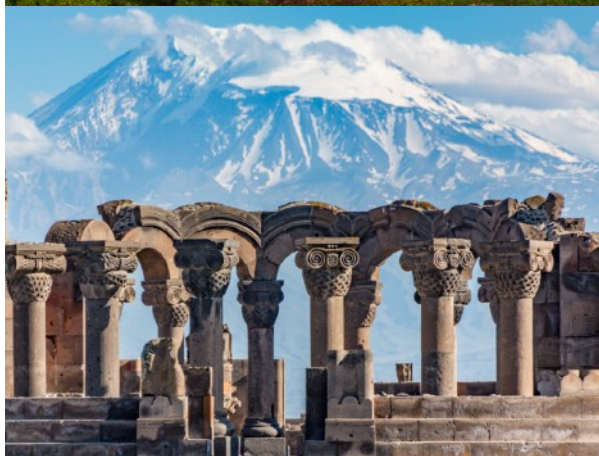
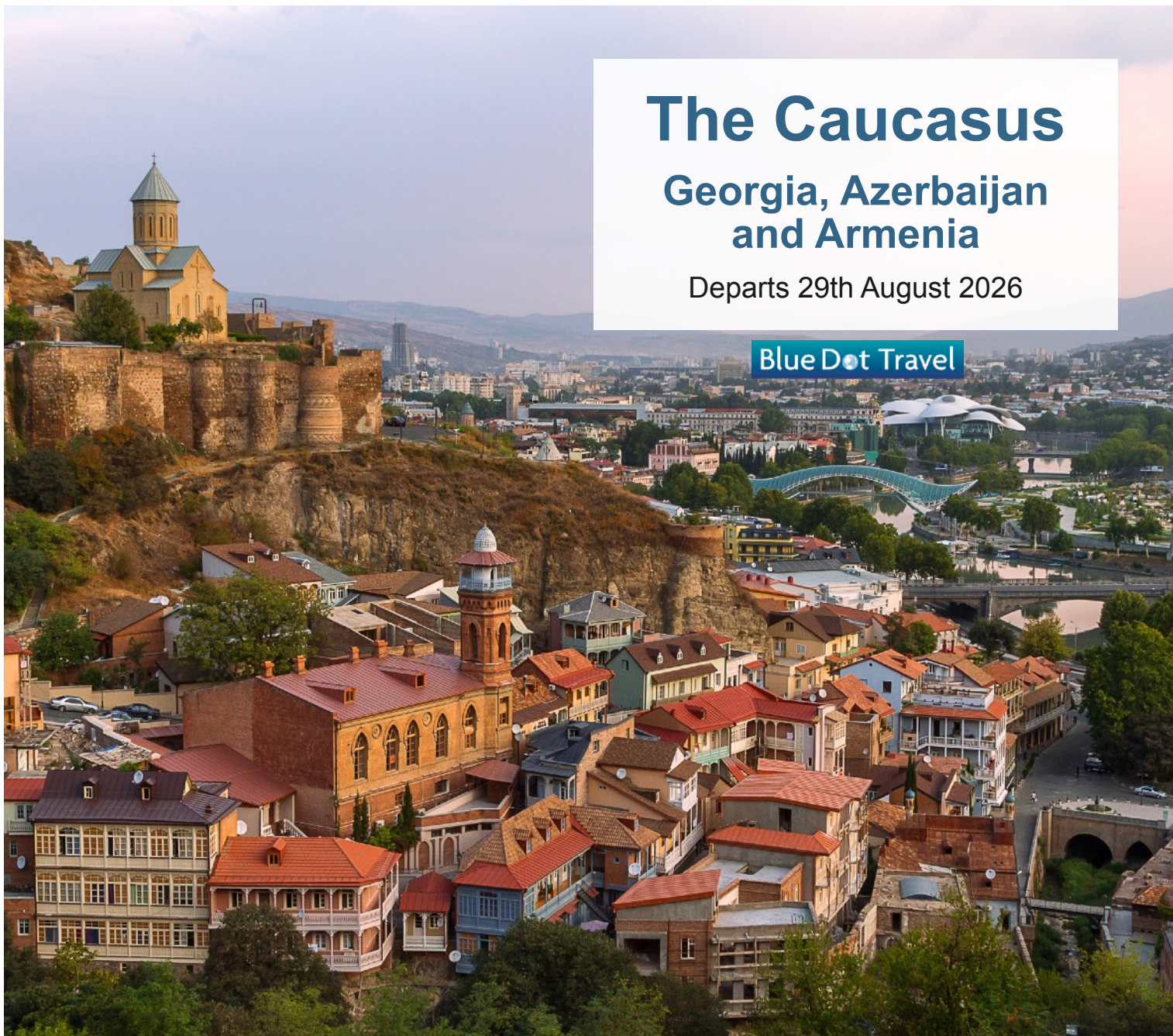


The Caucasus

Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia

Departs 29th August 2026

Blue Dot Travel



Itinerary correct as at 9 Oct 2024, but subject to change. ALL flights to be confirmed. www.bluedottravel.com.au



THE CAUCASUS AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

At the crossroads of Asia and Eastern Europe, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus is a unique travel destination. Few tourists visit this fascinating region but those who do are struck by its beauty, culture and history. On this trip, you'll pass snow-capped mountains, glaciers and gorges; dine with local families; and explore rock-hewn villages, mosques and UNESCO World Heritage-listed monasteries and churches.

Azerbaijan is a country boasting a history that dates back to prehistoric times and evidence of stone-age settlements. From the dynamic capital city of Baku to charming villages filled with stone buildings and cobblestone streets, to the ancient city Sheki, it is a country of contrasts. Azerbaijan was an important part of the Great Silk Route, and nowadays its economy is based on the abundance of oil and gas reserves. It is home to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed rock art site Gobustan and is the birthplace of the ancient Zoroastrian religion.

Georgia has an ancient culture and a unique alphabet found nowhere else in the world. Over the centuries all her neighbours have coveted over her land. Turks, Persians, Mongols, Arabia and the Russians have invaded and periodical civil war has also left its mark. But nowadays, it is a peaceful country becoming known for its quality wines and spectacular scenery. The capital, Tbilisi, has a modern European vibe, with cosy cafes, art galleries and theatres. Yet, leave the city and it may feel like travelling in medieval times, amongst palaces, castles, fortresses and rock-hewn villages. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed ancient capital Mtskheta sits at the confluence of the Aragvi River, and its 11th-century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is where Christ's robe was buried. Admire the views of snow-capped mountains, gorges and glaciers as we travel through the country and the higher Caucasus Mountain range, reaching heights of over 5,000 metres.

Armenia is a very small country at less than half the size of our own Tasmania and with a population of less than 3 million. Like Georgia, it is a Christian country with an ancient history. Once a part of the Soviet Union, independence was reclaimed in 1991. It is a very "indigenous" country with 98% of the population being and speaking Armenian. Tourism is growing as infrastructure and services improve. Like Georgia, the countryside is beautiful with the jewel being the alpine Lake Sevan at almost 2,000 metres above sea level – one of the largest freshwater alpine lakes in the world.

This fascinating region has been overlooked by travellers for too long. Now is the time to visit, as it emerges as a destination for adventurous travellers.



**Departure, Saturday 29th August
IN TRANSIT**

Depart Australia for Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. We will provide you with an individualised flight itinerary for your trip.



**Day 1, Sunday 30th August
ARRIVAL TO BAKU**

We'll be met at the airport and transferred to our hotel in Baku, where we'll stay for 4 nights. After

checking in, we'll have a brief orientation tour with a walk along the waterfront to stretch our legs after the flight and a visit to Highland Park, situated on a hill with fantastic views of the city and Baku Bay. Welcome Dinner at our hotel. **D**



**Day 2, Monday 31st August
BAKU CITY TOUR**

This morning, we'll enjoy a tour of the old city, with its fortified walls, historic buildings and narrow cobbled streets. Attractions include the Palace of the Shirvanshah, the Maiden Tower, Karvansarays, mosques, preserved old walls and numerous

labyrinths. After lunch, we'll visit the Heydar Aliyev Center, built by world-famous architect Zaha Hadid. An internationally recognised architectural work, the building of the Heydar Aliyev Center has become a signature landmark of modern Baku due to its innovative and cutting-edge design. Baku is a city of contrasts, and today's sightseeing is a perfect example. There'll be free time to explore before meeting for dinner at a local restaurant. **D**



**Day 3, Tuesday 1st September
GOBUSTAN DAY TRIP**

Today we'll drive to Gobustan, with its perfectly preserved rock paintings - petroglyphs - a kind of artistic "archive" of human evolution. The Gobustan Rocks reflect the history of this region for nearly 15,000 years - from the end of the era of the Upper Paleolithic till the Middle Ages. Azerbaijani scientists have found, described and studied more than 4,000 petroglyphs (rock painting in the stone carving art), and this important work continues. We'll visit the interactive museum with the same name, where, with the help of special programs and multimedia touch screens, you will hear more about the flora and fauna of Gobustan. After this visit, drive to the fascinating mini mud volcanos just north of the city. Our final stop is "Ateshgah", which means Place of Fire. This temple was built on the land where natural gas burned

eternally and was worshipped by Zoroastrian believers. Zoroastrianism (sometimes called less correctly 'fire worshipping'), one of the world's oldest religions, first began in Azerbaijan. We'll return to Baku for dinner at a local restaurant. **B/D**

 **Day 4, Wednesday 2nd September**
BAKU – GUBA – KHYNALIQ – BAKU

After an early breakfast, we'll head north for a fascinating day trip. Guba is located in the northeastern slopes of Mount Shahdag in Greater Caucasus, on the banks of the river Gudial. Even though Guba is now a small town, in the Middle Ages, it was the capital of Guba Khanate, and a thriving centre. Krasnaya Sloboda is a unique place in the Caucasus, where 3,000 mountain Jews live compactly. This settlement has existed in Guba since the 13th century. In 1742, the local ruler Falihan



permitted the Jews, persecuted by Islamic fundamentalists, to settle on the left bank of the mountain river Kudial-chai opposite the city itself. There are

seven synagogues in the village. After lunch, a trip to the Khynalyg village (visiting Khynalyg is possible only under appropriate weather conditions). Khynalyg is located high in the Caucasus mountains, at 2350 m above sea level, and Khynalygs have lived there for thousands of years. We'll take a short walk around the village, which, in good weather, offers views of the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus. Return to Baku for dinner at the hotel. **B/D**

 **Day 5, Thursday 3rd September**
BAKU – LAHIJ – SHEKI

Today we'll drive to the north-west region of Azerbaijan through the Caucasus Mountains, where dense forest mountains replace the dry landscape around Baku. We'll visit Lahij village in Ismayilly district (subject to weather conditions). Most of the 2,000 people living in Lahij are involved in ancient crafts such as engraved copper work and carpet weaving. In the mid-19th century, there were more than 200 workshops in Lahij. Traders discovered Lahij crafts many centuries ago and sold them for high prices at bazaars in Baghdad [now Iraq], Shiraz [now Iran] and other Middle Eastern cities. Continue to Sheki, visiting the Albanian church enroute, located in Kish village. Legend says that this church was the first Christian church built not only on the territory of Caucasian Albania but also in Transcaucasia. Check-in for one night in Sheki, and dinner at the hotel. **B/D**

 **Day 6, Friday 4th September**
SHEKI – GEORGIAN BORDER – TBILISI

This morning we'll take a walking tour of mountain city of Sheki. Situated at 700 m above sea level, the city, like an amphitheatre, is surrounded by mountains and forests of oak trees. This ancient city was long famed as a silk Centre and an essential stop on the Great Silk Route. We'll explore the 18th-century Khan's summer palace with magnificent frescos and exquisite stained-glass work. Then we'll visit the "Shebeke" workshop, where local craftsmen will explain the process of making this stunning glasswork. Afterwards, we will visit a local baklava maker, a sweet famous all over Azerbaijan. At around 2.00 pm, we'll be dropped at the Georgian Border to be collected by our new guide. Be prepared for a 1km walk through no-mans land with your luggage.

WELCOME TO GEORGIA

Our first stop is Signaghi. The city was established in the XVIII century and was fortified with a 5 km long wall, which is still evident today. Modern Signaghi is a beautiful architectural site that uses Georgian and Italian design. You can walk in the parks and cobbled streets, aligned with the local handicraft studios and markets. Visit a local wine cellar, where we can taste different varieties of Georgian wines. Then on to Tbilisi. Dinner at a local restaurant. **B/D**

 **Day 7, Saturday 5th September**
TBILISI

This morning brings a tour of Tbilisi, including the National Museum and the Sameba Cathedral, the largest in the Caucasus. Discover the fashionably cozy cafes and art galleries of Shardeni Street before we visit the cosmopolitan and arty scene of Rustaveli Avenue. In the afternoon, a visit to Old Tbilisi. (Note, you can explore Tbilisi at leisure when returning. Dinner is at a local restaurant, and then we'll take a short walking tour across the Freedom Bridge to see the lights at night. **B/D**

 **Day 8,**
Sunday 6th
September
KAZBEGI VIA
MTSKHETA AND
ANANURI

After breakfast, take a short drive to Mtskheta, a



UNESCO-listed site and an ancient capital of the Georgian Kingdom from the 3rd Century BC. We will also visit the magnificent C11th Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, where Christ's robe was buried, and the C6th Jvari monastery sitting high on a rocky

mountaintop. The stunning drive along the Tergi River leads to Kazbegi, which passes Ananuri Castle and Jinvali water reservoir. Dinner is planned back at the hotel in Kazbegi. *B/D*



 **Day 9,
Monday
7th September
KAZBEGI**

After breakfast, we'll transfer to 4WD vehicles to drive to Gergeti Trinity Church,

located at an altitude of 2170m. This is one of the great sights of Georgia. Weather permitting, catch a glimpse of Mt Kazbegi, one of the highest mountains of Eurasia at 5047m. Afterwards, drive to the Dariali Gorge and take a short trek to Gveleti Waterfall. Return to the hotel for a free afternoon. Dinner is at the hotel. *B/D*

 **Day 10, Tuesday 8th September
KAZBEGI TO KUTAISI VIA GORI AND
UPLISTSIKHE**

If you don't mind rising early, grab your camera and, weather permitting, take a photo of the sun rising on Mt Kazbegi. After breakfast, we'll drive to the 11th-century city of Gori and visit the Joseph Stalin Museum plus his personal train. We'll also see the home where he was raised. Then we'll drive to nearby Uplistsikhe, an ancient rock-hewn town known as "The Lord's Fortress". Built high on the rocky left bank of the Mtkvari River, some structures date from 2000 BC through to the late Middle Ages, and it is also notable for its unique combination of different styles of rock-cut cultures. (Some of the walking here is a little steep, and there is also a tunnel to walk through (if open), so for those who don't like enclosed spaces, you may want to wait at the café below. Later, we arrived in Kutaisi, the country's second-largest city and former capital. Check in to the hotel for a two-night stay and dinner. *B/D*

 **Day 11, Wednesday 9th September
KUTAISI**

We'll tour Kutaisi this morning, visiting the Bagrati Cathedral and impressive Byzantine Gelati Monastery, a 12th-century masterpiece of the Georgian Golden Age that is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Archaeological evidence indicates Kutaisi functioned as the capital of the ancient Colchis kingdom. At the end of 2012, it resumed its role when it was re-established as Georgia's governing city with the new parliament building designed by Spanish architect Alberto Domingo Kabo. *B/D*

 **Day 12, Thursday 10th September
KUTAISI TO MESTIA VIA ENGURI DAM**

After breakfast, we will drive to the Samegrelo Region and visit the Martvili Canyon, one of Georgia's best

nature sites. 700 m long stone paved circular route starts from Martvili Canyon visitor centre and crosses the Dadiani historical trail. There are two bridges, three platform views and a historical 30-step stairs, constructed of large limestone boulders. Next, we take a boat tour in Martvili Canyon before heading to the Svaneti region, one of the tour's highlights. The scenic drive to Mestia in the Svaneti region of high mountains and glaciers is stunning. (Consider some snacks for the road trip, as there aren't many places to stop for lunch). Before arriving in Mestia, we'll visit the Enguri Dam at 271 metres, the second-highest concrete arch dam in the world, creating a reservoir in the picturesque gorges of Samegrelo and Svaneti mountains. Check in to the hotel for dinner and a four-night stay. *B/D*

 **Day 13,
Friday 11th
September
MESTIA**

After breakfast, the group will drive to the Chalaadi glacier (20 minutes from the hotel) for a



challenging walk to see nature at its best (about 3.5 hours return, with some sections rated hard). This walk is only for active travellers, those not up to the walk can stay at the lodge or visit the small township. There will be free time in the afternoon and a great tip is to watch a local Georgian movie in the small café/cinema just 5 minutes from the centre of town, overlooking the river. Your guide will provide details. *B/D*

 **Day 14, Saturday 12th September
DAY TRIP TO USHGULI**

Cameras ready! Today is another major highlight of the trip. The group will take the most scenic drive by 4WD Jeeps to UNESCO-listed Ushguli, a community of four villages at 2200m, considered Europe's most populated place. We'll have lunch at a local guesthouse and learn how to make the local specialty of cheese and kubdari. Visit the local ethnographic museum before driving to Nakipari to visit the 12th-century St George's church. If you have the chance, take a walk through a few of the villages and meet some of the locals. On the way back to Mestia, drive to Tetnuldi ski resort, which offers wonderful views (weather permitting) *B/L*

 **Day 15, Sunday 13th September
MESTIA**

This morning, we'll visit Mestia's Ethnographic and Machubi Museums. In the afternoon, take the cable car (weather permitting) to the top of Hatsvali Mountain ski resort and enjoy the panoramic mountain views – this is a great option for lunch (at your own expense). There may be an hour or two of free time in Mestia, *B/D*



Day 16, Monday 14th September MESTIA TO BATUMI

Today we'll drive to Batumi, located on the Black Sea and arguably Georgia's most beautiful city. (It's almost opposite Istanbul if you look due west). We'll stop for a pick-up lunch at Zugdidi (or nearby). Of the several sculptural artworks of particular interest is the "Ali and Nino" statue by Georgian sculptor Tamara Kvesitadze – two towering human forms made out of metallic discs and constantly on the move. The figures draw closer and kiss before continuing their path and passing through one another, eventually parting and facing in opposite directions, tragically representing a Muslim boy and Christian girl separated by the invasion of Russia. Check in to the hotel for a two-night stay with dinner at a local restaurant. If you're up for it, stroll around the hotel to get a feel for the city at night. *B/D*



Day 17, Tuesday 15th September BATUMI

This morning, we'll stroll Batumi's busy boulevard, a park strip fronting the main beach. Its trees, paths, fountains, cafes, and beach bars are the life and soul of Batumi. We'll also walk through the lovely botanical gardens, which will take about 2 hours (up and down hills), and take in some lovely views over the Black Sea. Later, enjoy a short boat trip on the Black Sea to view the city from the water. *B/D*



Day 18, Wednesday 16th September BORJOMI

Today is mainly a day of transfers. After breakfast, we'll drive to Borjomi. On arrival at our hotel, check-in and stroll around the small township, including the gardens and waterfall. Make sure you try the "unusual" warm spring water. About 3.5 km from the entrance of Borjomi Central Park, you will discover a treasure of nature - Hot Sulphur Pools between the forest and the rocky river. Sulphur Pools - an average temperature of 32-38 C° - are very beneficial for health. The territory has free Wi-Fi, a café-bar, changing rooms and showers. *B/D*



Day 19, Thursday 17th September BORJOMI TO AKHALTSIKHE AND VARDZIA CAVE

After breakfast, we'll travel to Vardzia, a rock-hewn complex on the bank of the river Mtkvari, founded in the 12th and 13th centuries. Initially planned as a town fortress, the complex became a well-fortified monastery that played a significant role in the country's political, cultural, educational and spiritual

life. In the middle of the complex is a Church of Assumption, richly decorated with mural paintings. Note that there is some uphill and cave walking, which could be considered challenging and not for everyone. (Even if the local minibus takes you up the hill, there will be about 500 metres to walk, mostly uphill). After the excursion, we'll have lunch at a local restaurant in Vardzia. Then we'll drive to Akhaltsikhe and visit the Rabati fortress, the town's main sight. Return to Borjomi. *B/L*



Day 20, Friday 18th September BORJOMI TO TBILISI

After breakfast, transfer from Borjomi back to Tbilisi, which takes about 2 hours. Today is free to enjoy the sights of Tbilisi or to shop and mix it with the locals in the area right near the hotel. There are many things to see and do, and your tour leader will provide options. Note that today is at your own leisure and not guided or hosted. Dinner at a local restaurant. *B/D*



Day 21, Saturday 19th September TBILISI TO DILIJAN

After breakfast, we'll transfer to the Armenian border. After border formalities, we'll change transport and guide. Note: There is a 500-metre walk into "no man's land" between borders, and you will be required to carry your luggage.

WELCOME TO ARMENIA

After crossing the border, we'll travel to the UNESCO-listed medieval Haghpat Monastery, built halfway up a hillside on a mountain cirque – when not wreathed in clouds, the views are lovely. The monastery's oldest structure was built before 1000 AD. We'll continue to Dilijan, a picturesque town in Northern Armenia's mountains, where we'll spend the next two nights. We'll stroll along cobblestoned Sharambeyan Street before dinner at a local restaurant. *B/D*



Day 22, Sunday 20th September DILIJAN AND LAKE PARZ

It is time to relax and enjoy our beautiful mountainous surroundings, beginning with a visit to nearby Parz Lake in Dilijan National Park. We'll visit Haghartsin Monastery, built between the 10th and 13th centuries and nestled in a verdant valley amidst stunning scenery. After visiting the monastery, we'll take a light hike (approx 1.5 hours) to the Haghartsin waterfall. We'll return to Dilijan, with free time to relax in the hotel or visit the local museum in Dilijan. Dinner is at our hotel this evening. *B/D*



Day 23, Monday 21st September
YEREVAN VIA SEVAN, GARNI TEMPLE AND
GEGHARD

This morning, we'll travel to Lake Sevan, one of the world's largest high-altitude lakes at 2000 metres above sea level. Discover the beautiful church on the hilltop (about 250 steps up) against the backdrop of



the spectacular lake. We'll have a short coffee stop before continuing to Garni, a pagan Temple built in the 1st century and the Symphony of Stones, a natural basalt rock formation shaped into columns. Then we'll visit a local family's home for lunch (Abelyan's House) and a demonstration showing how they make their

delicious bread. It is a short drive to the 13th-century Geghard Monastery, whose name derives from the legendary lance used to pierce the body of Christ and housed here for centuries. Listening to the local choir perform in these age-old acoustics is a delight. Finally, we'll continue to Armenia's wonderful capital, Yerevan, for a 4-night stay. Dinner is at leisure tonight, with many great local options. **B/L**



Day 24, Tuesday 22nd September
YEREVAN AND SURROUNDS

We'll start today's tour of Yerevan with a short drive to Khor Virap Monastery, where Gregory the Illuminator, who introduced Christianity to Armenia, was imprisoned for about 13 years. Enjoy the spectacular view of the sacred Ararat Mountain, an immortal symbol of Armenia (now on Turkish soil). Back in town, visit the history museum in Republic Square to gain a good general understanding of the history and culture of Armenia and its people, as well as the Opera House. Then we'll drive to the Genocide Museum, which can be very emotional but a must-see as it's a significant part of the country's recent history. We'll return to the hotel mid-afternoon, where you can explore this vibrant city at your leisure. A good tip is to head to the "Cascades" park to watch the world go by as the sun sets over the city. **B**



Day 25, Wednesday 23rd September
DAY TRIP TO GYUMRI

Today, we'll travel to Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city. Gyumri's historic centre is characterised by charming cobblestone streets, elegant buildings adorned with intricate carvings, and ornate churches. It still has many traditional 19th-century houses, and we'll visit a museum in one of them to learn about traditional life. We'll also visit the gallery of the Aslamazyan sisters, known locally as the Armenian "Frida Carlos". We'll return to Yerevan in the late afternoon, and dinner is at a local restaurant. **B/D**



Day 26, Thursday 24th September
YEREVAN AND SURROUNDS

We'll continue sightseeing in Yerevan this morning, covering anything we did not see on Day 24, including the manuscript museum, home to one of the world's richest depositories of medieval documents and books spanning

many subjects and languages. Next, we'll visit the Ararat Brandy Factory, established in 1887. With its historic buildings and cellars, it's not just for brandy

enthusiasts but a place to learn about the rich tradition of brandy production. Just outside the city lies the UNESCO-listed monuments Ejmiatsin and Zvartnots. The Cathedral of Ejmiatsin, founded in 303, is the official residence of the Catholics of Armenia, and Echmiadzin is for Armenians of the Apostolic Church. The 7th-century Zvartnots Temple, now in ruins, was noted for its circular exterior structure, unique in medieval Armenian architecture. We'll return to Yerevan late in the afternoon for our final dinner at a local restaurant. **B/D**



Day 27, Friday 25th September
DEPARTURE

After breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport for the flight home to Australia, arriving home the following day. **B**



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.