-day adventure is very much a food and wine experience through some of the most fascinating countries in the region.

Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs. Please note that double bed requests can be made at time of booking but can't be guaranteed.

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Roads in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road – not just 1-2 kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only. There may be sections of road where the surface is comparatively bumpy, but our drivers will do their utmost to lessen the impact.

Development in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia

The South Caucasus region sits right in the heart of the emerging Eurasian supercontinent — a massive market that makes up 70% of the population, 80% of energy resources and 45% of the GDP in the world. China is to the east, Turkey and Europe are to the west, Russia is to the north, and Iran, the Middle East, and India are to the south. The new BTK Railway through this region was the missing trade link of the much-heralded middle corridor of the New Silk Road, which is a multimodal trade route that goes from China to Europe via Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

Though parts of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia match the west in modernity and technological advances, it is important to remember that these countries are still a developing and as such, many aspects of tourism in these countries do not have the solid infrastructure and safety standards as seen here in the west.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so in each city, we will visit a workshop or factory which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places which hold local interest.

Azerbaijan is famous for its traditions of carpet weaving. Every region of the country has its own special patterns, technology is kept secret and inherited from one forewoman to another. Glass teacup sets, copperware, handicrafts, ceramics, national musical instruments, national clothing, paintings, national silver jewelry are among the other popular souvenirs tourists purchase while in the region.

Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by both a National Escort and local guides. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

Tipping Policy

Local tipping isn't customary in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is approximately 5 USD per person, per day on the tour, and will be collected (in the local currency) by your National Escort in Azerbaijan, your first day in Georgia and your first day in Armenia and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling to cities outside of the main cities in Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan. US Dollars and Euros are easily exchanged throughout Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan but other currencies such as New Zealand Dollars normally cannot be exchanged in hotels, exchange bureaux and airports. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of NZ\$400 per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional Tours – Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. In your Final Documentation an Optional Excursion Sheet will be included outlining the activities available in each city and local cost associated. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your Doctor or Health Centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Holiday Health has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.holidayhealth.co.nz

After Your booking

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

Before You Leave

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

Updated November 2020