



Crossroads of the Caucasus: Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia

29 AUG – 19 SEP 2017

Code: 21723

Tour Leaders **Iain Shearer**

Physical Ratings 

Explore the fascinating history, art, architecture and unforgettable scenery of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia.

Overview

Tour Highlights

- Explore the intricate history and richly varied culture of the Caucasus with [Iain Shearer](#).
- Learn how this region was a crossroads of invasion and trade by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Turks and became a vital leg of the famed Silk Route.
- Journey through some of the world's most magnificent landscapes, with verdant valleys framed by the great Caucasus Mountains and supreme Ararat.
- Discover the fascinating, at times eccentric, ultra modern architecture of Baku, including the Flame Towers, Carpet Museum and Zaha Hadid's Heydar Aliyev Centre.
- Wonder at the richly decorated interior of the Khan's Summer Palace, Sheki, with exquisite paintings inspired by late medieval Persia.
- Drive high into the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range to stay in a famous mountain lodge and visit Gergeti Trinity Church framed by high Caucasus peaks, and (optional) Dariali Gorge with a waterfall walk.
- Appreciate the distinctiveness of Armenian religious culture; this was the first state formerly to adopt Christianity as its official religion.
- View the fascinating decoration of Georgia's and Armenia's stunningly located mountain monasteries, that fuses local, Islamic and Western motifs.
- Take the 'Wings of Tatev', a 5.7-kilometre cableway, to the Tatev Monastery, built on a natural fortress of rock overlooking the Vorotan Canyon and the peaks of Karabakh.
- Enjoy supreme quality Eastern fresco painting in Gelati Monastery (Kutaisi, Georgia), Akhtala Monastery (Armenia), and in the Church of the Dormition (Vardzia, Armenia).
- Visit the cave city of Vardzia, a vast complex of religious buildings and dwellings cut into the living rock on the slopes of Erusheti Mountain.
- At the Matenadaran, Yerevan, explore one of the world's greatest libraries of medieval manuscripts.
- Enjoy distinctive Georgian and Armenian music and dance, and modern Georgian puppet theatre.
- Stroll through Tbilisi's Old Town, a labyrinth of alleys with buildings of all ages, including old bathhouses, churches, museums and wooden houses with carved balcony decorations.
- Gauge the Hellenistic presence in the Caucasus when you visit a pristine Hellenistic temple at Garni.
- Realise the strategically crucial, greatly contested position of the Caucasian states by visiting forbidding fortresses like Gremi, Ananuri and Khertvisi in Georgia.
- Wonder at the magnificent collection of early gold in Tbilisi's Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia, Yerevan History Museum's unique archaeological collection, and fine Russian and European painting in Yerevan's National Art Gallery.
- Enjoy Georgia's unique cuisine and wine at tastings and meals in interesting restaurants.

Testimonials

This was one of the best organized tours we have been on. Superb scenery and interesting history plus faultless accommodation and meals. Don and Yvonne, VIC.

22-day Cultural Tour of the Caucasus

Overnight Baku (3 nights) • Sheki (1 night) • Signaghi (1 night) • Tbilisi (2 nights) • Kazbegi (2 nights) • Kutaisi (1 night) • Akhaltsikhe (2 nights) • Tbilisi (1 night) • Dzoraget (1 night) • Tsaghkadzor (1 night) • Goris (2 nights) • Yerevan (4 nights)

Overview

Explore the fascinating history, art, architecture and unforgettable scenery of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. Lying in the shadow of the high Caucasus Mountains and Ararat, between the Black Sea and the Caspian, these states have formed a bridge between East and West for millennia. Mesopotamian, Greek, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Turkic and Russian conquerors and merchants have all interacted here to form fascinating mixed cultures. We witness this rich legacy in old townscapes like Tbilisi's alleyways, and in the art and architecture of Georgia's and Armenia's churches, mixing Zoroastrian, Islamic and Christian motifs in extraordinary opulence. We begin in Baku's UNESCO heritage-listed centre and new Carpet Museum, enjoying the vivid colours and bold designs of Azeri carpets. Azerbaijan has a lustrous Persian culture with historic caravanserais, palaces, mansions and tombs; in Sheki we visit the Khan's Summer Palace whose walls glow with exquisite Persian paintings. We stay in a fine mountain lodge in the Greater Caucasus Mountains and visit Gergeti Trinity Church framed by high Caucasus peaks. We explore powerful fortress monasteries like Ananuri and Tatev, the latter reached by the world's longest cable car. We study the exquisite gold treasures in Tbilisi's History Museum and Yerevan's exceptional archaeological and painting collections. In ancient Mtskheta we visit grand Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and in Kutaisi, Gelati Monastery, with magnificent architecture, mosaics, wall paintings, enamel and metalwork. Vardzia has a fascinating 12th-century cave monastery, with sumptuous frescoes and royal portraits. We visit Armenia's mountain monasteries of Haghput, Noravank, and Akhtala, the country's finest flowers of ecclesiastical architecture. We follow the Silk Road past Lake Sevan, visiting a fine caravanserai at the high Selim Pass. Yerevan boasts one of the world's greatest medieval manuscript collections. Nearby we visit a pristine Hellenistic temple at Garni and the grand old Echmiadzin Cathedral Compound. On this tour we drive through deep gorges, verdant valleys and across remote passes, view unforgettable mountain panoramas and taste an extraordinary mix of cuisine as well as Georgia's famous Kakhetian wine.

Leaders



Iain Shearer

ASA's Academic Coordinator
Graduate Uni. College (London),
Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society &
Sackler Scholar. Archaeologist in
North Africa, the Balkans, Central
Asia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan,
India and Middle East. Iain leads
ASA's tours to Central Asia, Iran,
Algeria & the Caucasus.

ASA's Academic Coordinator

Iain Shearer is an archaeologist who has always been fascinated by the many cultures and stories to be unearthed and explored within the Islamic World. During the last 20 years, he has worked as an archaeologist in North Africa, the Balkans, Central Asia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and the Arab Middle East and was appointed a Fellow of The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 2008.

Iain has successfully led a number of tours for ASA, the British Museum, The Traveller, ACE Cultural Tours and Distant Horizons across the Maghreb, the Arab Middle East, Iran, Central Asia, Bulgaria and Eastern Turkey. He was the Lonely Planet author for the Saudi Arabia and Hajj guides in 2009 and 2013, Lonely Planet Iran 2012, and the author of the updated Bradt 2014 guide to Iran. Iain is passionate about exploring and explaining the thrilling histories and cultures of the Arabic, Persian and Turkic speaking peoples and hosted an episode of National Geographic and Lonely Planet's *Roads Less Travelled to Kazakhstan*, which still lurks darkly in the nether regions of cable television, airline entertainment systems and the internet. He recently left the Middle East department of the British Museum where he was the Sackler Scholar for Afghanistan and Iran and is currently dividing his time between Sydney, the UK, the Middle East, Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus. He also works with the London Metropolitan Police, Arts & Antiques Unit as their in-house expert on stolen cultural artefacts from Afghanistan, Central Asia and Iran.



Itinerary

The following itinerary describes daily activities which may change or be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate alterations in opening hours, flight schedules etc. Participants will receive a final itinerary together with their tour documents prior to departure. The tour includes breakfast daily, lunches & evening meals indicated in the detailed itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=evening meal.

Baku, Azerbaijan - 3 nights

Day 1: Tuesday 29 August, Arrive Baku

- Airport Transfer for participants arriving on the ASA 'designated' flight (QR251 at 1025hrs)
- Heydar Aliyev Center (Zaha Hadid architects)

Participants taking ASA's 'designated' flight are scheduled to arrive in Baku mid-morning and will transfer by private vehicle to the [Hilton Baku](#). Participants who have made alternative air arrangements should meet the group at the hotel. After checking in and taking some time to freshen up from the flight we commence our program with a light lunch.

In the afternoon we travel north of the city to view the extraordinary fluid shell-like Heydar Aliyev Center by the Islamic world's foremost contemporary architect, Zaha Hadid. (Overnight Baku) LD

Day 2: Wednesday 30 August, Baku

- Short Introductory Meeting
- Coach Orientation Tour including view of Baku city from Martyrs' Lane & view of Flame Towers
- Baku's UNESCO-listed Old City including the Palace of the Shirvanshahs, Maiden Tower & Multani Caravanserai
- National Museum of History of Azerbaijan
- Welcome Dinner

Following a brief introductory meeting we take a coach orientation tour of Baku. Modern Baku constitutes three cities: the UNESCO Heritage listed old walled city (*icheri shekher*), the boomtown and the Soviet-built town. The boomtown, south of the old city, developed during the early 20th century when Azerbaijan was the world's greatest oil exporter. The boomtown that oil export supported has interesting beaux-arts architecture particularly of mansions of pre-Revolutionary millionaires. Modern Baku spreads out from the walls rising up hills that rim the Bay of Baku. It has some fascinating contemporary architecture.

We begin with a visit to Martyr's Lane, dedicated to those killed by the Soviet Army during Black January and later to those killed in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. From this memorial there are excellent views of the city and Bay of Baku. Adjacent to Martyr's Lane we also view the iconic trio of flame-shaped towers which have transformed the city's skyline. Designed by HOK, they were inspired by Baku's history of fire worship.

Next, we take a walking tour of the tightly packed old walled city of Baku, visiting major historic monuments. These will include the Palace of the Shirvanshahs, whose complex includes a palace, mosque, bathhouse and other buildings. Nearby is the powerful Maiden Tower, a remnant of the city's 12th-century fortifications. We also visit the Multani Caravanserai and Hajji Gayyib bathhouse, the Bukhara Caravanserai and Gasimbey bathhouse, the Synyk-Kala Minaret and Mosque and the Lezgi Mosque.

After lunch we move to the State Museum of History, Azerbaijan's largest museum, housed in the Neo-Renaissance mansion of the oil baron Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. The collection includes a wide variety of artifacts dating from prehistory to the 20th century. It also displays parts of the original house interior, including highly decorated oriental rooms that evoke the interiors of the Alhambra.

Our day ends with an evening welcome dinner at a local restaurant. (Overnight Baku) BLD

Day 3: Thursday 31 August, Baku – Gobustan – Baku

- Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape – an important site of ancient petroglyphs added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2007
- Azerbaijan Carpet Museum (opened August 2014) displaying the vivid colours and bold designs of Azeri, Caucasian and Iranian carpets
- Painting Gallery dedicated to 19th and 20th-century Azeri painters

This morning we drive out of Baku to Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, an outstanding site with more than 6000 rock engravings bearing testimony to 40,000 years of human settlement. The remains of inhabited caves, settlements and burials reflect an intensive use during the wet period that followed the last Ice Age, from the Upper Paleolithic to the Middle Ages.

In the afternoon we visit Baku's extraordinary new Carpet Museum that takes the form of a huge rolled up carpet. It boasts the country's greatest carpet collection as well as a large corpus of ceramics, jewellery from the Bronze Age, medieval metal work, gold and silver adornments, national garments and embroidery and modern applied art works. Carpets constitute the most eloquent expressions of Azerbaijani ethnic identity. Praised by Marco Polo, they were prized throughout Europe during the Renaissance; Holbein depicted them as a sign of wealth in a number of portraits. For eons they have been used in Azerbaijan to adorn marquees, huts, houses, nomads' tents, and other structures.

We also visit a painting gallery located on the promenade overlooking Baku Bay. Opened in 2015, this small, modern art gallery, displays an interesting collection of Azeri art from the 19th and 20th centuries. (Overnight Baku) BL

Sheki, Azerbaijan - 1 night

Day 4: Friday 1 September, Baku – Shamakhi – Muganly Pass – Sheki

- Friday Mosque, Yeddi Gumbez Mausoleum (Seven Domes) and graveyard of Shirvanshahs, Shamakhi
- Muganly Mountain Pass
- Khan's Summer Palace (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Sheki's caravanserai

We drive this morning to Shamakhi, located at the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. One of the most ancient of Silk Road emporia, it claims to be the city of Kmakhia mentioned by the ancient Greek geographer Ptolemy in his *Geography*. Much of the city was destroyed by a series of earthquakes over five centuries, but a number of important monuments have survived. We shall visit the 10th-century Djuma Mosque, which has been rebuilt several times. It is the oldest mosque in the Caucasus and was constructed on the site of an ancient Zoroastrian temple. The Seven Cupolas (*Eddi Gyumbez*) Mausoleum is the burial place of the Shirvanshahs and their families, for whom Shamakhi was the capital for several centuries. On the hills just outside Shamakhi stands the derelict 11th-century Gulistan fortress. After exploring Shamakhi we shall drive through the awesome Muganly Mountain Pass to Sheki.

Situated 700 metres above sea level in a natural amphitheatre surrounded by mountains and oak forests, Sheki rises above fertile *yaylags* (pastures) and fields. The picturesque town has brick houses, shaded streets, with weeping willows lining canals carrying spring water. Originally a late Bronze Age settlement, it was occupied by Arab invaders in the 7th century. In the 9th century, when Arab power in the region weakened, a Christian kingdom was established here. The Shirvanshahs, a Persianised Arab dynasty then ruled the region as vassals of various overlords such as the Mongols and Timur (Tamerlane) until it was absorbed into Safavid Persia (1609). In the 18th century Sheki became capital of a Khanate, only to be taken by the Russians in 1805. Memories of its long history of silk manufacture remain in cottage silk production that can be seen today.

We shall visit the Khan's Summer Palace, built in 1762 by Hussein Khan, the famed poet 'Mushtaq'. The interior of the two-storey building is decorated with magnificent frescoes and lit by exquisite stained glass. We also visit Sheki's reconstructed upper caravanserai located on the right bank of the river Gurjanachai. (Overnight Sheki) BLD

Sighnaghi, Kakheti, Georgia - 1 night

Day 5: Saturday 2 September, Sheki – Kvareli – Gremi – Sighnaghi

- Lunch and wine tasting at Kvareli Gvirabi, Khareba Winery, Kakheti
- Gremi: Royal Citadel & Church of Archangels
- Evening meal at Pheasant's Tears Restaurant, Sighnaghi

We pass today from Azerbaijan into Georgia, visiting the Kvareli Gvirabi wine cellar and Gremi's royal citadel on our way to Sighnaghi. Kvareli Gvirabi in the Kakheti region, is Georgia's largest wine cellar – 7.7 kilometres of tunnels and galleries that maintain a constant temperature of 12-14 degrees Celsius and 70% relative humidity all year round. Originally built for military purposes during the Cold War, the tunnels (*gvirabi*) were purchased by Khareba Winery who use them to store and age about 25,000 bottles of wine. We shall enjoy a light lunch catered by the winery's excellent restaurant. This will be followed by a wine-tasting in the tunnels.

Gremi was the 16th-century capital of the Kingdom of Kakheti. Founded by Levan of Kakheti, it remained a

lively Silk Route trading town and royal residence until razed by Safavid Shah Abbas I of Persia (1615). Gremi died and the Kakheti royal house transferred its capital to Telavi in the mid-17th century. Gremi, like many other Georgian cities, had a large Armenian population with its own churches and market. The town was composed of three parts, the Church of the Archangels Gabriel and Michael and its complex, the royal residence and the commercial neighbourhood. We shall visit the church complex that includes a three-storey citadel, a bell tower and a wine cellar (*marani*) encircled by a wall defended by embrasures, turrets and towers. King Levan of Kakheti built the cruciform, domed church in 1565. Its construction is of traditional Georgian masonry but its design is a local interpretation of contemporary Iranian architectural styles.

In the late afternoon we continue to the lovely, typically Georgian village of Signaghi, known for its production of wine and traditional carpets. In the evening we dine together at the Pheasant's Tears Restaurant which specialises in traditional organic Georgian cuisine served with top-class natural wines made by the traditional *qvevri* method at their local winery. (Overnight Signaghi) BLD

Tbilisi, Georgia - 2 nights

Day 6: Sunday 3 September, Signaghi – Tbilisi

- Optional walk along Signaghi's stone walls
- Monastery of St Nina at Bodbe
- The Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia with its exquisite gold treasures (formerly known as the State Museum of History)
- Performance of Marionettes at the Rezo Gabriadze Theatre (performance to be confirmed in 2017)

At Signaghi there are over 4.5 kilometres of well-preserved stone walls which offer wonderful views of the vast Alazani Valley framed by the distant Caucasus Mountains. You may wish to join an optional walk along a section of the walls or take a short stroll along the town's charming cobbled streets.

Located two kilometres from Signaghi is the beautiful Monastery of St Nina at Bodbe. Here we visit the grave of St Nina, who brought Christianity to Georgia, and the monastery's magnificent gardens.

Mid-morning we drive to Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, where we shall be based for the next two nights. Following lunch at a local restaurant offering wonderful views of the old town, we visit the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia to see its exquisite gold treasures. Of special note is the 5th-century BC Akhlagori hoard that contains unique examples of jewellery, blending Achaemenid (Persian) and local styles and gold pieces brought here from various archeological sites in Georgia. There is also a collection of medieval icons.

In the early evening we plan to attend a performance of marionettes at the Gabriadze Theatre. While puppet shows have traditionally been targeted largely towards children, those created by Rizo Gabriadze, the Georgian director, have a distinctly adult focus. The theatre has toured extensively, including the Lincoln Centre Festival, New York; The Barbican Centre, London; and the Kennedy Centre Festival, Washington DC. (Overnight Tbilisi) BLD

Day 7: Monday 4 September, Tbilisi

- Walking tour of Tbilisi, including: Metekhi Church, Mosque, Orbeliani Baths, Synagogue, 19th-century caravanserais, The Anchiskhati Basilica of St Mary, Sioni Cathedral of the Dormition
- Afternoon at leisure
- Tbilisi's Art Nouveau architecture (optional walking tour)

- Dinner at Azarpesha Restaurant incl. recital by 'Ensemble Tbilisi' (by special arrangement)

Georgia's capital Tbilisi (pop. 1.6 million) was founded in the 6th century by the monarch of what was then the medieval kingdom of Iberia. We shall spend the morning walking through the historic core of the city that has been Georgia's capital for the greater part of 1500 years. During our walk we visit a number of important churches, including the 13th-century Metekhi Church, the 6th-century Anchiskhati Basilica of St Mary and Sioni Cathedral of the Dormition housing the Cross of St Nina. We also view (exterior only) 19th-century caravanserais, the blue-tiled Orbeliani Baths and the Old Town's mosque and synagogue.

From below, we also view the powerful Narikala Fortress, founded in the 4th century and expanded by Iberia's Umayyad (Arab) rulers and by king David the Builder (1089-1125). Most of the extant fortifications you will see date from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Lunch will be served at a local restaurant in the Old Town which features organic Georgian produce with meat and fish dishes cooked in the *jospir* (pronounced 'hosper'), a unique super-hot charcoal grill that seals in flavours. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure for you to further explore the Old Town.

Tbilisi's architecture is a fascinating mix of different period styles. Historic local architecture shows strong Byzantine and Middle Eastern influences. Tbilisi's 19th-century precincts have many buildings in the Russian Neo-Classical style. At the beginning of the 20th century, during the Art Nouveau era, politics in Georgia were directly controlled by the capital of the Empire, Saint Petersburg, and Russian influence was evident. Despite all this, Tbilisi's privileged location between Europe and Asia – that is, a city-bridge between two continents – helped to bring Art Nouveau inspired architecture, an unquestionable image of internationalism and modernity that was called 'Modern Style' in Georgia. In the late afternoon there will be an optional walking tour in the vicinity of our hotel viewing some examples of Tbilisi's Art Nouveau buildings.

This evening we dine together at a local restaurant where we have engaged some members of the 'Ensemble Tbilisi' to sing for us. Formed in 1989, this ensemble consists of eleven professional male singers who specialise in polyphonic and country songs. Directed by Robert Gogolashvili, the ensemble have performed in concert halls in Georgia, Germany and Russia. (Overnight Tbilisi) BLD

Kazbegi National Park, Georgia - 2 nights

Day 8: Tuesday 5 September, Tbilisi– Mtskheta – Ananuri – Kazbegi

- Mtskheta, the UNESCO-listed capital of the early kingdom of Iberia including: Jvari (Holy Cross) Church and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral
- Ananuri Fortress, built by the 17th century dukes of the Aragvi Valley

We drive north today into the awesome Greater Caucasus Mountain Range where we shall stay two nights high amongst snow-covered peaks. On the way we stop at Mtskheta, the UNESCO-listed capital of the early kingdom of Iberia where we shall visit Jvari (Holy Cross) Church and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Mtskheta, capital of Iberia before Tbilisi, was founded around 1000 BC. It is one of Georgia's oldest cities and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Jvari Church was founded in the 6th century. Its façades are decorated with bas-relief sculptures that show strong Hellenistic and Sasanian (Persian) influences. Inscriptions on the façades are extremely important for documenting the earliest Georgian script. Grand Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, built in the 11th century over a much older sacred site, is Georgia's second largest church. It is believed to be the burial site of Christ's mantle and has long been the principal Georgian church; it remains one of the country's most venerated places of worship. It is the seat of the

archbishop of Mtskheta and Tbilisi, who is at the same time *Catholicos* – Patriarch of All Georgia.

Further north we visit Ananuri Fortress, a large complex consisting of two castles connected by a curtain wall, situated in an extraordinarily beautiful site overlooking the broad Aragvi River. Built by the *eristavis* (Dukes) of Aragvi, a feudal dynasty that ruled the area from the 13th century, it has seen many fierce battles. We continue to Kazbegi (Stepantsminda), which at 1740m above sea level nestles beneath Mount Kazbegi (5034m) and Mount Shani (4451m). We stay for two nights in a beautiful mountain lodge with fine views of the surrounding peaks. (Overnight Kazbegi) BLD

Day 9: Wednesday 6 September, Kazbegi

- 4WD excursion to Gergeti Trinity Church
- Dariali Gorge and small waterfall walk (optional)

This morning we make an excursion by 4WD to one of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring sites in the world. Isolated in a mountain vastness, 14th-century Gergeti Trinity Church sits at an elevation of 2170 metres right under Mount Kazbegi.

Following a buffet lunch at the hotel you may wish to spend the afternoon at leisure enjoying the lodge's facilities. Alternatively, you may join an excursion to Dariali Gorge followed by a short walk through Alpine flora to a small waterfall. The strategic Dariali Gorge controlled passage in and out of the region. Dariali derives from *Dar-e Al n*, Persian for 'Gate of the Alans'. A Georgian myth claims that Alexander the Great had an iron gate there; the Sasanians, Western Turkic Khans, Arabs, Mongols, the Kingdom of Georgia and the Russians have variously controlled this vital pass. Today the gorge marks the border between Russia and Georgia. We shall return to Kazbegi in good time to allow you to enjoy at leisure the wonderful scenery surrounding your lodge. (Overnight Kazbegi) BLD

[Kutaisi, Georgia - 1 night](#)

Day 10: Thursday 7 September, Kazbegi – Gori – Kutaisi

- Joseph Stalin Museum, Gori

Today we drive south and west to the important western Georgian city of Kutaisi. Along the way we stop at Gori to visit the house-museum of Russia's most notorious Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin. In a pavilion in front of the museum is the tiny wooden hut in which Stalin was born (1878) and spent his first four years. Stalin's father Vissarion Jughashvili, a local shoemaker, rented the one room on the left hand side of the small building and maintained a workshop in the basement. The museum also has Stalin's personal railway carriage, as well as a large number of photographs and various memorabilia.

On arrival in Kutaisi we enjoy an evening meal at a charming local restaurant featuring live music. (Overnight Kutaisi) BLD

[Akhaltzikhe, Georgia - 2 nights](#)

Day 11: Friday 8 September, Kutaisi – Borjomi – Akhaltzikhe

- Gelati Monastery, Kutaisi (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Borjomi Gorge
- Rabati Castle Complex incl. the Samtskhe-Javakheti History Museum, Akhaltzikhe

Before leaving Kutaisi we visit Gelati Monastery. It is surrounded by thick, verdant forest and contains the Church of the Virgin founded by the King David the Builder (1106), as well as the 13th-century churches of St George and St Nicholas. UNESCO World Heritage listed, Gelati was an extremely important medieval centre of learning. The monastery, with its distinctive Georgian church architecture, contains a number of royal tombs, including that of King David and a number of Georgia's most important mosaics, frescoes and icons dating from the 12th to the 17th century.

Mid-morning we drive south and east through the Borjomi Gorge to the lovely town of Akhaltsikhe, where we stay for the next two nights. The picturesque Borjomi Gorge is a canyon cut by the Mtkvari River through the Lesser Caucasian Mountains.

In Akhaltsikhe we explore Rabati Castle Complex composed of a citadel, mosque and the Samtskhe-Javakheti History Museum. The complex has recently been restored to its former glory when, from the 13th to the 16th century, it was the residence of the local Jakhely princes. Its great diversity of building types is equalled by the fascinatingly eclectic styles of its buildings, with strong Georgian, Byzantine and Islamic elements. Opened in 2012, the museum, which is part of the Georgian National Museum, is especially known for its collection of 13-19th century manuscripts, including the oldest version of *Vepkhistaosani* ('The Knight in the Panther's Skin'), of the 16th century. (Overnight Akhaltsikhe) BLD

Day 12: Saturday 9 September, Akhaltsikhe – Vardzia – Akhaltsikhe

- Cave city of Vardzia including the Church of the Dormition
- Khertvisi Fortress (exterior only)

We make a day excursion to Vardzia, a vast complex of religious buildings and dwellings cut into the living rock on the slopes of the Erusheti Mountain on the left bank of the Mtkvari River. This site, inhabited from the Bronze Age, reveals four major building phases after it had become an important monastery. The site was first laid out and the first cave dwellings quarried during the reign of King Giorgi III of the medieval kingdom of Georgia (1156-1184). The second phase occurred between his death and the marriage of his successor Tamar in 1186, when the Church of the Dormition was excavated and decorated. The third phase lasted from 1186 until the Battle of Basian (c.1203), when many more dwellings as well as defences, a water supply, and irrigation network were added. The fourth phase was a period of partial rebuilding after heavy damage in the earthquake of 1283. The site was abandoned when the region was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.

Vardzia is particularly important for its wall paintings, which we shall view. Queen Tamar at Vardzia is an iconic image of Georgian history. Dating from 1184-86, her image forms part of the wall paintings adorning the Church of the Dormition, the focal point of this famous rock-cut monastery. Comprising images of the Virgin, donors and nationally revered saints, with scenes from the Passion of Christ, the wall paintings survive almost complete.

Founded in the 2nd century BC, Khertvisi is one of the oldest fortresses in Georgia, having been particularly important in the Middle Ages. The fortress sits atop a steep, high crag in a narrow canyon at the confluence of the Mtkvari and Paravani Rivers. Its church was built in 985, and its present walls constructed in 1354. We make a brief stop to view the fortress (exterior only) before returning to Akhaltsikhe for some time at leisure. (Overnight Akhaltsikhe) BLD

Tbilisi, Georgia - 2 nights

Day 13: Sunday 10 September, Akhaltsikhe – Tbilisi

- Museum of Fine Arts
- Private Classical Concert at the Elene Akhvlediani House Museum with wine and snacks

This morning we return to Tbilisi where, after lunch, we visit the Museum of Fine Arts housed in a former seminary where Joseph Stalin studied for the priesthood from 1894 to 1898 until he was expelled for revolutionary activities. Its treasury contains works from the Bronze Age, Hellenistic and medieval periods, as well as significant artefacts. Objects include fine icons, crosses and jewellery of costly metals encrusted with precious stones.

In the early evening we attend a private classical concert at the house-museum of Elene Akhvlediani (1898-1975), a 20th-century Georgia female painter, graphic artist, and theatre decorator. Having studied in France and Italy for many years, Elene Akhvlediani returned to Tbilisi where her house became an art salon hosting poetry evenings and concerts. Her exhibitions turned attention of French art critics and artists (she was a friend of Pablo Picasso and Paul Signac). Eminent musicians such as S. Richter and H. Neihaus are known to have played at her salon. The artist collected more than 4000 paintings during her life, which are on display in this house-museum. (Overnight Tbilisi) BL

Dzoraget, Armenia - 1 night

Day 14: Monday 11 September, Tbilisi – Akhtala – Haghpat – Dzoraget

- Georgia/Armenia Border Crossing
- Akhtala Monastery with 13th century frescoes
- Haghpat Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

This morning we cross into Armenia and visit two magnificent monasteries, foundations of medieval royal houses. Thirteenth-century Akhtala monastery's great jewel is its cycle of medieval frescoes, arguably the finest in Armenia. It also has fine façade relief carvings. This isolated, seldom-visited complex, like so many Caucasian monasteries, perches high in its fortress *enceinte* dominating the surrounding countryside. Unlike the other two monasteries we visit today, Akhtala shows a strong Georgian architectural influence.

The second monastery we visit, Haghpat, is justly famous. Located on a hillside looking down on the Debed River and across to a 2500-metre peak, it was founded by Queen Khosrovanuysh, wife of the Bagratid king Ashot III (c.976) and constitutes a superb example of the 10th-century flowering of Armenian architecture. The Cathedral of Surb Nishan (c.976-991) dominates the complex. Its high dome rests on four imposing pillars, typical of Armenian architecture of this period. The church has frescoes and fine relief sculptures, depicting Christ Pantocrator, the donor Prince Khutulukhaga, and his sons Smbat and Kurike with Queen Khosravanuche. A small hamlet usually surrounded monasteries in this region and over time the complex grew to include the small domed church of Sourb Grigor (1005), the so-called Hamazasp House (1257), the small 13th-century chapel of Sourb Astvatsatsin, a *scriptorium*, free-standing bell tower (1245) and refectory. We shall also view superb *khachkars*, cross-stones that were ubiquitous in medieval Armenia.

In the late afternoon we continue to the mountain resort of Dzoraget. (Overnight Dzoraget) BLD

Tsaghkadzor, Armenia - 1 night

Day 15: Tuesday 12 September, Dzoraget – Fioletovo – Haghartsin – Lake Sevan – Tsaghkadzor

- Russian minority town of Fioletovo
- Haghartsin Monastery
- Sevanavank Monastery

We begin this morning with a visit to Fioletovo, a small village in the Lori Province of Armenia founded in 1842 by Russian Molokan (Russian for 'milk-drinkers') exiles from the Tambov Governorate of the Russian Empire. Molokans are members of a spiritual Christian sect. They were Russian peasants who refused to obey the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th century. In the 19th century, the government's policy in Tsarist Russia was to send heretics away from the centre of the country to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Central Asia, and Siberia. Molokans do not accept icons, the church hierarchy and clergy, do not venerate the cross, don't eat pork, don't drink alcohol and do not smoke. Today we visit a private home of a Molokan family where refreshments (light lunch) will be served.

Haghartsin, the first monastery we visit today, is also a royal foundation of the Bagratuni Dynasty. Located in a fine, heavily wooded location, it is also in the style initiated in the 10th century, when Armenian culture flowered after the collapse of Arab dominion. Its major church, St Astvatsatsin (1281), has a 16-faced dome articulated with arches. The columns of this blind arcade have bases that are connected by triangular ledges and spheres to a band around the drum's base. Trefoils adorn the south portal's architrave and the church's eastern façade is decorated with bas-reliefs similar to those at Haghpat and Sanahin. Two figures dressed as monks – probably the church's first Abbot and his assistant – support a model of the church. One is more richly attired than the other and the styles of their faces, with their long whiskers, luxuriant combed beards and large almond eyes, differ markedly.

In the afternoon we visit Sevanavank Monastery, one of the few active monasteries in Armenia, consisting of two rough-hewn churches built on a peninsula overlooking Lake Sevan. Its courtyard has distinctive *khachkars* carved from a plentiful local green stone and one church's altar is among the finest in Armenia. (Overnight Tsaghkadzor) BLD

Goris, Armenia - 2 nights

Day 16: Wednesday 13 September, Tsaghkadzor – Noratus – Vardenyants (Selim) Pass – Karahunj – Goris

- Noratus Cemetery
- Ancient caravanserai and Vardenyants (Selim) Pass
- Karahunj (Carahunge) Observatory

Today we skirt Lake Sevan and journey south to Goris, a town in the mountainous southern Syunik Province of Armenia. Our first site today is Noratus Cemetery, with the largest cluster of *khachkars* (cross-stones) in Armenia. More than 1000 of these intricately carved stones, some sporting scenes of daily life, were produced from the 10th century. 16th- and 17th-century *khachkars*, created by three of Armenia's greatest sculptors, show strong influences from Safavid Persia, which demanded fealty from Armenian leaders at this time.

We follow a major trunk of the trans-Eurasian Silk Route up the Selim Mountain Pass where we visit Orbelian's Caravanserai, constructed by prince Chesar Orbelian in 1332 for merchants making the long trek through the mountains. The basalt caravanserai, like Armenia's medieval churches, sports interesting relief sculptures. *Muqarnas* gracing its portal and wall niches reflect the strong influence of Islamic architecture.

En route to Goris we make a short visit to the Karahunj Observatory where hundreds of huge vertical stones (*menhirs*) with accurate through-holes are arranged in an oval. Two archaeological investigations in the mid 1990s concluded that this cyclopean construction served as a temple for the Deity of Sun, an accurate ancient astronomical instrument, and a major centre for learning. It was built 6000 years ago and had been used for 4000 years before the adoption of Christianity. (Overnight Goris) BLD

Day 17: Thursday 14 September, Goris – Tatev – Khndzoresk – Goris

- Tatev Monastery
- Khndzoresk Cave Village

This morning we take the 'Wings of Tatev', a 5.7-kilometre cable car, from Halidzor across deep valleys to Tatev Monastery, built on a natural fortress of rock overlooking the Vorotan Canyon below the peaks of Karabakh. Tatev Monastery began to develop in the 9th century as the seat of the bishop of Syunik. It played a significant role in the history of the region as a centre of economic, political, spiritual and cultural activity. By the 11th century 1000 monks and a large number of artisans lived there. In the 14th and 15th centuries the monastery hosted one of the most important Armenian medieval 'universities', which contributed to the advancement of science, religion and philosophy, reproduction of books and development of miniature painting.

Tatev monastery has three churches: Sts Paul and Peter, built in the 9th century to house important relics, the 13th-century St Gregory the Illuminator, and the 11th-century St Mary. The fortifications added in the 17th century have been restored and the complex includes a library, refectory, belfry, mausoleum (St Gregory of Tatev (1346-1409) is buried here), as well as other administrative and auxiliary buildings. In the courtyard stands a 10th-century pendulous column topped by a *khachkar*, known as the *Gavazan Siun* (staff). This 8 metre-tall monument dedicated to the Holy Trinity is said to have predicted seismic activity and the drum of enemy horse beats by rocking backwards and forwards.

From Tatev we return to our coach by minivans through the precipitous Vorotan Gorge. At its deepest point we view the 'Devil's Bridge' – a natural rock bridge 30m long and 50-60m wide surrounded by mountainous springs. Here, waters of the springs have given pink, yellow and green colouring to the rocks of the canyon.

Khndzoresk village is located on the steep slopes of Khor Dzor (Deep Gorge), and is widely famous for its canyon with picturesque rock formations and ancient cave settlement. The artificial caves, some of which are currently used as stables and warehouses, were inhabited until the 1950s. Estimates suggest that the population grew to as many as 15,000 people and that the village included two churches and three schools. We walk to the village across a 160-metre-long suspension bridge, built in 2012. (Overnight Goris) BLD

Yerevan, Armenia - 4 nights

Day 18: Friday 15 September, Goris – Noravank – Khor Virap – Yerevan

- Noravank Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Khor Virap Monastery, Ararat Valley

Today we continue northwest to Armenia's capital, Yerevan. On the long drive we shall enjoy some of Armenia's most powerful scenery. We first enter the scenic upper Amaghov Valley to visit another of Armenia's most famous monasteries, Noravank. Its site is particularly dramatic; it occupies a narrow gorge with tall, sheer, brick-red cliffs above the Darichay River. S. Astvatsatsin Church (1205) is a narrow high structure topped by a lovely drum consisting of an open arcade.

Even more dramatically situated is the last monastery we visit before driving to Yerevan. Khor Virap Monastery sits on a spur above the Ararat Valley, looking across to majestic Mount Ararat (5163 metres). In many ways the image of the monastery framed by a backdrop of one of the world's highest mountains encapsulates the rugged beauty of this mountainous country. Khor Virap owes its fame to the fact that Armenia's most famous churchman, Gregory the Illuminator (c.257-c.331), was imprisoned here by the

Parthian-Armenian (Zoroastrian) King Tiridates III before Gregory eventually converted him, his court and aristocracy – and thus the country – to Christianity (301). Within the church stairs lead down into the pit in which Gregory was incarcerated. (Overnight Yerevan) BLD

Day 19: Saturday 16 September, Yerevan

- Short orientation coach tour of Yerevan: incl. House of Government, Victory Park and the Cascade
- History Museum of Armenia
- Armenian Genocide Memorial & Museum
- Matenadaran: a repository of 17,000 illuminated manuscripts

We begin today with a short coach tour of Yerevan's major sites including the House of Government and Victory Park that affords dramatic views of the city framed by Mount Ararat. Victory Park also displays some interesting Soviet weaponry, including a Mig-19, the aircraft used by the communists during the Vietnam War.

Next we tour the History Museum of Armenia. Of particular importance are its archeological collections that span a vast period from 100,000 BC to the Middle Ages. They comprise the Paleolithic Collections (100,000-12,000 BC); the Neolithic-Chalcolithic Collections (8th millennium-2nd half of 4th millennium BC); the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Collections (2nd half of the 4th millennium-15th-12th cc. BC); the period of the great Kingdom of Urartu (Kingdom of Van) (9th century. BC-early 6th century BC); Collections of the 6th-4th c. BC when Persia's Achaemenid Dynasty dominated the region both politically and culturally; the Hellenistic collections (4th century BC-3rd century AD) when Greek and Roman forms predominated, and the Medieval collections (4th-15th century).

We shall also visit the Armenian Genocide Memorial (Tsitsernakaberd) that records one of the darkest hours of Armenian history, when the failing Ottoman Empire killed an estimated 1 to 1.5 million Armenians during and after World War I. The Turkish government still denies that this holocaust occurred.

On a less confronting note, we end our day with a visit to one of the world's greatest collections of medieval manuscripts. The Matenadaran is a repository for 17,000 precious illuminated works that document the rise of Armenian literary culture and the country's particular form of Christianity over more than a millennium. (Overnight Yerevan) BL

Day 20: Sunday 17 September, Yerevan – Vagharshapat – Yerevan

- Church of St Hripsimeh Martyria
- The Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Echmiadzin (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Zvartnots Cathedral Ruins
- National Gallery of Armenia
- Vernissage Market (weekend flea market)
- Folk Show (performance to be confirmed in 2017)

This morning we drive the short distance to Armenia's ancient religious centre and the Holy See of Armenians throughout the World. Here we shall visit the Church of St Hripsimeh Martyria and The Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

St Hripsimeh is one of Armenia's oldest surviving churches. Built between 395 and 618 AD this church of the 'classical' Armenian period was to influence profoundly the architecture of the 10th century revival. It has a very sophisticated tetraconch (four apsed) plan and the powerful supports that carry its dome have

enabled the structure to withstand the earthquakes that have occurred regularly since it was built.

The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin is a complex that is dominated by the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, built by Saint Gregory the Illuminator in 301-303. This cathedral, which was reconstructed in the 5th century and has been much added-to since, is believed to be the oldest Christian foundation initiated by a state in the world. Our visit is timed for the Sunday service marked by the pealing of church bells at 11.30am. Inside you may join the crowds to enjoy the Cathedral's Choir. Should a second round of church bells occur, we may be fortunate enough to view His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians who traditionally proceeds from his palace into the Cathedral.

We shall also visit the 7th-century ruins of Zvartnots Cathedral before returning to Yerevan. This centrally planned tetraconch cathedral, which now lies in ruins, was built at a time when much of Armenia was under Byzantine control or influence and during the early invasions of Armenia by the Arabs

This afternoon we tour the National Gallery of Armenia which is situated in the Republic Square. Its collection of European, Russian, Armenian and Oriental art includes works by the great Armenian / Russian maritime artist Aivazovsky, Vernet, Kandinsky, Donatello and other masters. Of special note are Aivazovsky's *Descent of Noah from Ararat* (1889) and *Lord Byron's visit to San Lazzaro degli Armeni* (1899).

We also enjoy some time at leisure for a relaxing stroll through Yerevan's Vernissage market, Armenia's largest flea market. The market, founded by artists in the 1980s, sells carved wood and art works, traditional carpets, old collections of coins and medallions, books, jewellery and musical instruments. Its program permitting, we also attend a professional Armenian Folk show. (Overnight Yerevan) BL

Day 21: Monday 18 September, Yerevan – Geghard – Garni – Yerevan

- Monastery of Geghard and the Upper Azat Valley (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Hellenic Temple of Garni
- Time at leisure
- Farewell Dinner

This morning we drive east from Yerevan to the Monastery at Geghard and the extraordinary Hellenistic temple at Garni, one of the most important early cities of Armenia. Geghard Monastery, like so many Armenian monasteries, is located in a spectacular landscape. Formed in part by chambers carved out of the rock, it clings to the high cliffs of a gorge carved out by the Azat River. The complex was founded in the 4th century by Gregory the Illuminator at the site of a sacred spring inside a cave. The main chapel, however, was built in 1215. The monastery originally housed the spear that wounded Christ.

The area around Garni was first occupied in the 3rd millennium BC on easily defensible terrain on a bend of the Azat River. The Urartian King Argishti I had conquered the area in the 8th century BC. It was probably fortified sometime in the 3rd century BC when it became a summer residence of the Armenian Orontid and the Parthian-Armenian Artaxiad dynasties. Timur (Tamerlane) eventually destroyed the fortress in 1386. The temple collapsed during an earthquake in 1679 but was reconstructed brilliantly in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is a peripteral temple set on a high podium and was probably dedicated to the Zoroastrian god Myhras. It was the only pagan temple to survive the Christianisation of Armenia in the 4th century AD.

We return to Yerevan in the afternoon to allow you some time at leisure to relax or further explore the city. This evening we shall enjoy a farewell dinner together. (Overnight Yerevan) BLD

Day 22: Tuesday 19 September, Depart Yerevan

- At leisure/Check out
- Airport transfer for participants travelling on the ASA 'designated' flight

Our tour ends in Yerevan. In the morning you will be required to check out of the hotel. There will be some time at leisure, before joining the coach transfer to Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport for the ASA 'designated' flight back home to Australia. Alternatively, you may wish to extend your stay in Armenia. Please contact ASA if you require further assistance. B

Accommodation

22-day Cultural Tour of the Caucasus

Hotels are rated 3- to 5-star locally and are comfortable and conveniently situated. All rooms have en suite bathroom. Several hotels have swimming pools. Double/twin rooms (for single occupancy) may be requested – and are subject to availability and payment of the Double (as Single) Supplement. Further information on hotels will be provided in the 'Tour Hotel List' given to tour members prior to their departure.

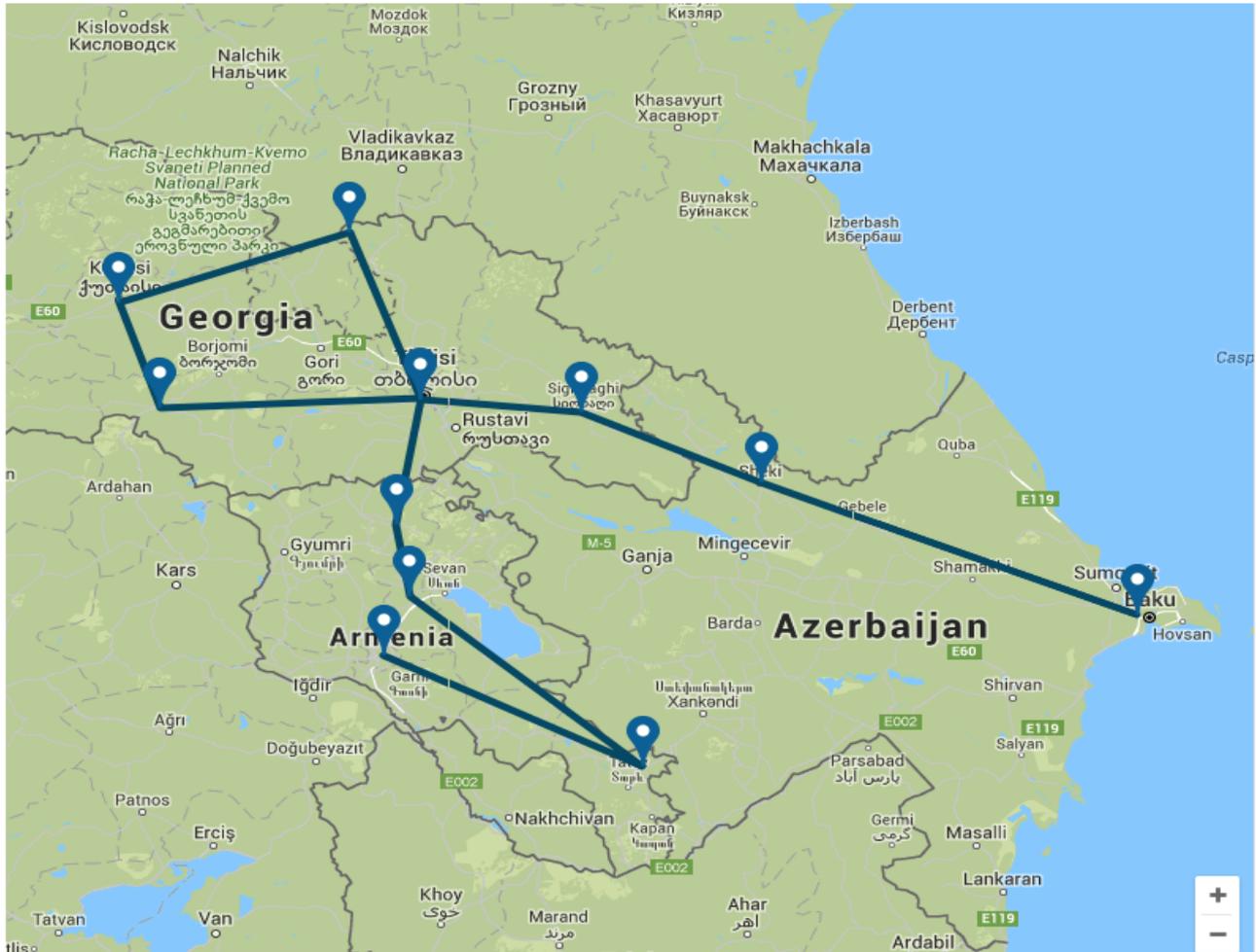
- Baku (3 nights): 5-star Hilton Baku Hotel – overlooking the Caspian Sea, within walking distance of Baku's 12th-century UNESCO-protected walled city. www.hilton.com/baku
- Sheki (1 night): 4-star Sheki Saray – within easy walking distance to the bazaar, restaurants and supermarket. www.shekisaray.az
- Signaghi (1 night): 4-star Kabadoni Boutique Hotel – a charming boutique hotel located on the main square of the village. kabadoni.ge or 3-star Hotel Brigitte – a charming new boutique hotel, 5 minutes from the 18th-century Signaghi Fortress. The hotel's 6 'luxe' rooms provide a balcony with sweeping views of the village. brigitte.ge
- Tbilisi (2 nights): 4-star The Courtyard by Marriott Tbilisi – located on Freedom Square, a short walk from Tbilisi's old town. www.marriott.com
- Kazbegi (2 nights): 4-star Rooms Hotel – opened in 2013, this retreat is located at the base of Kazbek Mountain, 7km from the 14th-century Gergeti Trinity Church. It offers rooms with spectacular views of the dramatic Caucasus Mountain Range. roomshotels.com
- Kutaisi (1 night): 3-star Bagrati 1003 – located on the left bank of the Rioni River near the town centre, offering 44 rooms in a new wing (opened March 2015). bagrati1003.ge
- Akhaltsikhe (2 nights): 4-star Hotel Rabath Gino Wellness – housed in the renovated Rabati Castle complex in the historic centre of Akhaltsikhe. www.gino.ge
- Tbilisi (1 night): 4-star The Courtyard by Marriott Tbilisi – located on Freedom Square, a short walk from Tbilisi's old town. www.marriott.com
- Dzoroget (1 night): 4-star Avan Dzoraget Hotel – a boutique heritage hotel located on the banks of the Debed River. www.tufenkianheritage.com
- Tsaghkadzor (1 night): 5-star Tsaghkadzor Marriott Hotel – opened in 2012, a modern luxury hotel located in the mountainous spa town. www.marriott.com.au
- Goris (2 nights): 3-star Hotel Mirhav – a boutique hotel offering accommodation in two buildings, a rear garden and good restaurant.
- Yerevan (4 nights): 4-star Tufenkian Historic Yerevan Hotel – a charming boutique hotel located 450m from Republic Square. Designed in the 19th-century Caucasian style, it offers modern rooms with handcrafted Armenian furnishings. The Kharpert Restaurant serves traditional Armenian cuisine and Italian dishes. www.tufenkianheritage.com

Note: Hotels are subject to change. In this instance a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Double (as Single) Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a double (or twin) room for single occupancy throughout the tour. The number of rooms available for single occupancy is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

Tour Map



Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$11,195.00 Land Content Only – Early-Bird Special: Book before 30 September 2016

AUD \$11,395.00 Land Content Only

AUD \$2980.00 Double (as Single) Supplement

For competitive Economy, Business or First Class airfares please contact ASA for further information.

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities in 3-5 star hotels
- Meals as indicated in the tour itinerary where: **B**=breakfast, **L**=lunch & **D**=evening meal
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals may not have drinks included.
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach; 4WD vehicles to Gergeti Trinity Church in Kazbegi, Georgia
- Airport-hotel transfers if travelling on the ASA 'designated' flights
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels (not at airports or at border crossings)
- Lecture and site-visit program
- Local guides in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia
- Entrance fees
- A bottle of mineral water per person per day for all day excursions
- Wine tasting at 2 wineries
- Tips for the coach driver, local guides and restaurants for included meals

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Baku, Yerevan-Australia
- Evening meals & lunches not indicated in the tour itinerary
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers if not travelling on the ASA 'designated' flights
- Luggage in excess of 20kg (44lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Visas (Australian passport holders require visas for both Azerbaijan and Armenia)



Physical Endurance & Practical Information

Physical Ratings 

The number of flags is a guide to the degree of difficulty of ASA tours relative to each other (not to those of other tour companies). It is neither absolute nor literal. One flag is given to the least taxing tours, seven to the most. Flags are allocated, above all, according to the amount of walking and standing each tour involves. Nevertheless, all ASA tours require that participants have a good degree of fitness enabling 2-3 hours walking or 1-1.5 hours standing still on any given site visit or excursion. Many sites are accessed by climbing slopes or steps and have uneven terrain.

This 22-day Cultural Tour of the Caucasus involves:

- A moderate amount of walking where many of the sites are large and unsheltered.
- Visiting sites where you will encounter steps, cobbled streets, rocky and uneven ground, slopes and steep walks.
- Extensive travel by air-conditioned coach; 4WD vehicles to Gergeti Trinity Church in Kazbegi, Georgia.
- You must be able to wheel your own suitcase (this will apply at border crossings). There is no portorage at the borders, although limited assistance will be provided by the local guides and drivers.
- 3- to 5-star hotels with eleven hotel changes.
- You must be able to carry your own hand luggage. Hotel portorage includes 1 piece of luggage per person.

It is important to remember that ASA programs are group tours, and slow walkers affect everyone in the group. As the group must move at the speed of the slowest member, the amount of time spent at a site may be reduced if group members cannot maintain a moderate walking pace. ASA tours should not present any problem for active people who can manage day-to-day walking and stair-climbing. However, if you have any doubts about your ability to manage on a program, please ask your ASA travel consultant whether

this is a suitable tour for you.

Please note: it is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. For further information please refer to the ASA Reservation Application Form.

Passport & E-Visa Requirements

The following visas will be required for passengers travelling on an Australian passport:

- Azerbaijan: E-Visa
- Georgia: Not Required
- Armenia: E-Visa

If you are travelling on a non-Australian passport, ASA will advise you directly of your visa requirements.

Other requirements

- Please check that your passport will be valid for 6 months after your date of return to Australia. This is important because many countries will refuse entry to anyone whose passport is about to expire.
- Please make sure your passport has at least 4 empty pages.
- ASA will advise all tour members of the appropriate web links for E-visa's approximately 3 months prior to the commencement of the tour.

Practical Information

Tour members will receive prior to departure practical notes which include information on visa requirements, health, photography, weather, clothing and what to pack, custom regulations, bank hours, currency regulations, electrical appliances and food. The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade website has advice for travellers: www.smartraveller.gov.au

Booking Conditions

Make a Reservation

ASA RESERVATION APPLICATION FORM

Please complete the ASA RESERVATION APPLICATION and send it to Australians Studying Abroad together with your non-refundable deposit of AUD \$500.00 per person payable to Australians Studying Abroad.

Passport Details

All participants must provide no later than **75 days** prior to the commencement of the program a photocopy of the front page of their current passport.

Double (as Single) Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a double (or twin) room for single occupancy throughout the tour. The number of rooms available for single occupancy is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.



Reservation Application

TOUR NAME _____

TOUR DATES _____

Please complete **one application, per person in block letters and sign**. Parental signature is required for participants under 18 years of age. Please mail this form with the appropriate deposit to: **P.O. Box 8285, ARMADALE, VICTORIA, 3143**. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation.

Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr Mrs Ms Miss Dr Other _____

FIRST NAME _____ Preferred FIRST NAME _____

MIDDLE NAME _____ SURNAME _____

POSTAL ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ POSTCODE _____

TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____

EMAIL address _____

Date of birth ____ / ____ / _____ GENDER Male Female

Passport Number _____ Expiry date ____ / ____ / ____ Nationality _____

Colour copy of my current valid passport enclosed I'm renewing my passport ASA has a colour copy of my current passport

Travel Plans

I wish ASA to book my airfare, please contact me to discuss my options. Business Class Economy Class

I plan to leave Australia before the tour commences. Planned departure date ____ / ____ / ____

I will be arranging my airfare independently and taking the Land Content Only option.

Frequent Flyer _____ Name of Airline _____ Airline Seat preference _____
Membership # _____ (please note request only)

Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like: a twin-bedded room a double-bedded room a room for sole occupancy

I am travelling: on my own with a friend/family member Travel Companion _____

Meals

I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

fish poultry red meat dairy products

eggs pork nuts

Allergies: Refer to the Medical Information

Other _____

Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence Postal Mail Email Address _____

Emergency Contact Details

Note: this person **MUST** be available by telephone and be present in Australia for the duration of your tour with ASA

Name _____ Relationship to Traveller _____

Address _____

TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____

EMAIL address _____

The purpose of seeking this information is to assist ASA to determine, where necessary, whether ASA is able to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs and whether your health and safety (or that of your fellow travellers) is likely to be compromised given your choice of tour. It will also assist you and ASA if you fall ill or have an accident whilst travelling.

- ASA reserves the right to decline your Reservation Application if this Medical Information section is not completed properly and may reject or cancel your reservation, or terminate your participation on any tour, if ASA subsequently learns that you have failed to make full and proper disclosure.
- ASA is committed to protecting the privacy of your personal information. ASA's privacy policy is available for viewing at www.asatours.com.au
- If ASA has any concerns about the information you have provided, it will contact you to request clarification before considering your Application.
- ASA requires you to consider carefully your limitations in light of ASA's Physical Endurance Star Rating System in ASA's Brochure and Itinerary when choosing your tour.
- If you are not likely to satisfy ASA's Participation Criteria (see below), ASA, in its sole discretion, may reject your Reservation Application.
- It is a condition of your tour that you agree to accept the directions of ASA's Tour Leaders in relation to your suitability to participate in activities planned on tour.
- ASA reserves the right to cancel your participation on a tour if your behaviour is in ASA's opinion causing undue distress or damage to any person or their property.
- If your participation is discontinued during a tour, ASA will assist by arranging your onward travel (if required) at your own cost, but you will not be refunded for forfeited parts of the tour.
- ASA tour groups are not accompanied by a medical practitioner. ASA recommends that you see your doctor for advice about your specific needs while overseas. You may also wish to contact a travel and vaccination clinic for advice. www.traveldoctor.com.au tel: 1300 658 444; www.travelvax.com.au tel: 1300 360 164.
- Travel insurers require you to declare all existing medical conditions.
- Please carry a complete list of medications with you during the ASA tour. Include **generic names** of each medication (consult your local pharmacy for information).

Please mark **X** in the YES or NO box to every question below and provide details where necessary:

Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour. The responsibility of the Tour Leader is to ensure that the larger group enjoys a relaxing and informative journey, and he or she cannot be relied upon to provide ongoing individual assistance to any one guest.

- | | YES | NO |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Can you walk and stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Can you walk unassisted on and over uneven surfaces? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Can you climb at least 3 flights of stairs and/or walk up and down steep slopes unassisted? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Can you walk at a steady pace and no less than 1km every 15 - 20 minutes unassisted? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Can you organise, manage and carry your own luggage? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Can you follow and remember tour instructions and meet punctually at designated times and places? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Can you administer your own medication? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Do you have impaired vision or hearing which may impact your capacity to participate on this tour? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Mobility and Fitness

As many of ASA's international sites do not provide access to wheelchairs or similar mobility aids, we regret that ASA tours are not suitable for people who require the use of a walking frame, wheeled walker, wheelchair or motorised scooter.

1. Do you suffer from any medical conditions that may compromise your mobility and/or fitness to participate on this program? YES NO
- If yes, please specify

 If yes, how will you manage this on tour?

Allergies and/or Food Intolerances

ASA will make reasonable endeavours to organise meals to suit you, provided that you give ASA adequate notice of your specific dietary requirements or allergies. You may be required to research dietary alternatives, as not all destinations may be able to offer suitable food substitutes.

1. Do you have any food allergies or intolerances? YES NO
- If yes, please specify

2. Have you ever had an anaphylactic reaction to anything?
- If yes, please specify

Do you carry an epipen?

3. Do you have any other allergies or reactions to anything, including medical drugs?
- If yes, please specify

Existing Medical Conditions

You alone are responsible for managing any existing medical conditions, your medication and any medical equipment that you may need when on your tour. Please plan for contingencies and take extra medication, dietary supplements and/or fully charged batteries for medical equipment if your health and safety depends on these. You should take into consideration that power sources at some destinations may be unavailable, inadequate, inconvenient or unreliable.

1. Have you any significant medical conditions that may impact your capacity to complete this tour? YES NO
- If yes, please specify

 If yes, how will you manage this on tour?

2. Do you require some form of powered medical aid, such as a CPAP machine?

These machines may not be operable on certain international flights, modes of transport, in remote or other areas with inadequate or unreliable power sources without a fully charged independent long life battery or batteries.

Diabetics: You may be travelling and sightseeing for many hours at a time. Insulin dependent diabetics must carry extra supplies of insulin (as this medication cannot be obtained in some destinations), regulators, applicators, storage and refrigeration equipment, as well as any necessary supplements. Accommodation may not provide refrigerators in rooms.

3. Are you diabetic?
- Are you insulin dependent?
4. Do you suffer from travel sickness? Remember to use an appropriate medication while on tour.



Declaration, Liability and Booking Conditions

Declaration

I declare that: I have read and understood the ASA Tour Itinerary, Reservation Application and Booking Conditions. I am aware of ASA's terms as relating to refunds, cancellations, responsibility and liability. I understand that ASA relies upon this declaration when considering this Application. I accept that there are inherent dangers and risks that may occur during any tour. I have made full and complete disclosure and have not knowingly withheld any medical information about myself from ASA. I have completed this Reservation Application honestly and accurately. I warrant that I am able to participate independently in all activities described by ASA in the itinerary without assistance from any person.

I will advise ASA in writing if any aspect of my fitness and or health conditions change materially at any time before my departure date. I understand and accept that the itinerary, accommodation and lecturers scheduled for this tour may change.

I agree and consent that ASA may give my personal information in this Reservation Application to tour service providers and relevant authorities as required by law, but for the purpose of making bookings with and engaging services provided for the tour. I understand that if I do not consent to the use of my personal information for this purpose, ASA will decline my Reservation Application.

In consideration of ASA's acceptance of my Reservation Application, I irrevocably release and indemnify ASA from all claims that I, or any other party, may have against ASA its employees, invitees, agents and contractors, however arising in respect of any loss, damage, injury, death or expense incurred in the course of travelling to, on and from any tour.

I understand and acknowledge that this Release and Indemnity applies with respect to:

1. Every general risk to which I or my personal belongings may be exposed in the course of travelling to, on or from any ASA tour
2. Every special risk, in particular medical risks, to which I may be exposed in the course of travelling to, on or from any ASA tour arising from, including, but not limited to:
 - a. intermittent power cycles and/or the temporary or permanent loss of power (beware CPAP or any other medical machine users);
 - b. dietary, food or other allergies (ASA cannot guarantee that traces of items to which you are allergic are not present in food or drink you are served, medication you are administered or other substances with which you may come into contact);
 - c. any event or situation that may compromise the administration of necessary medication or my health, safety and wellbeing generally.
3. All claims arising as a result of my or ASA's cancellation or termination of my continued participation on a tour for whatever reason (refund conditions in ASA's Booking Conditions excepted).

Limitation of Liability

ASA is not a carrier, event or tourist attraction host, accommodation or dining service provider. All bookings made and tickets or coupons issued by ASA for transport, event, accommodation, dining and the like are issued as an agent for various service providers and are subject to the terms and conditions and limitations of liability imposed by each service provider. ASA is not responsible for their products or services. If a service provider does not deliver the product or service for which you have contracted, your remedy lies with the service provider, not ASA.

ASA will not be liable for any claim (eg. sickness, injury, death, damage or loss) arising from any change, delay, detention, breakdown, cancellation, failure, accident, act, omission or negligence of any such service provider however caused (contingencies). You must take out adequate travel insurance against such contingencies.

ASA's liability in respect of any tour will be limited to the refund of amounts received from you less all non-refundable costs and charges and the costs of any substituted event or alternate services provided. The terms and conditions of the relevant service provider from time to time comprise the sole agreement between you and that service provider.

ASA reserves the sole discretion to cancel any tour or to modify itineraries in any way it considers appropriate. Tour costs may be revised, subject to unexpected price increases or exchange rate fluctuations.

Booking Conditions

DEPOSITS

A deposit of \$500.00 AUD per person is required to reserve a place on an ASA tour.

CANCELLATION FEES

If you decide to cancel your booking the following charges apply:

- More than 75 days before departure: \$500*
- 75-46 days prior 25% of total amount due
- 45-31 days prior 50% of total amount due
- 30-15 days prior 75% of total amount due
- 14-0 days prior 100% of total amount due

*This amount may be **credited** to another ASA tour departing within 12 months of the original tour you booked. We regret, in this case early-bird discounts will not apply.

We take the day on which you cancel as being that on which we receive written confirmation of cancellation.

UNUSED PORTIONS OF THE TOUR

We regret that refunds will not be given for any unused portions of the tour, such as meals, entry fees, accommodation, flights or transfers.

WILL THE TOUR PRICE OR ITINERARY CHANGE?

If the number of participants on a tour is significantly less than budgeted, or if there is a significant change in exchange rates ASA reserves the right to amend the advertised price. We shall, however, do all in our power to maintain the published price. If an ASA tour is forced to cancel you will get a full refund of all tour monies paid. Occasionally circumstances beyond the control of ASA make it necessary to change airline, hotel or to make amendments to daily itineraries. We will inform you of any changes in due course.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

ASA requires all participants to obtain comprehensive travel insurance. A copy of your travel insurance certificate and the **reverse charge** emergency contact phone number must be received by ASA no later than 75 days prior to the commencement of the tour.

FINAL PAYMENT

The balance of the tour price will be due 75 days prior to the tour commencement date.

PLEASE READ THE ABOVE CAREFULLY, PRINT AND SIGN BELOW

- I accept the conditions on this booking form I have read the information about the physical requirements of the tour in the detailed itinerary and confirm that I am able to meet these requirements

Applicant's Signature _____

Print Full Name _____

Dated _____

Tour / Course Name

Name of Traveller 1 _____

Name of Traveller 2 _____

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ _____ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

The above amount is payable for:

- Intention to Travel Tour Deposit
- Balance of Payment Upgrade from Intention to Travel to a Deposit
- Travel Insurance Other (eg. Airfares, Accommodation) _____

By Cheque

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ
Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic
Swift Code ANZBAU3M
BSB 013-423
Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. _____

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended

Date Money Transferred _____

Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard & Visa 1.95%
American Express 2.80%

Please debit my: Mastercard Visa American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number _____

Expiry Date _____ Security Code (CVC) _____

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ)

Cardholders Name _____

Cardholders Billing Address _____

Postcode _____

State _____ Country _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cardholders Signature _____

AUSTRALIANS STUDYING ABROAD

Office 6, Level 1, 1087-1095 High St (PO Box 8285) Armadale VIC Australia 3143

Phone +61 3 9822 6899 Freecall 1800 645 755 (outside metro Melbourne area only) Email info@asatours.com.au License No. 31248 ABN 27 006 589 242

www.asatours.com.au