

BEST OF ARMENIA

Character:

Unique cultural tour to Armenia, historical sites, perfect landscapes, lush forests of northern Armenia and rocky landscapes of the south, biblical Mount Ararat, small villages, local food and wine. The perfect mix of ancient history and living culture ... with some fun times thrown in too!

Duration:

10 days / 10 nights

Accommodation:

Superior hotels

Meals:

10 breakfasts

Mode of travel:

Comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles

Some days involve short walks (1-2 hours round trip); for those who do not want to walk local jeeps can be rented

Tour support:

AdvenTour tour leader /driver, local guides

Included:

Accommodation for 10 nights

Meals as specified in the itinerary

AdvenTour tour leader/driver, local guides

All activities as per itinerary

All transfers in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles

Welcome to Armenia information kit

Excluded:

Optional activities

Itinerary

Day 1

Treasures of Yerevan and Classical Armenia

In the morning meet other group participants and tour leader, brief pre-tour orientation meeting. The day starts with a walking tour of Yerevan exploring various layers of its history – medieval shrines hidden behind imposing Soviet-style façades, narrow streets of the old center with sunlight playing on its pink walls, the Republic Square, Mother Armenia, Opera House and ambitious projects of independent Armenia – North Avenue and spacious Grigor Lusavorich Cathedral consecrated by His Holiness the Patriarch of All Armenians in the presence of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. A cultural showcase not to be missed is Matenadaran, one of the world's oldest repositories of Greek, Persian and Arabic manuscripts. Drive east to the magnificent Temple of the Sun at Garni and the legendary Monastery of Spear at Geghard. Explore the mosaic ancient baths and ruins of the royal palace, immerse yourself in the atmosphere of this mythical place and examine remarkable cross stones carved into sheer rock. Back to Yerevan.

Overnight: *Hotel in Yerevan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 2

Mother Cathedral and Neolithic sites

Breakfast at hotel. Today we continue our exploration of the treasures of Caucasus with a visit to the Vatican city of Armenia, Holy Echmiadzin. Experience a fascinating journey through time, descend to the ruins of the pagan sanctuary beneath the altar and pay tribute to the Treasury of Mother Cathedral with striking collection of relics of Christianity. Continue to the Royal City of Metsamor, a vast archaeological site, now a museum with a spectacular collection of over 22,000 artefacts, jewellery and weapons dating from Neolithic times. There is time to explore the museum and have a walk at the site with the remains of burial sites and a fire temple built 28 centuries ago. On-site explanations offered by local guides and archaeologists working at the site. Return to Yerevan. In the evening we offer you to enjoy the treasures of the cultural life of Yerevan. An exquisite performance at National Opera or a concert at Classical Music Chamber will offer you the best of what is available at the time of your stay (optional).

Overnight: *Hotel in Yerevan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 3

Mount Aragats and Gyumri

Early start today with a trip to the highest peak of Transcaucasia, Mount Aragats (4,090m), an extinct volcano. Acclimatizing gradually as we ascend the beautiful countryside of Aragats, we reach Amberd Fortress on the southern slope of the mountain. Breathtaking views of the fortress and citadel, snow covered peaks of Aragats, sun scorched grasslands dressed in wildflowers and abundant birdlife combine to provide an unforgettable experience this morning. If we come here during summer months we can visit high-mountain camps of friendly Yezidi tribes who tend their sheep under the towering peaks of Aragats. We will discover the traditional way of life of these people of the mountains, visiting their homes, trying fresh cheese and yogurt. Later we take a ride to Gyumri, Armenian's humor capital and second largest city. Transfer to Marmashen crossing and walk to Marmashen Urartian Fortress with cuneiform inscriptions of Argishti I. This is a prehistoric site accessed by only a handful of tourists and is well worth a visit. Continue to explore Marmashen church, a beautifully sited complex with fascinating history. Back to Gyumri, rest and walking tour of historical center of Gyumri including Street of Crafts.

Spring special: flower tour of Aragats conducted by expert botany guide (easy walking, 1,5 h).

Winter special: Marmashen Urartian Fortress is replaced by half-day horse drawn sleigh ride to Lake Arpi followed by visit to a local cheese farm.

Overnight: *Hotel in Gyumri*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 4

Frescoes of Akhtala, Northern Armenia

This day takes in some of the less traveled routes of Northern Armenia. The first stop of our journey is mysterious Akhtala Monastery situated on the edge of a narrow ravine. Superb frescoes

and amazing legends make Akhtala one of the most beautiful sites of Armenia. Later we continue our exploration and admire the jewels in the crown of Northern Armenia, Haghpat and Sanahin. Severe and majestic design and marvelous bas-reliefs justly rank these sites among the celebrated UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Continue to Dilijan, a picturesque town nestled in deep wooded gorge, our base is a newly renovated hotel. Take a stroll in the old town where strangers are greeted with smiling curiosity. Narrow streets, cozy houses with carved wooden terraces and souvenir shops opening onto narrow alleyways make this an ideal place to relax and have fun souvenir-hunting. Evening visit to newly-opened Dilijan Ethnography Center on historic Shamamberyan street.

Overnight: *Hotel in Dilijan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 5

Dilijan National Park

Day five starts slowly, with time for leisurely breakfast before our journey through Dilijan National Park, a protected area renowned for its serene lakes, picturesque hill trails and peaceful villages. We reach Crystal Lake, a prime hiking area where we enjoy a relaxing morning on foot actively experiencing nature and feasting our eyes on abundant birdlife in the thick groves of chestnut and oak. Change of vehicle (Niva Russian jeep) and cross wildly beautiful Areguni pass to visit Goshavank, a fairy-tale monastery set amidst flower-filled meadows. Afternoon drive through the picturesque pass to come to the shores of Lake Sevan. Check-in at your chalet-style hotel right on the beach, evening at leisure. Enjoy the scenery, take a boat ride to Artanish peninsula for fantastic views of the lake (optional), swim in the emerald waters of the Lake.

Winter special: Free time at Lake Sevan will be replaced by a half-day trip to Tsakhadzor winter resort featuring Kecharis Monastery and short winter walk at the slopes of Mount Teghenis.

Overnight: *Hotel at Lake Sevan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 6

Lake Sevan, Pearl of Armenia

Lake Sevan, one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world - the tranquil majesty of its ever-changing waters, stunning mountains silhouetted against the blue sky, all this inspired its name The Pearl of Armenia. Morning start with a 20-minute walk to the top of Akhtamar Trail for the best photographic views of the Lake and romantic Sevanavank Monastery. Proceed to Stone Garden with unique collection of exquisite khachkars, Armenian cross-stones. Start a heart-pumping southward trip through the rugged Selim Pass. Climbing steep paths and enjoying the views of Lake Sevan below, we reach the amazingly intact Selim Caravanserai, an important trading post on the Great Silk Road where little has changed since the fourteenth century. Late afternoon arrival in Jermuk mountain resort, check-in at hotel, our base for 2 nights. Time free to relax in shady parks or walk to discover graceful Tsopk waterfall.

Overnight: *Hotel in Yeghegnadzor*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 7

Silk Road Adventures

Start your day with a trip to the valley of Her-Her river for a day designed for leisurely exploration of this remote area believed to be peopled long before civilization. The day offers a real off-the-beaten-path cultural experience that can be as strenuous or light as the group prefers. Take a narrow village path to reach Church of St. Catherine with romantic stories attached to its history, continue on foot to explore Zorats Cathedral situated in a gorge flanked by towering cliffs, walk or take a jeep ride to discover the Fortress of King Smbat. Back to Jermuk. For those with more energy to burn we offer a short but absolutely fantastic trip to enigmatic Gndevank Monastery in Jermuk Gorge.

Overnight: *Hotel in Jermuk*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 8

Tatev and Cave Town

A day dedicated to exploration of Southern Armenia combining the magic of Armenia's finest mediaeval architecture with stunning landscapes. We start the day with a visit to Tatev Monastery, an architectural masterpiece dating from the 10th century. Drive through a narrow ravine so deep that the sun hardly reaches the bottom, later ascend to a high-mountain plateau with striking views of jagged mountains and gorges. The journey takes 4 hours and is a totally absorbing and unique experience.

Transfer to Goris crossing and off to Khndzoresk cave town. Walk down the gorge to explore the mysterious caverns cut in the face of the rocks by people seeking refuge from persecution in the natural protection of high cliffs. Drive to Goris, a quaint town surrounded by mountains. Take a stroll in the narrow tree-lined streets and charming old town. Dinner is at your leisure, before you sink into a good night's rest at your hotel.

Overnight: *Hotel in Goris*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 9

Wine route, Southern Armenia

After a hearty breakfast consisting of so many fresh and home-made products we leave Goris. Driving back to Yerevan we have the last chance to experience the untamed beauty of Southern Armenia - surreal red rocks providing an eerie echo, honey-coloured villages sandwiched between them. Visit to Noravank, the masterpiece of medieval architect Momik situated above an awesome gorge. Private wine touring in the cellars of a leading winery in Ararat Valley. Meet the owners, learn about ancient secrets of wine making and their burning ambition to produce the best wine Armenia has yet seen! The next stop of our trip is Khor Virap, the site of royal prison where St. Gregory the Illuminator was held for thirteen years before converting Armenia into the first Christian nation in 301. Guided by the remote majesty of biblical mount Ararat, we explore the site, its underground chambers, elegant chapels and are captivated by the ascetic atmosphere of the site. Back to Yerevan.

Overnight: *Hotel in Yerevan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 10

Farewell to Yerevan

Free day on your own for a last chance to enjoy Yerevan. Visit Vernisage, the huge arts & crafts market, the best place in Caucasus to buy souvenirs. Open only on weekends it is a lot of fun to wonder in. Explore the treasures of the cultural life of Yerevan, ramble in the oldest part of the city or just relax in shady parks or busy outdoor cafes, enjoying the young and lively atmosphere of this ancient city, the contemporary of Babylon and Rome.

Overnight: *Hotel in Yerevan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Those taking Iran extension proceed to airport for flight to Tehran (see Iran extension below).

IRAN EXTENSION (year round)

The ancient lands of Persia are steeped with history and culture. If you want to learn more about this fascinating country from the vibrant city of Tehran to Shiraz, the home of famous Poets, Persepolis where you will encounter an astounding example of the rule of the early Achaemenid Empire and Isfahan famous for its ancient bridges, mosques, minarets, and tree lined avenues, this is the tour for you.

Day 1 Tehran and Shiraz

Arrive Tehran, city tour of Tehran including: Golestan Palace, where the coronations of the former Shah and his father took place, particularly notable are the hall of mirrors and the garden hall, archaeological museums featuring 7000 years of Persian history, from the 5th millennium BC to the 19th century AD. PM flight to Shiraz, arrive to Shiraz, transfer to hotel, rest.

Overnight: Hotel in Shiraz

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 2

Shiraz and Isfahan

Excursion to magnificent Achaemenian city of Perspolis (57 km northeast of Shiraz). Beyond the gate lies the hall of 100 columns, the Apadana Palace with its spellbinding display of bas-reliefs, the Tachara, the unfinished palace of Artaxerxes III, the Palace of Xerxes and the Tripylon Palace. Rock tombs cut into the mountain are those of Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III. A few kilometers from Perspolis is Nash-e Rostam where four cliff tombs are located. Back to Shiraz visit: Bagh-e-Eram or Garden of Paradise, home to a pretty 19th century Qajar palace which looks enchanting in its flower setting beside a pool. Narenjistan-e-qavam or qavam Orangery, is an elegant 19th century house some fascinating tile work and orange trees in its garden. Transfer to airport for domestic flight to Isfahan, arrive to Isfahan transfer to hotel, rest.

Overnight: Hotel in Isfahan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 3

Isfahan

Full day city tour including: Chehel Sutun inside a garden with an area of 67,000 square meters that was built as an official court and a reception hall by Shah Abbas II, Imam Square with an area of more than eighty thousand square meters, twice as large as Moscow's Red Square. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, a masterpiece of architecture and tile work, a beautiful religious building built by Shah Abbas in honor of the great Lebanese Sheikh Lotfollah. Visiting the Friday mosque as well as the mausoleum of Velayat Haroun with its exceptional portal and the minaret of Ali-Qapou (highest of Isfahan). Back to hotel.

Overnight: Hotel in Isfahan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 4

Tehran

Continue your tour of Isfahan, Armenian Cathedral of Vank (Saint Savior), begun in 1606, at the time of arrival of Armenian immigrants to Isfahan, it was completed between 1655 and 1664 under the supervision of Archbishop David, Imam Mosque (Masjid-e Jam'e Abbasi) is one of the finest and the most stunning building in the world, Visit Bazaar, night flight to Tehran.

Overnight: Hotel in Tehran

Meal plan: Breakfast

Included:

Accommodation for 4 nights
Meals as per itinerary
Services of local guide fluent in English
All activities & sightseeing with entrance fees
Airport-hotel-airport transfers
All transfers in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles
Visa processing

Tour Notes

1. Special notes

The information in these Special Notes covers the average range of conditions likely to be found on this trip. In remote destinations unexpected conditions can prevail at any time, and all adventurous holidays can therefore be subject to unexpected changes; in order to enjoy them you should be prepared to be flexible where necessary.

2. Travel health and insurance

No vaccination is required for traveling in Armenia. The country's climate is very pleasant, with no health risks. Water in Armenia is very clean and safe. However, travelers usually prefer bottled spring and mineral water, which can be found in shops and supermarkets.

There are registered pharmacies in all cities and towns with all basic medications. Travelers with special needs are advised to take a supply of those medications that they are likely to require. Medical facilities are numerous with many qualified doctors practicing in all specialties. Doctors and hospitals often expect cash payment for their services. Travelers are advised to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. Also please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or if you will be reimbursed later for expenses incurred. When selecting a travel insurance policy we require that it cover medical expenses including emergency repatriation and personal liability. We also strongly recommend that the policy cover loss of luggage and personal effects.

3. Physical preparation

There will be no extreme fitness requirements and rough traveling. Some of the natural and historical sites we visit will require fair amount of walking with options for more keen travelers and nature explorers. A normal level of fitness will be expected and will certainly help enhance the opportunities to enjoy the trip.

4. Money

You will need to allow enough money for meals as well as optional activities. An average meal in a restaurant should cost between EUR8-10. Tipping is customized and not compulsory. You should be aware that Armenia is still a cash-only economy and credit cards are not accepted in the

majority of shops and restaurants. There are several ATM machines in Yerevan and other cities where you can obtain cash. 10 000 Armenian Drams (approximately EUR 26) is charged as a departure tax on exiting Armenia by air.

Please note: we do not charge sightseeing fees in advance allowing you to choose whether or not you visit sites, depending upon your interests.

5. Communication during the tour

If you need to be contacted while traveling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road. Email cafes are common and are the preferred way for our leaders and travelers to stay in touch.

If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency while you are on an AdvenTour trip we recommend that they contact our operator by phone + 374 91 42 67 45 or E-mail: adventour@netsys.am.

6. Accommodation

We choose facilities that combine high level of comfort and service with unique design and appreciation of the natural beauty of a region. The emphasis is on location, practicality and reasonable degree of comfort.

Hotel/Guesthouse

Accommodation is generally in same sex twin rooms. If you are sharing with another single no supplement is necessary. Our costs are generally based on 3 star properties. If you want higher-class accommodation you can request an upgrade at the time of booking.

Single Supplement

Should you want more privacy during your trip, you can upgrade by the requesting your own room, often at a little extra cost.

Pre / Post-Tour Accommodation

If you require additional accommodation either before or after the trip, we can book this for you provided you notify us at the time of booking. Please contact AdvenTour for current prices. Payment for this must be made to AdvenTour. Please note that AMD 5,000 booking fee is added to the cost.

7. Transport and private transfers

The mode of transport we use is chosen to suit the environmental aspects and local infrastructure. During tours we use comfortable,

air-conditioned cars, minibuses and buses as well as some local transport that is well-maintained and supplied with a first-aid kit. In fact, we often use more than one type of transport per trip. And just in case you are wondering – we also travel by foot.

Airport transfers are not included in the cost of the trip. Please, let us know at the time of booking if you would like us to arrange a private transfer for you.

8. Staff and support

While on AdvenTour trips, you will be accompanied by a tour leader/driver. The tour leader is in charge of general organization of your trip making sure that you have a most enjoyable time. He/she has broad general knowledge of the places visited, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. The tour leader is able to provide suggestions on what to do and see and can recommend great local eating venues. Local guides are an important part of AdvenTour team, they are trained by us and support our groups in sites and locations where their special knowledge of the trails, particular activities or communities will add to the enjoyment of the tour.

9. Meals

The tour cost includes bed and breakfast in the hotels and guesthouses. Meals, when included, will feature local cuisine. For other meals, you are left to choose what and where to eat, though your tour leader will be on hand to suggest venues and arrange where necessary. This can be one of the great joys of this trip as the food in Armenia is superb. Vegetarians should have no problems on this tour.

10. Laundry

Facilities are offered by all hotels for a charge.

11. Visas

To obtain a tourist visa for traveling to Armenia, you should apply to the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in your country or online at

<http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/eVisa/>.

Another option is to obtain your visa upon arrival at Zvartnots International Airport. Visa regulations can and do change without notice. Please check the current regulations in good time to obtain a visa if one is required.

12. What to take

Pack small and light. From early May to late October the weather is generally warm and pleasant with some hot days in July - August.

13. Safety

Armenia is a very safe country. Anyway we always recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while traveling, for the safe keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items. All the hotels we use have safety deposit boxes, which can be used to store your valuables.

14. Responsible tourism

Tourism can be a real help to local communities providing income, positive cultural exchanges and the financial incentive to protect the natural environment. Our trips are designed to use family-based guesthouses in the regions, buy local food, hire local guides, drivers and rent trucks to ensure that as much money as possible is retained within the local economies.

15. Feedback

After your travel, we would like to hear from you. Within two weeks after your departure we will send you a feedback form to complete.

Information in this document has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change and does not form part of the contract between the client and AdvenTour.