



Crossroads of the Caucasus: Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia 2023

29 AUG – 19 SEP 2023

Code: 22329

Tour Leaders **Davit Naskidashvili, Ali Oveissi**

Physical Ratings 

With Georgian Archaeologist, Davit Naskidashvili, explore the fascinating history, art, architecture and unforgettable scenery of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia.

Overview

Featuring a rarely included 5-day excursion to Kutaisi and the Upper Svaneti region, a UNESCO World-heritage site.

Explore the intricate history and richly varied culture of the Caucasus with Georgian archaeologist, [Davit Naskidashvili](#), and [Ali Oveissi](#).

- 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 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.
- Explore the Khaketi region visiting Telavi's medieval castle, the 19th-century summer palace of the princely Chavchavadze family, and learn about the ancient Georgian *Qvevri* wine-making tradition.
- 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.
- Visit the [Upper Svaneti region, a UNESCO World-heritage site](#), featuring exceptional mountain scenery with medieval-type villages and distinctive *koshki* (defensive stone towers).
- View the fascinating decoration of Georgia's and Armenia's stunningly located mountain monasteries, that fuses local, Islamic and Western motifs.
- 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.
- 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.
- This tour is limited to 16 participants

Overnight Baku (3 nights) • Sheki (1 night) • Tsinandali (1 night) • Tbilisi (3 nights) • Kazbegi (1 night) • Borjomi (2 nights) • Kutaisi (1 night) • Mestia (2 nights) • Kutaisi (1 night) • Tbilisi (1 night) • Dilijan (1 night) • Yerevan (4 nights)

Introduction

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. In the Central Caucasus we visit the Svaneti region, featuring exceptional mountain scenery and medieval-type villages with distinctive defensive stone towers which are UNESCO World-Heritage listed. We study the exquisite gold treasures in Tbilisi's National Museum and Yerevan's exceptional archaeological and painting collections. In ancient Mkheta 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 Haghpat and Noravank, 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.

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.

Leaders



Davit Naskidashvili

Lecturer, Institute of Archaeology,
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State Uni.
Davit, whose PhD focuses on the
Greek colonisation of the Black Sea
coast, has worked on archaeological
sites in Azerbaijan & Georgia. He
first joined ASA as a lecturer for the
Caucasus in 2017.

Davit Naskidashvili is currently a Lecturer at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU). His PhD research focuses on the Greek colonisation of the Black Sea coast in the Antique Period and has been funded by a Shota Rustaveli national scholarship. He has excavated on a variety of international field projects; most recently he has been working with Oxford University at the Medieval city of Barda in Azerbaijan and with the 'Persia and its Neighbours' project in collaboration with the Universities of Edinburgh and Durham where he has been involved in fieldwork in Iran, Oman and Dariali in northern Georgia. He is currently co-directing Excavation on Petra castle (West Georgia).



Ali Oveissi

For many years, Ali has earned the
close friendship and deep respect of
many ASA travellers to Iran. Without
exception, tour members have
admired his polite, personable,
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organised tour leading. Ali currently
leads ASA tours to Iran the
Caucasus and Venice.

For many years, Ali Oveissi has earned the close friendship and deep respect of many ASA travellers to Iran. Without exception, tour members have admired his polite, personable, good natured style and his extraordinarily dependable, well organised tour leading. Ali earned his degree in geology from the Arzad University of Shahrood in 1988 and, after two years' military service, worked for one of Iran's largest tour companies. In 1995, he moved to the USA. In 1998, the year he married, he first worked with ASA and became a dear friend of its directors Kristen and Chris. Thenceforth, after founding Abgin Tours in 1999, Ali has run all ASA tours in Iran. Ali has also run tours in Europe and the Caucasus, and such is his popularity with ASA group members and the company's great trust in him, that we have appointed him tour manager for our tours to the Caucasus.



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=dinner.

Baku, Azerbaijan - 3 nights

Day 1: Tuesday 29 August, Arrive Baku

- Tour commences at 1.30pm in the foyer of the Four Season Hotel Baku
- Buffet lunch at the hotel
- Introductory Meeting
- Heydar Aliyev Center (Zaha Hadid architects)
- Introductory Lecture followed by a buffet dinner at the hotel

Meeting Point: The tour commences at 1.30pm in the foyer of the [Four Seasons Hotel Baku](#).

We shall then proceed immediately to the hotel restaurant for a light lunch. In the afternoon we begin with a short introductory meeting and then board our coach and 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. In the evening we regather for an introductory lecture before dining together at our hotel. (Overnight Baku)
LD

Day 2: Wednesday 30 August, Baku

- 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

Caravanseraï

- Azerbaijan National Museum of Art
- Welcome Dinner

This morning 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 Caravanseraï and Hajji Gayyib bathhouse, the Bukhara Caravanseraï and Gasimbey bathhouse, the Synyk-Kala Minaret and Mosque and the Lezgi Mosque.

After lunch we visit the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art, in which you will have time to explore both the European collection, with works by artists like Andrea del Sarto, Guercino, Frans Hals and Charles le Brun, and the collection of Eastern art, represented in particular by Persian, Turkish, Chinese and Japanese art. The museum also includes decorative-applied arts of Western Europe (France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Greece, Flanders, Denmark, Spain), the East (Iran, Turkey, Japan, China, India, Egypt, Middle East) and Russia.

Our day ends with a 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
- YARAT Contemporary Art Space: Painting Museum dedicated to 20th and 21st-century Azeri painters
- Azerbaijan Carpet Museum displaying the vivid colours and bold designs of Azeri, Caucasian and Iranian carpets

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.

Situated on the National Flag Square is the Museum of Azerbaijani Painting of the 20 and 21st centuries which was founded by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. The Museum, which was inaugurated in June 2015, presents works by both prominent and lesser-known Azerbaijani painters from State Collections, such as the National Picture Gallery and the Museum of Modern Art.

We end the day with a visit to Baku's extraordinary 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. (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 *yaylars* (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

Tsinandali - 1 night

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

- Lunch and wine tasting at Kvareli Gvirabi, Khareba Winery, Kakheti
- Gremi: Royal Citadel & Church of Archangels

We pass today from Azerbaijan into Georgia, visiting the Kvareli Gvirabi wine cellar and Gremi's royal citadel on our way to Tsinandali. 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 drive to the Radisson Collection Hotel located within the Tsinandali Estate. Tonight we dine together at the hotel's gastronomic restaurant which serves traditional Kakheti cuisine. (Overnight Tsinandali) BLD

Tbilisi, Georgia - 3 nights

Day 6: Sunday 3 September, Tsinandali – Alaverdi – Telavi – Tbilisi

- Alaverdi Monastery: Cathedral & Alapiani Winery Cellar
- Batonis Tsikhe
- Lunch at the Marletas Cheese Farm
- Chavchavadze Estate

We begin this morning with a visit to the monastery complex at Alaverdi which was founded by the Assyrian monk, Joseph Alaverdeli, in the middle of the 6th century. Located in the Alazani valley and silhouetted against the Great Caucasus Mountains, the complex is surrounded by extensive defensive walls dating from the 16th and 17th centuries. Within these walls lies the 11th-century cathedral built by Kakhetian King Kvirike the Great, which replaced a small church of St George. Over 55 metres tall, this is one of the largest cathedrals in Georgia. Alaverdi became the episcopal centre of the diocese, and the Alaverdi Cathedral became the tomb of Kakheti royalty. The monastery is the focus of the annual religious celebration, Alaverdoba, which is celebrated throughout Kakheti. Within the monastery walls lies the Alapiani Winery Cellar, built on the site of the older 10th-12th century cellars. Here monks maintain the centuries-old Georgian wine-making tradition, producing wine using the endemic variety of Kakhetian vine in *qvevri*, clay vessels buried in the ground.

The medieval royal palace, Batonis Tsikhe, ('The Master's Fortress'), is located in Telavi, the principal city of Kakheti. It was built by King Archil in 1667-1667 and was the main residence of the Kakhetian kings during the 17th and 18th centuries. The castle complex has undergone extensive reconstruction over the centuries; it was recently restored in 2018. Within the complex, which is surrounded by a monumental rampart and large corner towers, we view surviving sections of the Persian-style palace of King Erekle II, modelled on the Arg of Karim Khan in Shiraz, Iran. There are also two small churches, the royal baths and a combined history and art museum.

Lunch will be served at Marletas, home to artisan cheesemakers who live in Shalauri village just outside of Telavi.

We spend the afternoon visiting the 19th-century summer palace and English-style gardens at Tsinandali, created by Prince Alexander Chavchavadze (1786-1846). Chavchavadze was one of the most colourful and influential characters in Georgian history. Born into the St Petersburg elite, he spoke seven languages and was an influential Romantic poet and translator; he assisted in the introduction of European Enlightenment ideals to Georgia. He was also a pioneer of European winemaking techniques. His homes at Tsinandali and in Tbilisi hosted distinguished visitors including the writers Dumas, Pushkin, Lermontov and Griboyedov.

In the late afternoon we drive to Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, where we shall be based for the next three nights. (Overnight Georgia) 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
- Cable car to Narikala Fortress
- Afternoon at leisure
- Tbilisi's Art Nouveau architecture (optional walking tour)
- Dinner at Azarpesha Restaurant incl. recital by 'Ensemble Didgori' (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.

We take the cable car up to 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. From the the fortress there are magnificent views of Tbilisi.

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 Didgori' to sing for us. The men's folk and chant ensemble Didgori was founded in 2003 with a

leadership of Mr. Levan Tsitaishvili. The name *Didgori* honours the historical battle in 1121 that helped reunite Georgia and ushered in a period of growth in arts and culture. (Overnight Tbilisi) BLD

Day 8: Tuesday 5 September, Tbilisi

- The Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia with its exquisite gold treasures (Georgian National Museum)
- Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery incl. the art of Niko Pirosmiani
- Private Classical Concert at the Elene Akhvlediani House Museum with wine and snacks

This morning we visit the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia to see its exquisite gold treasures. Of special note is the 5th-century BC Akhagori hoard that contains unique examples of jewellery, blending Achaemenid (Persian) and local styles and gold pieces brought here from various archaeological sites in Georgia. There is also a collection of medieval icons.

After lunch we visit the Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery which displays the largest Pirosmiani collection in the world. Niko Pirosmiani was born in the Kakheti region in the village of Mirzaani in 1862 where he became a self-educated artist. He later moved to Tbilisi where he made a living painting shop plaques, portraits and landscapes for bar owners. Known as one of the foremost self-taught Georgian painters, Pirosmiani was discovered by prominent Georgian artists Lado Gudiashvili, David Kakabadze and Kirill Zdanevich. Despite this recognition, he struggled to reach a wider audience and faced limited work opportunities. It was only after his death in 1918 that he rose to prominence and gained international recognition.

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) BLD

Kazbegi National Park, Georgia - 1 night

Day 9: Wednesday 6 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

Borjomi - 2 nights

Day 10: Thursday 7 September, Kazbegi – Ananuri – Grakliani – Borjomi

- 4WD excursion to Gergeti Trinity Church
- Grakliani Hill archaeological site (time-permitting)
- Borjomi Gorge

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.

Late morning we return to Ananuri where we break for lunch at a restaurant overlooking the Aragvi River and Zhinvali Reservoir. Our next visit (time-permitting) is to the site of the Iron Age temple at Grakliani. The site was declared a National Cultural Heritage Monument following the discovery of a mysterious script etched on the side of a collapsed stone altar in 2015. The script is believed to be the oldest example of a native alphabet in the Caucasus. As recently as 2020, archaeological expeditions undertaken by Tbilisi State University have revealed ceramic and metal items that date to the 6th and 5th centuries BC. Davit, who has previously worked at this site, will show us some of the archaeological findings which are on display in a small onsite archaeological museum.

From Grakliani we continue west to the picturesque spa town of Borjomi where we will be based for the next two nights. Our journey takes us through the Borjomi Gorge, a canyon cut by the Mtkvari River through the Lesser Caucasian Mountains. The canyon is the source of 'Borjomi' carbonated mineral water. The valley's artesian springs are fed by water that filters from glaciers covering the peaks of the Bakuriani mountains. The springs were discovered by the Imperial Russian military in the 1820s and were famous throughout the Russian Empire. (Overnight Borjomi) BLD

Day 11: Friday 8 September, Borjomi – Vardzia – Akhaltsikhe – Borjomi

- Cave city of Vardzia including the Church of the Dormition
- Khertvisi Fortress (exterior only)
- Rabati Castle Complex incl. the Samtskhe-Javakheti History Museum, Akhaltsikhe

This morning we make an 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 continuing to Akhaltsikhe.

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 *Vepkhistkaosani* ('The Knight in the Panther's Skin'), of the 16th century. (Overnight Borjomi) BLD

Kutaisi, Georgia - 1 night

Day 12: Saturday 9 September, Borjomi – Kutaisi

- Gelati Monastery, Kutaisi (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Time at leisure

This morning we drive west to the important western Georgian city of Kutaisi, capital of the Imereti region. Following lunch at a local restaurant 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.

The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to explore Kutaisi which is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Our hotel is within walking distance of the Rioni River and the medieval Bagrati Cathedral whose interior is decorated with frescoes. This evening we dine at a charming local restaurant featuring live music. (Overnight Kutaisi) BLD

Mestia, Svaneti, Georgia - 2 nights

Day 13: Sunday 10 September, Kutaisi – Zugdidi – Mestia

- Scenic drive into Caucasus Mountains, incl. Engird Reservoir.
- Dadiani Palace, Zugdidi
- Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography, Mestia
- Optional walk to Mikheil Khargiani House Museum and small medieval painted churches in Mestia

Today we drive north into some of the grandest, highest, most beautiful mountain landscapes of the Caucasus. We shall make a number of stops to view magnificent panoramas, including that of the great Engird Reservoir. We drive into the Svaneti region, one of the most remarkable historic areas of the Caucasus, located in North west area of the Georgia. We drive up the Enguri Gorge where the first inhabitants, mainly gold prospectors, settled in antiquity. It was here that most of the famed gold of the ancient kingdom of Colchis was obtained. For centuries the Svan ethnic group, considered an ethnic subgroup of the Georgians, evolved here, cut off from the outside world by the high and inaccessible mountains, their local language and culture preserved almost intact. In earlier centuries, Svaneti was a recognized part of the Kingdom of Colchis.

Along the way, we visit Dadiani Palace in Zugdidi – a castle-like building from the 17th to 19th centuries. The museum houses one of Napoleon Bonaparte's three bronze death masks, acquired through a 19th-century marriage between a Dadiani and a descendant of Napoleon's sister. We shall eat lunch at restaurant "Mendzeli" Zugdidi, eating a meal of "Megrelian" (West-Georgian cuisine) cuisine.

Our destination today is the small town of Mestia, the major 'townlet' (*daba*) in the Svaneti region and, at an altitude of 1,500 metres, the highest town in Georgia. Mestia is graced with extraordinary Svan fortified dwellings consisting of a high defensive tower, an adjacent house (*macho*), and other household structures encircled by a defensive wall.

On arrival we visit the Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography which is a treasury of the history of Georgia, as it contains material culture from the Georgian lowlands which Svaneti's isolation protected from the depredations of foreign invaders. This new museum, which opened in 2013, includes Christian masterpieces from the 9th to the 18th century including the Icon of the Forty Sebastian Martyrs, an embroidered Byzantine icon, Venetian cross, a jug donated by Queen Tamar, and the earliest remaining sample of an illustrated manuscript from the Adishi Gospels (897).

For the energetic, there will also be an optional walk to the Mikheil Khargiani House Museum and small medieval painted churches in Mestia. (Overnight Mestia, Svaneti) BLD

Day 13: Monday 11 September, Mestia – Kala – Ushguli – Mestia

- Lonely Tower ('Tower of Lovers'), Kala village
- Ushguli: The four villages of Chvibiani, Murkmeli, Jibiani and Chazhashi

This morning we drive 36 kilometres further north and higher into the mountains of the Upper Svaneti region to explore the cluster of four villages located in the Enguri Gorge that take the collective name, Ushguli; they are designated a UNESCO World-heritage site. Within exceptional mountain scenery, these 'medieval' villages, have remained pristine due to their extreme isolation. At 2,200 metres, they are considered the highest continuously settled villages in Europe; from these villages it is possible to see Shkhara peak, the highest in Georgia. We shall focus on the village of Chajashi, dominated by distinctive *koshki* (defensive stone towers). These towers not only acted as strongholds for Svanian family clans, but were also used as retreats from avalanches in winter. Currently most of the towers have an important sacral function for local people. We also visit the so-called lonely tower (tower of love) in the village of Kala. (Overnight Mestia, Svaneti) BLD

Kutaisi, Georgia - 1 night

Day 14: Tuesday 12 September, Mestia – Lashtkveri – Latali – Kutaisi

- Church of St Gabriel (also known as Mkheri Church), village of Lashtkhveri
- Saint George Church, Latali

Today we return to Kutaisi. Along the way we visit two churches in Svaneti, Lashtkhveri's church dedicated to the Archangel Gabriel and the Church of St George, Latali. The first of these has a richly decorated interior. It also has fragments of exterior paintings, one of which shows a medieval knight, presumably the Archangel Gabriel, piercing the devil with a sword. The simple little Church of St George, Latali, occupies a stunning location with a high mountain backdrop. (Overnight Kutaisi) BLD

Tbilisi - 1 night

Day 16: Wednesday 13 September, Kutaisi – Gori – Tbilisi

- Joseph Stalin Museum, Gori

Today we return to Tbilisi. 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. (Overnight Tbilisi) BLD

Dilijan - 1 night

Day 17: Thursday 14 September, Tbilisi – Akhtala Monastery – Haghpas Monastery – Dilijan

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

Today 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 monastery we visit today, Akhtala shows a strong Georgian architectural influence.

The second monastery we visit, Haghpas, 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 Khosrovanuche. 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 afternoon we continue south to the spa town of Dilijan situated within the Dilijan National Park. (Overnight Dilijan) BLD

Yerevan, Armenia - 4 nights

Day 18: Friday 15 September, Dilijan – Lake Sevan – Vardenyants (Selim) Pass – Noravank – Khor Virap – Yerevan

- Lake Sevan
- Ancient caravanserai and Vardenyants (Selim) Pass
- Noravank Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Khor Virap Monastery, Ararat Valley

Today we continue southwest to Armenia's capital, Yerevan. On the long drive we shall enjoy some of Armenia's most powerful scenery. From Dilijan our route follows the western shore of Lake Sevan, one of the largest freshwater high-altitude (alpine) lakes in Eurasia.

We then 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.

Next we enter the scenic upper Amaghou 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
- Matenaderan: 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 Hripsime 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 2023)

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

- Tour concludes in the morning
- At leisure/Check out

Our tour ends in Yerevan. In the morning you will be required to check out of the hotel. Please contact ASA if you require assistance with a transfer to Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport. B

Accommodation

Hotels are rated 3- to 5-star locally and are comfortable and conveniently situated. All rooms have en suite bathroom. Further information on hotels will be provided in the 'Tour Hotel List' given to tour members prior to their departure.

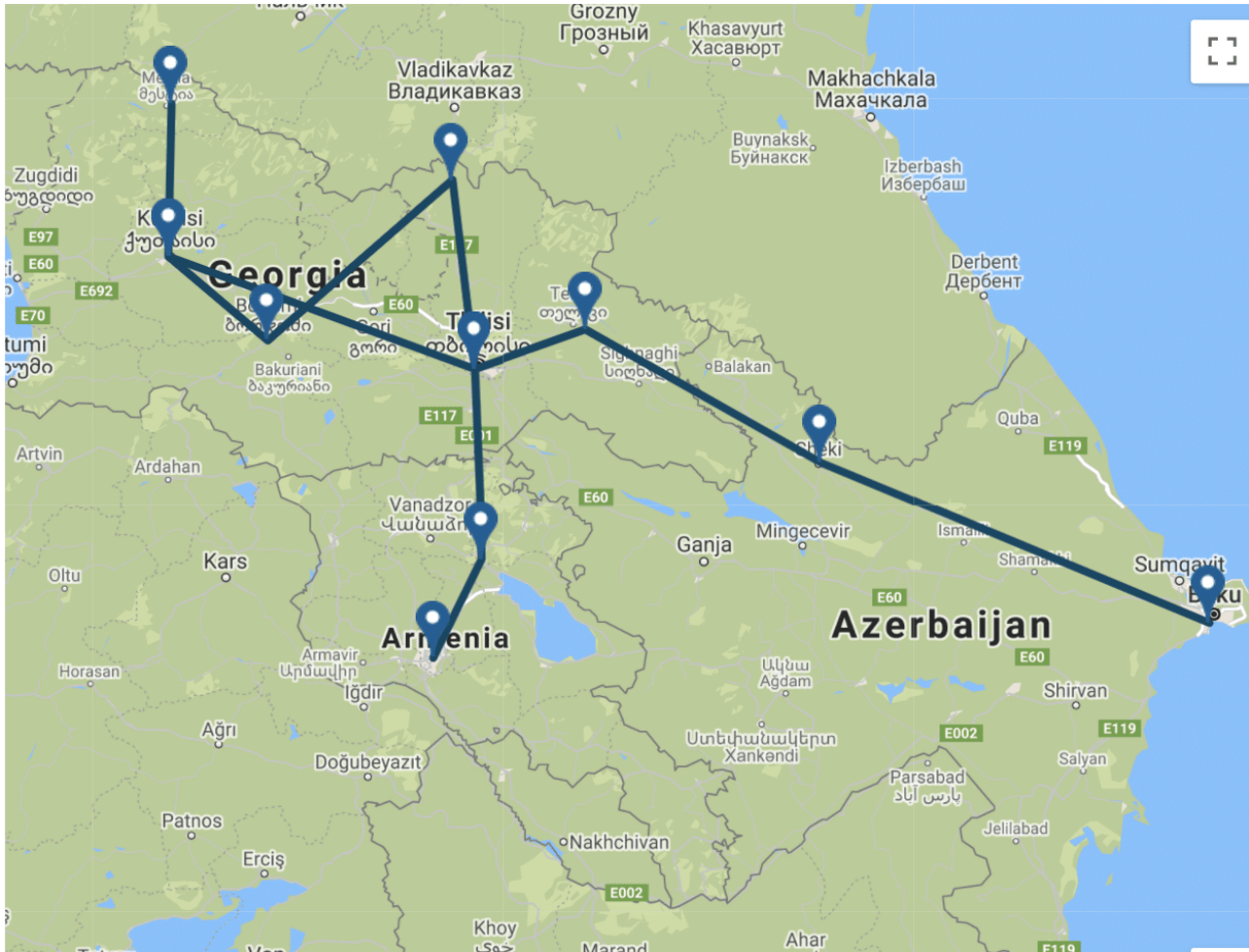
- Baku (3 nights): 5-star Four Seasons Hotel – overlooking the Caspian Sea, within walking distance of Baku's 12th-century UNESCO-protected walled city. www.fourseasons.com
- Sheki (1 night): 5-star Marxal Resort & Spa Hotel – surrounded by mountains, overlooking Sheki. www.marxalresort.az
- Tsinandali (1 night): 5-star Radisson Collection Estate Hotel – a new contemporary hotel connected to the Chavchavadze Palace, featuring two gastronomic restaurants celebrating Kakheti cuisine. tsinandaliestate.ge
- Tbilisi (3 nights): 4-star Courtyard by Marriott Tbilisi – located on Freedom Square in the heart of Tbilisi. www.marriott.com
- Kazbegi (1 night): 4-star Rooms Hotel – 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
- Borjomi (2 nights): 4-star Crowne Plaza Borjomi – located in the heart of this picturesque spa town. www.ihg.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/borjomi
- Kutaisi (1 night): 4-star Newport Hotel – built in 1914, this former courthouse building has recently been transformed into a modern 4-star hotel. The hotel is within walking distance of the historic centre. nhkutaisi.com
- Mestia (2 nights): 4-star Hotel Posta – this new hotel is located 700m from the new Museum of History and Ethnography. www.instagram.com/hotelpostamestia
- Kutaisi (1 night): 4-star Newport Hotel – built in 1914, this former courthouse building has recently been transformed into a modern hotel and is within walking distance of the historic centre. nhkutaisi.com
- Tbilisi (1 night): 4-star Courtyard by Marriott Tbilisi – located on Freedom Square in the heart of Tbilisi. www.marriott.com
- Dilijan (1 night): 4-star Best Western Plus Paradise Hotel – situated in the picturesque site of Dilijan Resort Town, on the highway connecting Armenia and Georgia. paradisehotel.am
- 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 Kharper 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.

Single Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a double room for single occupancy throughout the tour except in Dilijan where a standard single room will be provided. 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 \$13,780.00 Land Content Only – Early-Bird Special: Book before 30 Sep 2022

AUD \$13,980.00 Land Content Only

AUD \$2770.00 Single Supplement

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=dinner
- 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 and Ushguli village.
- 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
- 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
- Luggage in excess of 20kg (44lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Visas (Australian passport holders require a visa for Azerbaijan)



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 and Ushguli village.
- You must be able to wheel your own suitcase (this will apply at border crossings). There is no portering 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 portering 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: Not Required

If you are travelling on a non-Australian passport, please contact ASA for further information on 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 Notes

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

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.

Covid-19 Vaccination Certificate

Commencing from November 2021 it will be a condition of travel that all group leaders and ASA travellers are fully vaccinated against Covid-19. All participants must send ASA a copy of their vaccination certificate at the time of submitting their Reservation Application Form. For information on how to obtain either a Covid-19 digital certificate or a certificate in PDF format please view the [Australian Government Services Australia "What types of proof there are"](#) web page.



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

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 the inherent dangers, risks and uncertainties in travel and those beyond ASA's control and understand they may occur before or 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 only for the purpose of making bookings with and engaging services associated with 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 booking, preparing for, travelling to, on and from or cancelling any tour.

I release and indemnify ASA with respect to:

1. Every general risk to which I or my personal belongings may be exposed in the course of preparing for, 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 preparing for, 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; and
 - d. any event or happening beyond ASA's control
3. All claims arising as a result of my or ASA's cancellation or termination of any tour, part of a tour or of my continued participation on a tour for any reason (subject to ASA's refund conditions below).

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, services, terms and conditions. If a service provider cancels or does not deliver the product or service for which you have contracted, and does not give a refund, your remedy lies with the service provider, not ASA.

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

ASA's liability in respect of any tour cancelled or changed will be limited to the partial refund of amounts you have paid, less an administration fee of \$500 and other costs and charges of third party service providers. No compensation will be payable to you by ASA where ASA cancels or changes a tour, or any part of a tour.

ASA reserves the sole discretion to cancel any tour or to modify itineraries in any way it considers appropriate and in the best interests of health, safety and wellbeing of tour participants. 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 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 or services 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. Occasionally circumstances beyond the control of ASA make it necessary to change airline, hotel or to make amendments to 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) _____

International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

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 & American Express 2%

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 _____