ARMENIA & GEORGIA EXPLORER

12 days
Countries visited
Armenia • Georgia

Tour Highlights
• The 'Pink City' of Yerevan
• The ruins of Zvartnotz Temple
• Pay your respects at the Armenian Genocide Museum
• ‘Symphony of the Stones’ at Garni
• Lake Sevan, the largest lake in the Caucasus
• Narrow streets of Tblisi’s old town
• Visit Kvaleri, the heart of the Kakheti wine-producing region
• Stunning views from the sacred pilgrimage site of Jvari Monastery
• Inspect the sturdy 14th century Khertvisi Fortress
• Soviet history displayed at the Stalin Museum

Places visited
Yerevan • Garni • Tbilisi • Lake Sevan • Sighnaghi • Velistsikhe • Kvareli • Mtskheta • Uplistsikhe • Borjomi • Gori • Vardzia • Rabati Castle • Kazbegi

What's included
• Arrival & departure transfers
• Ground transport with driver
• Domestic flights (if relevant - refer to itinerary)
• Accommodation
• Meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
ARMENIA & GEORGIA EXPLORER

• English-speaking guides
• Entrance fees to sites & parks

What's not included
• Meals not mentioned in itinerary
• Drinks
• Visa fees
• Tipping
• Camera / video camera fees
• Personal items (laundry, telephone, etc.)
• Medical expenses
• Any services not mentioned in itinerary

All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.
Your Itinerary Explained

The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.

---

The part of the day's text in italics (and comes after the three dashes “---”) is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.

Tour Itinerary

Day 1  
**Arrival**

Arrive into Yerevan where you will be met by a Travel The Unknown representative and transferred to your hotel. Overnight in Yerevan.

---

*Overnight in Republica Hotel Yerevan, Yerevan*

Day 2  
**Yerevan - Etchmiadzin - Zvartnotz - Yerevan**

Enjoy a morning tour of Yerevan, including visits to the Republic Square, the Opera House and the Cascade Complex. Continue to the Armenian Genocide Memorial Museum before visiting the History Museum of Armenia. A homemade lunch will be served in a local Art School where you can observe the children's artwork in the art salons. Later, take part in a cooking class and learn how to make the Armenian traditional dish “Dolma”. Drive to the Aramvur region to visit the UNESCO-listed Etchmiadzin Cathedral, St. Hripsime Church and Zvartnotz Temple. Return to Yerevan, stopping at Maran Winery on the way. Overnight in Yerevan.

---

*The capital of Armenia, Yerevan, sits on the Hrazdan river surrounded by picturesque hills and snow-capped mountains. It is often referred to as the ‘Pink City’ due to the 106 shades of tufa lava stone used on the city's buildings. During the Soviet years, Russian architect Alexander Tamanyan completely reconstructed Yerevan to resemble the neoclassical city styles of Paris and St. Petersburg.*
The 4th-century **Etchmiadzin Cathedral** is the central authority of the worldwide Armenian Apostolic Church. Its name translates as 'where the Only Begotten descended' in reference to Gregory the Illuminator's vision of Christ descending from heaven and striking the ground with a golden hammer. The Cathedral was then built on that exact spot. The complex consists of the Mother Cathedral, the monastery with a residing brotherhood, the Catholicos residence, the Kevorkian Theological Seminary and a museum.

The **Maran Winery**, founded in 1991, uses a combination of Armenian tradition and French technology to produce new and exciting wines. Interesting variations include pomegranate, apricot and cherry wines. Classic dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet and sweet grape wines are also produced.

**Garni Temple** is a picturesque monument of the Hellenistic period and an impressive piece of ancient Armenian architecture built in the 1st century A.D. After Christianity was proclaimed as a state religion in 301, the temple was used as a summer residence of the kings. The **Garni canyon**, which is a one-hour walk away along the Azat River, is particularly interesting. Its walls are formed of hexagonal rock strips, which is a natural formation known as the 'Symphony of Stones'. The gorge is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
The **Geghard Monastery** is a magnificent monument of medieval Armenian architecture that is partially carved out of a mountain. It was founded in the 4th century by Gregory the Illuminator when a sacred spring was found inside a nearby cave, but the main chapel was built only in 1215. The name is translated as 'Monastery of the Spear', named after the spear that pierced Jesus on the crucifix. Apostle Jude supposedly brought this spear into Armenia and it is now displayed in the Echmiadzin treasury. However, churches in Rome, Vienna and Antioch also claim to possess this spear. Geghard has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Overnight in Republica Hotel Yerevan, Yerevan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Yerevan - Khor Virap - Yerevan</th>
<th>Meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

After breakfast, visit the Megerian Carpets Company, a showroom and factory of handmade Armenian rugs. Enjoy a unique experience watching and even participating in the carpet making process, learning about the different colours and designs of the rugs. After, drive to the Aragatsotn region to visit the Armenian Alphabet Monument, where giant stone letters are dedicated to the founder of Armenia's alphabet, M. Mashtots. Continue to Ararat region and stop at Khor Virap Monastery, the closest point to Mt. Ararat. Return to Yerevan, visiting the local craftshop of a "Duduk" maker en route (Duduk is a traditional Armenian instrument made of apricot wood). Lunch will be served at a local house or restaurant. The afternoon is free at your leisure. In the evening, enjoy dinner in a traditional Armenian restaurant with live folk music. Overnight in Yerevan.

---

The **Armenian Alphabet Monument**, also known as 'Letter Park', is located in the Artashavan village, set against a backdrop of Mt. Aragats. It features 39 giant stone letters dedicated to the founder of the Armenian alphabet, Mesrop Mashtots. The alphabet was introduced in the 5th century to translate the Bible and is still used to this day. The park has plenty of great photo opportunities.

The **Khor Virap Monastery**, located in the Ararat plains, is the closest point to biblical Mt. Ararat. It is a prominent pilgrimage site, as it is where the first Armenian Catholicos resided and where Gregory the Illuminator, Armenia’s patron saint, was imprisoned for 14 years. The monastery holds regular services to this day.

**Duduk** is a traditional Armenian instrument made of apricot wood. Duduk and its music is inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

**Overnight in Republica Hotel Yerevan, Yerevan**
Day 5  Yerevan - Lake Sevan - Fioletovo - Tbilisi (Georgia)  Meals

In the morning, depart for Lake Sevan. Climb up Sevan Peninsula and see Sevanavank Monastery before proceeding to Dilijan town. Continue to Fioletovo village mainly inhabited by local “molokans” (translated as “milk drinkers”). Enjoy some sweets and tea or coffee with your host and get an insight into the lives of this unique spiritual sect. After, drive to Lori region to visit the UNESCO-listed Haghpat Monastery. Transfer to the Armenian-Georgian border Sadakhlo where you will change transportation and guide, and after some border formalities continue to Tbilisi in Georgia. In the evening, have dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight in Tbilisi.

---

The Sevanavank monastic complex sits on a picturesque peninsula off the shore of Lake Sevan. It was founded in 874 AD for monks from Etchmiadzin Cathedral who had sinned against God.

Lying at 1900 metres above sea level with an area of 940 square kilometres, Lake Sevan is not only the largest lake in the Caucasus, but it's also one of the largest freshwater high-altitude lakes in the world. It holds a large variety of fish, including crayfish and the endangered 'ishkhan' (prince trout). Considered the “jewel” of Armenia, the lake scenery is beautiful, with the water often changing colour depending on the weather, from deep blue and turquoise to bright azure.

Built between the 10th and 13th centuries, the UNESCO-listed Haghpat Monastery was Armenia's largest centre of science during this period, holding a rich collection of books and manuscripts within its library. Along with the nearby Sanahin Monastery, Haghpat became the religious centre of the Lori region in the mid-11th century. It is a beautiful example of medieval Armenian architecture, with many well-preserved structures within the site showcasing wonderful detailing and craftsmanship.

Overnight in Iota Hotel, Tbilisi

Day 6  Tbilisi  Meals

After breakfast, enjoy a sightseeing tour around Tbilisi. Explore Tbilisi’s Old Town, walking down the narrow streets of the city and observing the religious and secular architecture. Take a cable car ride (if available) to Narikala Fortress and then walk downwards to the sulfur baths. During the tour, you can enjoy superb panoramic views over the Old Town. Afterwards, visit the stunning treasury of the Georgian History Museum (closed on Mondays) before taking a stroll along Rustaveli Avenue – the main street in Tbilisi. Dinner is at a local restaurant with a folklore dance show. Overnight in Tbilisi.

---
Tbilisi, formerly known as 'Tiflis', is Georgia's capital and the largest city of Georgia. It lays on the banks of the Mtkvari River and has a population of roughly 1.5 million people. Founded in the 5th century by the monarch of Georgia’s ancient precursor, the Kingdom of Iberia, the city was invaded by different invaders over the centuries. The increase of Armenian population was noticed in the 19th century. Tbilisi has many narrow streets and a mixture of religious and secular architecture. There are many churches, synagogues, mosques and 19th-century houses with multi-coloured wooden balconies.

Tbilisi’s old town stands in the shadow of Mother Georgia’s silvery statue, perched on a hill overlooking a mosaic of multi-coloured houses constructed in the 19th century. Nestled together on narrow streets, the homes feature wooden balconies that allow residents to revel in the fresh air. Established in the 4th century and fortified over hundreds of years, the ruins of Narikala Fortress also tower over Georgia’s capital, offering visitors spectacular panoramic views.

Overnight in Iota Hotel, Tbilisi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 7</th>
<th>Tbilisi - Sighnaghi - Velistsikhe - Kvareli - Tbilisi</th>
<th>Meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Travel to the Kakheti region, famous for its wine production and welcoming hospitality. Visit the 9th century Bodbe nunnery where St. Nino, the woman from Cappadocia who brought Christianity to Georgia in the 4th century, is buried. Continue to the 18th century town of Sighnaghi, where there are picturesque views of Alazani valley and the Caucasus mountains. Later, visit a traditional Georgian wine cellar and taste wine made in a &quot;Kvevri&quot; (clay vessel), a method of wine making included in the UNESCO heritage list. Enjoy a homemade lunch with a local family and explore their gardens and vineyards. Afterwards, visit Kindzmarauli Wine Factory and try different kinds of famous manufactured &quot;Kakhetian&quot; wines. Return to Tbilisi for your overnight stay.</strong></td>
<td><strong>B L</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sighnaghi</strong> was once the cultural centre of Eastern Georgia and, following extensive renovation, the town has reclaimed its heritage as a hub of workmanship and trade - the town is famous for its wine and carpet-making culture. Known as a 'town museum', its unique architecture has been preserved or recreated. Enjoy walking through Sighnaghi’s narrow streets in the shade of balconies richly decorated with lace-y carved ornamentation. Sighnaghi was instrumental in defending King Erekle II from the Lekis in the 18th century due to its geographic location and its city wall, whose 23 towers span nearly 5 kilometres. A short climb up the restored portion of the wall provides a sweeping panorama of the Alazani Valley and the Caucasus Mountains.**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The 16th-century Numisi Wine Cellar in Velistsikhe is a traditional winery that also acts as an ethnographic museum. There is a permanent exhibition that showcases ancient wine-making culture and artifacts.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Located in Kakheti province’s northeast is the town of Kvareli. Nestled near the foothills of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, this town is known as the heart of the Kakheti wine-producing region and as the birthplace of the influential Georgian author Ilia Chavchavadze, who sought to revitalize the Georgian language and to spread literacy. Wine houses abound in Kvaleri, but the repurposed defensive Kvaleri tunnel provides a unique experience. The 8 kilometre stretch inside of a mountain naturally chills the 25,000 stored bottles of wine at 7 degrees Celsius.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Day 8 | Tbilisi - Mtskheta - Gori - Uplistsikhe - Borjomi | Meals

Drive to the ancient capital and religious centre of Georgia, Mtskheta, and explore the UNESCO-listed 6th century Jvari Church and 11th century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral where the Robe of Christ is buried. Continue to the town of Gori and explore Uplistsikhe Cave Town. Afterwards, proceed to mineral water town Borjomi for your overnight stay.

---

Mtskheta is one of Georgia’s oldest cities, located roughly 20 km north of Tbilisi at the confluence of the Aragvi and Mtikvari rivers. Within the city (which is itself a UNESCO World Heritage Site) is the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, one of Georgia’s largest places of worship. The site, surrounded by a defensive wall, has housed churches since the 4th century, but the standing building was constructed in the early 11th century and artfully restored in the 1970s. According to Biblical canon, Christ’s robe was carried to Mtskheka after his crucifixion and buried beneath the cathedral. Inside, a painting illustrates the buried garment and the miracle of a pillar rising into the air during the church’s construction.

Uplistsikhe (meaning 'Fortress of the Ruler') is a rock-hewn town that dates back to 1000 BC and covers an area of approximately 8 hectares. The town is divided over three levels that are connected by a series of narrow tunnels. Uplistsikhe used to be a main point on the Silk Road, but was abandoned in the 17th century.

The city of Gori is famously known as the birthplace of Joseph Stalin. The city is home to the Stalin Museum, which was originally built in 1951 as a local history museum. It later became a memorial museum to Stalin, following his death in 1953. Visitors to the museum can delve into the dictator’s past, seeing the house where he spent the first few years of his life, his personal armored train carriage and many items that once belonged to Stalin - including hand written texts, office furniture and a bronze cast of his death mask.

The cross-shaped Jvari Monastery precipitously tops a mountain, peering over the city of Mtskheta and the three-pronged intersection of the Mtikvari and Aragvi rivers below. This UNESCO World Heritage Site was built on the site where St. Nino erected a cross outside of a Pagan temple, symbolising Iberia’s shift to Christianity in the 4th century. The Small Church of Jvari was built to the north of the cross, 60 years before the Jvari Monastery was completed, and can still be identified as ruins. Relief sculptures survive on the sacred pilgrimage site’s exterior, and a giant wooden cross still adorns the small monastery today.

Overnight in Borjomi Likani Health & Spa Centre, Borjomi

Day 9 | Borjomi - Vardzia - Borjomi | Meals

In the morning, travel to the magnificent 12th century cave town of Vardzia. Stop at Khertvisi fortress, stretching out along the river Mtikvari. Explore the complex and amazing 12th century frescos in the rock-hewn church. Close to Vardzia, taste the local yogurt "Matsoni". On the way back to Borjomi, visit Rabat Citadel (closed on Mondays) in Akhaltsikhe. Overnight in Borjomi.

---
### Rabati Castle

Founded in 1829, **Borjomi** is a resort town that was popularised when the Russian royal family built a summer residence here in 1895. Today, Likani Palace belongs to the Georgian president, and the town remains famous as the source of Georgia's number one export - naturally carbonated mineral water. This water is exported to over 40 countries and is said to have medicinal and restorative properties. Borjomi is known for its picturesque location and setting within the protected Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, one of the largest national parks in Europe. The town of Borjomi is also home to the most extensive ecologically-themed amusement park in the Caucasus.

With most construction taking place during the second half of the 12th century, **Vardzia** is a complex of cave dwellings set over 13 levels that centre around a main church and throne room. The Church of the Dormition, which dates back to the 1180s, is decorated with religious and royal murals. The site at Vardzia, however, was destroyed beyond repair by an earthquake in 1283.

The 13th-century **Rabati Castle** in Akhaltsikhe stands on top of a small hill and its four towers provide excellent views over the surrounding area. The complex occupies a territory of seven hectares and its museum is of great cultural and historical importance to the region.

The precursor to **Khertvisi Fortress** was purportedly destroyed by Alexander the Great; the current fortress, one of the largest in Georgia, was constructed in the 14th century, more than a millennium later. With 1.5-metre-thick and 20-metre-tall walls, it stretches over half a kilometre and has 19 tiers. The fortress stands guard to the current village of Khertvisi at the joining of the Mtkvari and Paravani rivers.

**Overnight in Borjomi Likani Health & Spa Centre, Borjomi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 10</th>
<th>Borjomi - Gori - Stepantsminda</th>
<th>Meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Kazbegi](image) Kazbegi, officially known as "Stepantsminda", is a small town located just 10 kilometres south of the Russian border. The town is 1,750 metres above sea level and has breathtaking mountain views that include Mount Kazbek (or 'Glacier Mountain'), Georgia’s third highest peak, standing at 5,047 metres high. Kazbek is associated with the myth of Prometheus, who is said to have been chained to the mountain as punishment for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to mortals.

The **Stalin Museum** in Gori, Georgia, is dedicated to the life the Soviet Union leader, Joseph Stalin. The main museum building was constructed in 1951 as a local history museum, which later became a memorial museum to Stalin following his death in 1953. The many displays exhibit different moments in Stalin's life, including objects and items that he owned - such as office furniture and gifts. Beside the museum, visitors can also see the house Stalin was born in, along with his personal armour plated railway carriage, which was used to transport Stalin to international conferences.
Day 11  Stepantsminda - Tbilisi

Enjoy a 3 hour trek through beautiful valleys and woodlands to and from the Gergeti Trinity Church. Weather permitting, you may catch a glimpse of one of the highest glaciers in the Caucasus - Mt. Kazbegi (5047m). Return to Stepantsminda and visit a local master making “Teka” artifacts. Have lunch with a local family and take part in a cooking class, learning how to make the Georgian dish "Khinkali". Transfer to Tbilisi for your overnight stay.

---

Kazbegi, officially known as "Stepantsminda", is a small town located just 10 kilometres south of the Russian border. The town is 1,750 metres above sea level and has breathtaking mountain views that include Mount Kazbek (or 'Glacier Mountain'), Georgia’s third highest peak, standing at 5,047 metres high. Kazbek is associated with the myth of Prometheus, who is said to have been chained to the mountain as punishment for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to mortals.

The isolated Gergeti Trinity Church, constructed in the 14th century, is elevated 2,170m over the Chkheri riverbank, facing Mt. Kazbek. The church holds important religious relics which were brought from Mtskheta during the 18th-century Persian invasion. Even when religious services were outlawed during the Soviet era, tourists were still drawn to the church to admire the small town of Kazbegi.

 Overnight in Iota Hotel, Tbilisi

Day 12  Departure

Transfer to the airport at the appropriate time for your international flight home.

---