

## CYCLING ARMENIA

***Character:***

The Best of Armenia by Bike! This trip is a combination of Armenia's incredible history and breathtaking landscapes. Classic bike tour with relaxed rides and opportunities for challenging days for keen cyclists.

***Duration:***

10 days / 10 nights

***Accommodation:***

Tourist hotels and guesthouses

***Meals:***

10 breakfasts, 1 dinner

***Mode of travel:***

Bikes, full support by 4WD vehicles

***Tour support:***

AdvenTour tour leader /driver, cycling guide optional

***Included:***

Accommodation for 10 nights

Meals as specified in the itinerary

AdvenTour tour leader/driver, cycling guide optional

All activities as per itinerary

All transfers in comfortable 4WD vehicles

Travel permits in protected areas

Luggage handling

*Cycling in Armenia* information kit

***Excluded:***

Optional activities

## ***Itinerary***

### **Day 1**

#### **Ararat Valley**

The tour starts in Yerevan with pre-tour briefing with organiser and other tour participants. From the set up on Ararat Highway, begin a 30 km ride to Khor Virap Royal Prison. Climb to the top of the hill behind the monastery, presumably the site of Artashat, ancient Armenian capital. Fantastic photographic moments, the ascetic silhouette of the monastery with Mount Ararat in the background - perhaps the most famous photo of Armenia. Short transfer to Zangakatun, the highest point of Tugh Manuk pass (1,795 m). Get on the bikes and start downhill ride to reach Vayk, the largest town of Vayots Dzor province. Transfer to hotel, a great place to hang around and relax with a glass of cold beer under plum trees (ride app. 55 km). Welcome dinner at the garden of the hotel local delicacies of the agricultural heart of Armenia.

***Overnight:*** Hotel in Vayk

***Meal plan:*** Breakfast, dinner

### **Day 2**

#### **Sightseeing on Two Wheels**

After an early wholesome breakfast we get the bikes out and go sightseeing on two wheels. A gentle morning warm-up ride takes us downtown, we continue through surreal gorge of Noravank exquisitely dressed in wild flowers and red rocks of strange forms. The gorge is dominated by magnificent Noravank Monastery, the masterpiece of Momik, Armenia's famous medieval architect. Afternoon visit to Areni Wine Market, an ideal place to enjoy exceptional local wine, honey and fruits. Back to Vayk for overnight (ride app. 55 km).

***Overnight:*** Hotel in Vayk

***Meal plan:*** Breakfast

### **Day 3**

#### **Gates of Syunik**

The route today is quite long so is broken into a couple of riding stretches with transfers. Following an undulating country road through the foothills we are now heading to Syunik, the southern edge of Armenia. Short transfer from Saravan to Gates of Syunik and it's time to pedal your bike again! Enjoy the delight of 50 km ride, descending through landscape that contrasts so dramatically with what you saw yesterday. Do not miss your chance of buying fresh fruits or simply chatting with locals at Tsghuk farm. And in case you are tired remember the vehicle backup is there, otherwise ride straight to your hotel in Sisian. You can relax at hotel bar before spending the evening sharing a meal with your group. If you can drag yourself away from the restaurant, you can cycle to the local church to watch rare microscopic paintings on rice and hair! Optional cycle to graceful Shaki waterfall. (ride app.50 km).

***Overnight:*** Hotel in Sisian

***Meal plan:*** Breakfast

### **Day 4**

#### **Legendary Tatev**

Early breakfast and a 15 km ride leads us down the valley through restful pastoral scenery to ancient observatory of Karahunj. Back to tarmac and on to Tatev, UNESCO World Heritage Site. Cycle 25 km and back to off-road again, pass Shinuhayr with its surprisingly huge shoe factory, continue through a narrow ravine so deep that the sun hardly reaches its bottom. Stop at Devil's bridge to fill your bottles with healing mineral water and swim in the steaming pool. Reach Tatev - as you see the Monastery you will appreciate what has drawn people to this sacred place for hundreds of years. It can be a hard day but the vehicle support will be on hand if required for a four-wheeled break. On the way back load the bikes onto the support vehicle and soar above the gorges in the world's longest aerial tramway, a must-see attraction opened in 2010. Back to Sisian for overnight (ride app.60 km).

***Overnight:*** Hotel in Sisian

***Meal plan:*** Breakfast

### **Day 5**

#### **Great Silk Route**

Early morning cycling takes us away from the mountains of Syunik into an arid region as we traverse Selim pass (2,410 m). Stop and get packed lunch at a village market, continue the road gradually climbing up to 2,410m in elevation following the historic Silk Route past Selim

Caravanseray. This is one of the best places to see what fabled Silk Route looked like centuries ago. As we cycle down, we pass high country sheep stations and get into unsurpassed views of Lake Sevan. By vehicle and cycle we reach Lake Sevan and enjoy a superb final lakeside track taking us to our hotel (ride app. 70 km).

**Overnight:** *Hotel at Lake Sevan*

**Meal plan:** *Breakfast*

## **Day 6**

### **Little Known Armenia**

Get on your bikes and head north from Shorzha, famous fishers' village. Today we get completely off the main tourist tracks and explore the eastern edge of Armenia, picturesque Tavush. By cycle and vehicle we gradually climb the picturesque pass (2,176 m) to get to Getik Valley for the last ride uphill to Chambarak (around 20 km). Have rest and lunch and continue to reach Berd - unparalleled views as your bike tours through thick forests with dramatic gray cliffs soaring above you. A final 30 km of downhill rush with long sweeping corners will bring you to Ijevan, a small town of quaint appeal with its quiet, cypress-lined streets. Your vehicle will meet and deliver you to your accommodation (ride app. 65 km).

**Overnight:** *Guesthouse in Ijevan*

**Meal plan:** *Breakfast*

## **Day 7**

### **Ancient Shrines**

Out from Ijevan on our bikes, we head to the highway and off to romantic Lori. The landscape here is an attractive patchwork of verdant pastures and woodlands. On beautiful sealed roads with lush forest lining the roadside we ride to Noyemberyan. Cycle another hour to reach sleepy Alaverdi hidden in scenic Lori Gorge. The lattice of quiet lanes and tracks follows Debed river and climbs into the hills to explore the enchanting countryside and ancient shrines. Our accommodation for the evening is in Akner, not far from Alaverdi, once a mining town (ride app. 70 km).

**Overnight:** *Farmhouse in Akner*

**Meal plan:** *Breakfast*

## **Day 8**

### **Local Villages and Hospitality**

Transfer to the highway leading to Vanadsor. Today's route stays away from the main road and follows less direct but quieter series of back roads to allow us to experience the rural life of Armenia. Our passing encounters with friendly locals in small villages of Akori, Aygehat and Vardablur may leave us with some of our strongest memories. At the east end of the last village, the road leads us to half-ruined 6<sup>th</sup> century church. Finally you are in Kurtan and from here the paved road gradually descends east along the side of the gorge. Cycle straight to your hotel or use the support vehicle for this final leg (ride app. 70 km).

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Stepanavan*

**Meal plan:** *Breakfast*

## **Day 9**

### **In the Shadow of Mount Aragats**

Our day starts with cycling at 1,350 m between Pambak mountain range to the south and Bazum range to the north. Both ranges exceed 3,000 m above sea level. We will cycle to the west of Vanadsor, reach the main road to follow Debed river and pass by the town of Spitak, the epicenter of 1988 earthquake. As we head deep into the mountains, today's route is dominated by Mount Aragats, the highest peak of Lesser Caucasus (4,090 m). This is an area of stunning natural beauty. In the afternoon we reach Ashtarak, an area famous for its superb fruits. From here strong riders can cycle straight to the hotel in Yerevan and support vehicle can pick those who want an easier option to reach the city (ride app. 70 km).

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Yerevan*

**Meal plan:** *Breakfast*

## **Day 10**

### **Yerevan**

Today is a rest day for a chance to explore Yerevan. There are many options available on this day, wandering in the red rose streets of old center, sampling a light snack at the busy outdoor

terraces at the Opera Square, visiting Vernisage, the best place in Caucasus for souvenir shopping, taking a tour in the cellars of Yerevan Brandy Factory and many more.

***Overnight:*** *Hotel in Yerevan*

***Meal plan:*** *Breakfast*

## ***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 the Caucasus. The region's climate is very pleasant, with no health risks. Water 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. 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 and tour grade**

The roads used for this tour are country roads between villages and little towns, quite peaceful, sometimes without cars, often used by carts and herds. Quiet tarmac roads are used where necessary. If weather conditions are poor we may use alternative sections to avoid muddy routes. And remember, all roads are either up or down, there are simply no flat roads in Armenia. You ride with fellow travellers, carrying only what you need for the day. The support vehicle will carry your bags.

This trip is classified "Road", grade A, 9 days of cycling, average 60km/day, 100% vehicle support.

#### *Grade A - moderate*

Involves some longer cycling generally at low altitudes below 2,500 m. The tour is designed

within the capabilities of those with normal physical fitness, but previous cycling experience would be beneficial.

### **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 EUR 8-10. Tipping is customized and not compulsory. You should be aware that Caucasus 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 major cities where you can obtain cash.

### **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 10 48 22 71 or E-mail: [adventour@netsys.am](mailto:adventour@netsys.am).

### **6. Accommodation**

We choose hotels/guesthouses that combine comfort and great service with unique ambience and appreciation of the natural beauty of a region. The emphasis is on location and practicality.

Our tours are based on 3 star properties. In capital cities and other places where higher-class accommodation is available you can upgrade if you wish. Your tour leader will help arrange this and the extra cost will be paid by you. In areas where hotels are not available, particularly in small towns in the regions, the group will stay at a local guesthouse (often with shared facilities). Some campsites we stay in are equipped with showers, toilets, electricity and a common eating area. Where no campsites are available we go wild camping (no facilities). These are limited to once or twice a tour and are in areas where you can enjoy the scenery. All other nights will be in campsites/hotels as described above.

#### *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. Please contact AdvenTour for current prices.

### **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.

#### *Biking guide*

No biking guide is provided for this tour. However, you can request one at the time of booking.

#### *Luggage handling*

All your gear is carried for you on this tour; you carry only a daypack.

### **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 most hotels for a charge.

### **11. Visas**

Citizens of EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and a number of other countries can obtain Armenian visa upon arrival at the airport or land border. All other nationals are advised to consult Armenian Embassy in their country of residence. Georgian visa is not required for EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand citizens. All other national are advised to consult the Georgian Embassy in their country of residence. Turkish visa is obtained upon arrival at the airport or land border. Iranian visa support is provided by AdvenTour through local partners in Iran. 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. Travel luggage**

Because of limited luggage space on transfer vehicles, we limit each passenger to ONE main suitcase or frameless backpack (the size not more than 75cm x 45cm x 25cm, the weight no more than 20 kg) and one day bag. The daypack is practical for keeping general items (e.g. camera, books, wallets etc.) at hand when your main pack is out of reach. Please note many hotels in the regions do not have porters and you will need to carry your own luggage.

*Travel tip 1:* On some tours, if you wish, it is possible to leave surplus clothes and other personal equipment in hotels where you will return after your circular trip. Please bring a small bag to pack excess items in and leave the bag at the hotel. Mark your luggage with your name and arrival date. Please ask your tour leader to advise where this may be possible / advisable.

*Travel tip 2:* You might be tempted to buy a few souvenirs here and there, so leave a little room for those extra purchases!

*Bring with you:* biking helmets, gloves and shorts, eye protection/sunglasses, water bottles and spare inner tube (unless hiring a bike), waterproof jacket, sun cream and lip salve, warm jacket for evenings, small day sack and favorite energy snacks.

#### *Local Bike Hire*

Bikes are available for hire in Armenia and should be requested at the time of booking.

#### *Bringing your own bike*

Many people choose to bring their own bikes. If you wish to bring your own bike, please note

that we cannot guarantee against small scratches and paintwork damage involved in the loading and unloading from support vehicles.

### **13. Safety**

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.