

The Caucasus:

ARMENIA, GEORGIA AND AZERBAIJAN



Blue Dot Travel
Go somewhere different

May 2027 | 27 Days

\$11,750 per person, twin share

Solo Supplement: \$2,000

Tour Highlights

- The region's natural beauty – mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes
- Medieval villages where the way of life has not changed for decades
- The region's warm and friendly people
- UNESCO-listed sites throughout the region – monasteries, towns and monuments.
- Ancient, medieval and modern history



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Tour overview

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 traverse snow-capped mountains, glaciers and gorges, explore rock-hewn villages, dine with local families, and visit UNESCO World Heritage-listed monasteries and churches.

From the vibrant capital city of Baku to the historic charm of Sheki, Azerbaijan is a land of striking contrasts. Its rich history stretches back to prehistoric times, evidenced by human settlements from the Stone Age. Archaeological discoveries reveal the presence of early inhabitants, alongside rock carvings that illustrate the daily lives and rituals of ancient Azerbaijani communities. Once a vital part of the Great Silk Road, Azerbaijan's modern economy thrives on its abundant oil and gas reserves. The country is also home to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Gobustan, known for its remarkable rock art, and it holds the distinction of being the birthplace of the ancient Zoroastrian religion.

Georgia has an ancient culture and a unique alphabet found nowhere else. Over the centuries, all her neighbours have coveted her land. Turks, Persians, Mongols, Arabs, and Russians have invaded, and periodic civil war has also left its mark. However, nowadays, it is a peaceful country that is becoming renowned for its high-quality wines and spectacular scenery. The capital, Tbilisi, has a modern European vibe, cosy cafes, art galleries and theatres.

Yet, leaving the city may feel like travelling in medieval times, amongst palaces, castles, fortresses, and rock-hewn villages. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed ancient capital of Mtskheta sits at the confluence of the Aragvi River, and its 11th-century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is where Christ's robe is believed to have been buried. Admire views of mountains, gorges, and glaciers as we travel through the higher Caucasus Mountain range, reaching heights of over 5,000 metres.

Travellers have overlooked this fascinating region for too long. Now is the time to visit, as it emerges as a destination for adventurous travellers.



Activity rating: Moderate to Active

You must be capable of walking up to 10,000 steps daily; ascending 3-4 flights of steps; standing at attractions for 1-2 hours; boarding and disembarking transport unaided and handling your own luggage.



Departure, Friday 8th May

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

Day 1, Saturday 9th May BAKU

Our group will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel in Baku, where we'll stay for four nights. After checking in, we'll take a brief orientation tour, which includes 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, Sunday 10th May BAKU CITY TOUR

This morning, we'll enjoy a tour of the old city. 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 Centre, built by world-famous architect Zaha Hadid. An internationally recognised architectural work, the Heydar Aliyev Centre has become a signature landmark of modern Baku due to its innovative, cutting-edge design. There'll be free time to explore, before meeting for dinner at a local restaurant. D

Day 3, Monday 11th May GOBUSTAN DAY TRIP

Today we'll drive to Gobustan to see the 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 Upper Paleolithic era to the Middle Ages. Azerbaijani scientists have discovered, documented, and studied over 4,000 petroglyphs (rock paintings in the art of stone carving), 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, we will hear more about the flora and fauna of Gobustan. After this visit, drive to the fascinating mini mud volcanoes 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 'fire worshipping') is one of the world's oldest religions, first originating in Azerbaijan. We'll return to Baku for dinner at a local restaurant. B/D

Day 4, Tuesday 12th May BAKU – GUBA – KHYNALIQ – BAKU

After an early breakfast, we'll head north for a fascinating day trip. Guba is situated on the northeastern slopes of Mount Shahdag in the Greater Caucasus, on the banks of the Gudial River. Even though Guba is now a small town, in the Middle Ages, it was the capital of the Guba Khanate and a thriving centre. Krasnaya Sloboda is a unique place in the Caucasus, where approximately 3,000 mountain Jews reside in a compact community. 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). Khynalig is situated high in the Caucasus Mountains, at an elevation of 2,350 m above sea level, and the Khynalygs have inhabited this region 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, Wednesday 13th May 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 for a two-night stay and dinner at the hotel. B/D

Day 6, Thursday 14th May SHEKI

This morning, a walking tour of Sheki. Situated at 700 m above sea level, the city, is surrounded by mountains and oak forests. This ancient city was long renowned as a vital stop on the Great Silk Road. We'll explore the 18th-century Khan's summer palace, featuring magnificent frescoes and exquisite stained-glass work. Then we'll visit the "Shebeke" workshop, where local craftsmen will explain the process of making their glasswork. Afterwards, we'll visit a local baklava maker and tea house to experience true Azerbaijani hospitality. Our afternoon concludes at the Albanian church, located in the nearby village of Kish. Legend has it that this church was the first Christian church constructed in the Transcaucasia region. B/D

Day 7, Friday 15th May SHEKI – GEORGIAN BORDER – TBILISI

After breakfast, we'll drive to the Georgian Border to be collected by our new guide. Be prepared for a 1km walk through no-man's land with your luggage. Our first stop is Signaghi. The city was established in the 18th century and was fortified with a 5-km-long wall, which remains evident today. Modern Signaghi is a beautiful architectural site that combines Georgian and Italian design elements. You can walk through the parks and cobbled streets, lined with local handicraft studios and markets. Visit a local wine cellar, where you can sample various varieties of Georgian wines. Then on to Tbilisi. Dinner at a local restaurant. B/D

Day 8, Saturday 16th May TBILISI

This morning, we embark on a tour of Tbilisi, which includes 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 9, Sunday 17th May 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 11th-century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, where Christ's robe was buried, and the 6th-century Jvari monastery, sitting high on a rocky mountaintop. The stunning drive along the Tergi River leads to Kazbegi, passing Ananuri Castle and Jinvali Water Reservoir. Dinner is planned back at the hotel in Kazbegi. B/D



Day 10, Monday 18th May 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 Georgia's great sights. 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 11, Tuesday 19th May 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, as well as 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 back to 2000 BC and extend through the late Middle Ages. 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 12, Wednesday 20th May 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 13, Thursday 21st May 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. A 700 m long stone paved circular route starts from the 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, a highlight of the tour. 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. On arrival we'll visit the Machubi Museum before checking in for a three-night stay. B/D

Day 14, Friday 22nd May MESTIA

After breakfast, we'll drive to the Chalaadi Glacier (a 20-minute drive from the hotel) for a challenging walk to experience nature at its best (approximately 3.5 hours return, with some sections rated as hard). This walk is only for active travellers, and those not up to the walk can stay at the lodge or visit the small township. On the way back we'll drive by 4WD jeeps to Heshkili Huts, a great spot to buy lunch with a spectacular outlook. There'll be some 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. Your guide will provide details. B/D

Day 15, Saturday 23rd May DAY TRIP TO USHGULI

Cameras ready! Today is another major highlight of the trip. The group will take the most scenic drive by 4WD jeep to UNESCO-listed Ushguli, a community of four villages at 2,200 m, considered Europe's highest 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 16, Sunday 24th May 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). Among 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 a Christian girl separated by the invasion of Russia. Check into 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, Monday 25th May 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 (with some uphill and downhill sections), and take in some stunning 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, Tuesday 26th May 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, with an average temperature of 32–38°C, are highly beneficial for health. The territory has free Wi-Fi, a café-bar, changing rooms and showers. B/D



Day 19, Wednesday 27th May BORJOMI TO VARDZIA TO AKHALTSIKHE

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 evolved into 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 the Church of Assumption, richly decorated with mural paintings. *Please note that the route includes some uphill sections and cave walking, which may be considered challenging and not suitable 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, Thursday 28th May BORJOMI TO TBILISI

After breakfast, transfer from Borjomi back to Tbilisi, which takes about 2 hours. Today, you are 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 leisure, and will not be guided or hosted. Dinner at a local restaurant. B/D

Day 21, Friday 29th May 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 the mountains of Northern Armenia, 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, Saturday 30th May 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, where we can relax in the hotel or visit the local museum in Dilijan. Dinner is at our hotel this evening. B/D

Day 23, Sunday 31st May 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, which is 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, Monday 1st June 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 Mount Ararat, an immortal symbol of Armenia (now located on Turkish soil). Upon returning to town, visit the History Museum in Republic Square to gain a comprehensive understanding of Armenia's history, culture, and 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, Tuesday 2nd June 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, Wednesday 3rd June YEREVAN AND SURROUNDS

We'll continue sightseeing in Yerevan this morning, covering any areas we didn't see, including the manuscript museum, home to one of the world's richest repositories of medieval documents and books spanning various 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 lie 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 the home of the Apostolic Church of Armenians. The 7th-century Zvartnots Temple, now in ruins, is noted for its circular exterior structure, which is unique in medieval Armenian architecture. We'll return to Yerevan in the late afternoon for our final dinner together. B/D

Day 27, Thursday 4th June DEPARTURE

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





Accommodation

Our hotels are carefully chosen to capture the local atmosphere and set you up in an ideal location. You can expect accommodation that comprises a mix of standard hotels, boutique-style hotels, and smaller, independently owned establishments. Below are sample hotels on this tour:

Sokos Presidentii, Helsinki
www.hotel-presidentii-helsinki

Metropole Hotel, Riga
www.metropole-hotel-riga

Victoria Hotel, Klaipeda
www.victoria-hotel-klaipeda

Radisson Blu Lietuva, Vilnius
www.radisson-blu-vilnius

Why Blue Dot?

Travel is more than just moving from one place to another; it is an opportunity to explore this vast planet, connect with its people and marvel at its beauty. We have established a group of loyal, like-minded travellers who share this feeling and have taken multiple tours with us. With Blue Dot, you'll experience

- Thoughtfully designed itineraries with unique experiences
- Small, inclusive groups with a maximum of 16 travellers on most tours, and often fewer
- The support of both an Australian tour leader* and experienced local guides
- Programs designed to meet the needs of mature-age travellers
- Hands on, personalised service including customised flight bookings
- Tipping included in your tour cost

*Australian leaders accompany groups with more than 10 travellers.


Blue Dot welcomes solo travellers

In fact, over half of our clients are solo travellers. We understand it can be daunting to travel on your own, and we'll ensure your travel is inclusive and enjoyable, while prioritising your safety. You can confidently join our groups, knowing that we bring solo travellers together to share the camaraderie of an unforgettable adventure.

Enquiries and bookings

A \$500 deposit is required to secure your booking.

For more information:

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