

HIKING ARMENIA

Character:

Armenia for the active and adventurous. Accompanied by mountain guides, undertake day walks in hidden corners of Armenia. Every day your exploration will offer new surprises and settings - from deep canyons and extraordinary volcanic landscapes to picturesque forest trails and serene lakes. You will also have a chance to experience the culture and traditions of this little-known country off the beaten path.

Duration:

10 days / 10 nights

Accommodation:

Superior hotels, camping (3 nights)

Meals:

10 breakfasts, 1 dinner

Mode of travel:

Comfortable 4WD vehicles/on foot

Tour support:

AdvenTour tour leader /driver, local mountain guides

Included:

Accommodation for 10 nights

Meals as specified in the itinerary

AdvenTour tour leader/driver, local mountain guides

All activities as per itinerary

All transfers in comfortable 4WD vehicles

Travel permits in protected areas

Hiking in Armenia information kit

Excluded:

Optional activities

Itinerary

Day 1

Yerevan New and Old

The tour starts with a meeting with your tour escort and group participants before heading to introductory tour of Yerevan, new and old. We start our exploration with the Republic Square with its magnificent buildings enhanced by singing fountains, continue to Erebouni Fortress, the birthplace of Yerevan. Take a guided tour of the fortress and explore the impressive ruins and museum. Drive back to city center, stopping at the Railway Station to see the beautiful monument of David of Sasun, national hero. Visit to the famous Closed Market on Mashtots Avenue. Wonder among the stalls with a variety of fresh, dried and marinated fruits and vegetables, sample some of the delicacies on offer, learn about Armenian cuisine you will have a chance to enjoy for the days to come. End the day with visit to Yerevan Brandy Factory to learn age-old secrets of brandy-making and sample the finished product.

Overnight: Hotel in Yerevan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 2

Mount Aragats

Early morning start your trip to Mount Aragats (4,090m), an extinct volcano, the highest peak of Lesser Caucasus. Our car takes us through picturesque Byurakan, Thousand Springs. Acclimatizing gradually as we ascend the beautiful countryside of Byurakan, we reach Stone Lake whose waters glitter like polished mirror in the sunlight. We have plenty of experience in getting travelers to the Southern peak (3,879m), whatever your physical fitness and age. A steep hike up is rewarded by superb panoramas of alpine meadows of rare beauty. If you're still keen for more, we will scramble up to the Western peak (4,080m) for unbelievable views of endless crisp blue sky and Mount Ararat in the distance. Continue our exploration of Aragats with a trip to medieval Amberd Fortress driving through traditional camps of Yezidi ethnic group living in high mountains in summer, grazing sheep and goats on mountain pastures. Discover the traditional way of life of these "people of the mountains", visit their homes, try fresh cheese and yogurt. Proceed to the small hotel at Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory, check-in, rest. A unique option this evening is a guided visit to the Observatory founded in 1946. Star observations using 2.6 meter telescope, the second largest in Europe, explanations by the team working at the observatory.

Overnight: Hotel at Byurakan Observatory

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 3

Lake Arpi National Park

After breakfast we take a ride to Gyumri, Armenian's humor capital and second largest city. Transfer to Lake Arpi National Park for a 20-km walk (round trip) to Hovasar Mountain (3,100m). This high mountain plateau of volcanic origin with mountain steppes, sub-alpine grasslands and lakes harbors unique ecosystems with many unusual species. Rare alpine flowers line our trail snaking its way up to the rocky viewpoint where we gain impressive views of the surrounding mountains. We then have a selection of open mountain trails to follow. The drive back passes Paleolithic sites and an active excavation. Back to Gyumri, time to explore the historical center including Street of Crafts and a guided visit to Gyumri Brewery.

Overnight: Hotel in Gyumri

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 4

Ancient Sites of Northern Armenia

After breakfast we head to romantic Lori, the northern province of Armenia offering complete change of scene - wonderful forested gorges. Light walk in dramatic Debed gorge to reach half-ruined Kobayr Monastery filled with frescoes that can only be described as "miraculous". Continue to sleepy but picturesque Alaverdi and start the hike along Haghpat - Sanahin route (Monasteries of Sanahin and Haghpat are listed among UNESCO World Heritage Sites). Easy walking through flower-filled meadows and small villages, 3 h. Optional walk uphill to explore

formidable Kayan Fortress. Rugged mountain paths take us up to the fortress and one of the best viewpoints over Debed Gorge. Overnight at camp in dramatic Debed Gorge.

Overnight: Camp in Debed Gorge

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 5

Wilderness Country

Breakfast at hotel and transfer to the village of Gomer near Ijevan where we take a short transfer in Russian military jeeps to the start of Lastiver Trail. We will spend the day hiking (20 km round trip) in this beautiful wilderness area, no roads, no shops, no TVs, just incredible views and marvelous solitude. A wonderful forested route into the most unspoiled and rugged area of north-eastern Armenia as we head into a deep gorge before ascending to cascading waterfalls and the most scenic meadows in Armenia. Follow the hiking trail to reach hidden caves of Lastiver, perhaps Armenia's best-kept secret. All the time we have open views of the beautiful green plateau of Lastiver. In the evening we have free time in Ijevan, a small city of quaint appeal with its beautiful cypress-lined streets before driving to Dilijan, rest and overnight.

Overnight: *Hotel in Dilijan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 6

Hiking and Nature Viewing at Dilijan National Park

Early transfer to Crystal Lake to start the hike along a stunning forest trail (8 km) in Dilijan National Park, cross the wildly beautiful Areguni pass and reach Goshavank Monastery where the great scholar of the 13th century Mkhitar Gosh is buried. Lookout for morning birds that are particularly active at this time, explore the enchanting nature of the park as we take a gentle walk on well-defined forest trails. For those with more energy to burn we offer a short but absolutely fantastic walk to a small lake above Goshavank. Back to Dilijan that captures the spirit of rural Armenia, explore its streets and small shops with an array of traditional handicrafts on display, optional lunch at one of the small outdoor terraces above river Agstev. 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 an optional boat ride to Artanish peninsula for fantastic views of the lake, swim in the emerald waters of the Lake.

Overnight: *Hotel at Lake Sevan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 7

Hidden Trails of Southern Armenia

After a leisurely breakfast we begin our exploration of Lake Sevan area. The air here is crystal clear and the views are magnificent with snow-capped peaks of Geghama Mountains towering in the background. Visit to Stone Garden famous for its collection of intricate cross-stones, the oldest of which date from the 9th c. Follow one of the caravan routes making up the extensive network of Silk Road. Taking the winding road up the lofty mountain peaks of Vardenis ridge we pass small settlements and reach Selim Caravanserai or inn for caravans, an important link for merchants trading on this route. A short transfer brings us to the valley of river Yeghegis where we hike to discover Tsakhats Kar Monastery, an enchanting site hidden between the mountains (app. 3 h.). A fitting finale for a day full of impressions is a well-deserved dinner at Goat Cheese Farm in Mosrov where villagers adhere to their traditional ways of life. Our fixed mountain camp, which we reach in the evening, is in a sheltered ravine near Gnishik river (fresh water supply, showers/toilets, comfortable sleeping tents and dining area).

Overnight: *Mountain camp*

Meal plan: *Breakfast, dinner*

Day 8

Hermits' Trail

Breakfast at camp and leave early to travel into the deep Armenian wilderness - an environment, which has barely changed for hundreds of years. We offer a unique option this afternoon, hiking the Hermits' Trail. Transfer by jeep to Jafar hill station to start the day's hike. After an hour's walk you can see Noravank Monastery in the distance – a sudden and dramatic sight amid surreal red rocks. Continue walking and come to a picnic area under rosehip trees, where there is time to relax and enjoy your lunch. After rest continue to reach an abandoned military point,

walk down the gorge, cross the river and hike your last hour to reach Noravank. This is around 5 hours' hike through exciting terrain, ranging from steep rocky paths down to tree-studded ravines, then to open, grassy hilltops. In Noravank take a tour of the monastery, examine the exquisite carvings and precious cross-stones. Back to camp by jeep.

Overnight: Mountain camp

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 9

Royal Prison and Garni Canyon

Breakfast and drive back to Yerevan. Scheduled stops along the route to break up the journey and a visit to Khor Virap historical site near the border with Turkey. This is one of the most remote and magnificent monastic sites in Europe, which illustrates the Spartan existence of the first Christians. Continue to Geghard, explore legendary Monastery of Spear cut in solid rock. Follow your guide for a hike in Garni Canyon (4 h.). The narrow trail contours through pleasant picnic areas, follows the river and descends into the wonderful rocky gorge. Reach half-ruined shrine of Havuts Tar, time to relax and enjoy the views. Rise again to your next destination, Garni, where the impressive and amazingly well preserved Temple of Sun stands proudly. Marvel at the monumental colonnade and elegance of Hellenic architecture set against a perfect mountain backdrop. Back to the comfort of our hotel in Yerevan, free evening.

Overnight: Hotel in Yerevan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 10

Free day in 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

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. Walking grade

Grade A - moderate

Trails are almost always good though we occasionally come across rough sections in mountains. Suitable for most hill walkers. Normally we walk between 4 to 6 hours per day at moderate altitude. The only exception is the Southern summit of Mount Aragats (3,878m). Walking during the first day of the hike should provide adequate acclimatization for higher altitudes.

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.

Camping

In some regions we provide accommodation at mountain camps or forest cabins at well-appointed locations, usually at the bank of a river or lake. Full facilities: fresh water supply,

shower, toilets, sleeping and dining tents, camping stools and tables are provided.

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 these tours we use comfortable 4WD vehicles 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.

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 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. Sometimes it can get cool in the mountains so we recommend taking a couple of warm sweaters. In addition to your “normal” daily clothes, you will need the following: 2/3 seasons jacket, light waterproof jacket, sunhat, water bottle, lightweight boots and a day sack.

Recommended: Tracksuit, gaiters, thermal underwear, trekking poles

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.