

HIKING ARMENIA

Character:

Armenia for the active and adventurous. Accompanied by mountain guides, undertake day walks in the hidden corners of Armenia. Every day your exploration will offer new settings - from deep canyons and extraordinary volcanic landscapes to picturesque forest trails and serene lakes. You will have a chance to visit two nature parks, treasuries of natural and cultural heritage only recently opened to tourism. Experiencing the culture and traditions of this little-known country off the beaten path is another treat you can't miss.

Duration:

10 days / 10 nights

Accommodation:

Tourist hotels and camp or lodge (1 night)

Meals:

10 breakfasts, 1 dinner, 1 lunch, 1 full board camping

Mode of travel:

Comfortable, air-conditioned 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 with all entry fees

All transfers in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles, local 4WD vehicles in parks

All camping gear

Travel permits in nature reserves

Hiking in Armenia information kit

Excluded:

Optional activities

Itinerary

Day 1

Yerevan New and Old

The tour starts with a meeting with your tour leader and group participants before heading to an introductory tour of Yerevan. 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.

Overnight: Hotel in Yerevan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 2

Khosrov Nature Park

In the morning drive to Geghard, explore legendary Monastery of Spear and Garni Temple of Sun, the only standing Hellenistic temple in the Caucasus. We start the hike in Khosrov Nature Park, a vast forest with its diverse flora and fauna with many rare and endangered species including Caucasian leopard, Armenian mouflon, bezoar goat and black vulture. Rich historical heritage is another reason why we chose this area for today's hiking. The length of trail is 9 km, duration about 6-8 hours. We start at the junction of Vedi and Khosrov rivers and continue to Tapi Fortress with ongoing conservation activities and following the course of Khosrov river we will reach Khosrov abandoned village surrounded by forests and remnants of rare cross stones. The trail continues to explore unique natural monuments such as homogenous dense oak forest, mountainous slopes with skeletal stones and an impressive mountain called Trchnaberd. In the evening we will reach the park shelter used for tourist accommodation, there are only 8 places in the shelter, the rest of the group will camp. Tents that fit 2 people, inflatable air mattresses and sleeping bags are provided. Dinner will be served at the campfire. There is a shower at the campsite and toilet facilities are basic but it is worth staying in this remote place.

Overnight: Camp or Lodge at Khosrov

Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Optional: you have an option of experiencing the stunning scenery of Khosrov Nature Park on horseback.

Day 3

Hidden Trails of Southern Armenia

We begin our exploration of Southern Armenia. Driving to the south we gain impressive views of the mountains, bizarre rocks and weirdly sculptured erosions add to the impressions. En route we visit Noravank, the masterpiece of medieval architect Momik situated above an awesome gorge. Check in at hotel and start hiking to Spitakavor (trail length 7 km). Our first stop is Gladzor, a major center of science and calligraphy in medieval Armenia. On to Spitakavor Monastery passing the village of Vernashen. Walking through the village, we have an opportunity to meet and chat with locals and gain a true insight into their traditional ways of life. The trail continues through rough slopes and leads directly to Proshaberde Citadel crowning the rocky peak. Here we are rewarded for our efforts by the dramatic views of the mountains and the valley below. In the evening we arrive at our hotel to try out the excellent local cuisine, rest and overnight.

Overnight: Hotel in Yeghegnadzor

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 4

Southern Armenia, continued

After breakfast and a good look around we are ready to continue our adventures in Southern Armenia. We reach the fertile valley of Yeghegis river where we hike to isolated Tsakhats Kar Monastery, an enchanting site hidden between the mountains and Smbataberd, a well-preserved medieval citadel built by King Smbat (12 km round trip). The setting of Smbataberd is perhaps

the most beautiful in Armenia, with Arpi river valley at your feet. Here we have the blissful feeling of freedom from the mundane that only truly comes after a few days of travelling nature's way – on one's own feet. Our next stop will be at Shatin observation point to see Bezoar Goats on the opposite side of the gorge. We are in the agricultural heart of Armenia and have a chance to enjoy private wine touring and lunch in *maran* (cellars) of a small winery in Aghavnadzor, free time before we drive to Vayk for rest and overnight.

Overnight: Hotel in Yeghegnadzor

Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch

Day 5

Hermit's Trail

After wholesome breakfast we continue into Southern Armenia, endlessly winding roads leaping through gorges over the mountains of Syunik. Today our trail is a perfect combination of natural and cultural wonders. We visit Tatev Monastery and continue walking on narrow footpaths that take us back in time, to the tiny cloister of Tatev Hermitage, a highly evocative place. Continue walking to the limestone caverns of the Devil's bridge with natural hot baths in a gorge so narrow, that the sun hardly reaches the bottom (trail length 5 km). After al fresco lunch and short rest, we continue our day full of activities. Have you ever seen a ghost town with hundreds of uninhabited dwellings, a place that seems frozen in time? Drive to Khndzoresk cave town at the altitude of 1580 m on the steep slopes of Deep Gorge. Picturesque rock formations and gently inviting nature make this one of Armenia's most popular sites. On to Goris, a cozy town with fine stone houses with arched windows and balconies on tree-lined lanes. The pace of life is slow here with little commercial or industrial activity, or even tourist kitsch, so it really feels like you stepped back in time.

Overnight: Hotel in Goris

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 6

On to Lake Sevan

Breakfast, we say farewell to our hosts for whom we are rare visitors and drive to 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. This day is designed as a rest day to enjoy water activities at the Lake and prepare for the hikes of the coming days. We travel via the rugged Selim Pass and enjoy the views of Lake Sevan below, en route stop at amazingly intact Selim Caravanserai, an important trading post on the Great Silk Road where little has changed since the fourteenth century. Continue the day with a 20-minute walk to the top of Akhtamar trail for the best photographic views of the Lake and romantic Sevanavank Monastery. Check-in at your chalet-style hotel right on the beach, rest. Enjoy the scenery, swim, relax or take a boat trip (optional, weather permitting).

Overnight: Hotel at Lake Sevan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 7

Hiking and Nature Viewing at Dilijan National Park

Early transfer to Crystal Lake to start the hike in Dilijan National Park along stunning forest trails (8 km), 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. End the day with a drive to Dilijan, a small town that captures the spirit of rural Armenia and check in at our hotel. Evening visit to newly-opened Old Dilijan complex on historic Shamambertan street, experience the town as it was in the 19th century and observe the weaving of carpets by local women at Tufenkian Carpet Showroom. On to our hotel for rest and overnight.

Overnight: Hotel in Dilijan

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 8

Wilderness Country

Breakfast at hotel and off to the village of Gomer near Ijevan where we take a short transfer to the trailhead. 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 unspoilt and rugged area of north-eastern Armenia as we head into a deep gorge before descending 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. A fitting finale for the day full of impressions is a well-deserved dinner at a farmhouse in Akner where villagers adhere to their traditional ways of life, overnight at farmhouse.

Overnight: *Farmhouse in Akner*

Meal Plan: *Breakfast, dinner*

Optional: you have an option of experiencing the stunning scenery of Lastiver on horseback

Day 9

Magnificent Gorges and Nomadic Tribes

After healthful rural breakfast we drive to the last point of our hiking adventure, Mount Aragats (4,090m), an extinct volcano. We spend a relaxing day to prepare for Mount Aragats trek tomorrow, have some sightseeing en route and enjoy the hospitality of Yezidi nomads. We visit Saghmosavank (Monastery of Psalms) perched on the edge of picturesque Kasakh gorge. Here we are captivated by stunning views around every corner providing superb photo opportunities. Acclimatizing gradually as we ascend the beautiful countryside, we reach Amberd Fortress on the southern slope of Aragats. Breathtaking views of the fortress and citadel, snow covered peaks of Aragats, sun scorched grasslands dressed in wildflowers combine to provide an unforgettable experience this morning. We 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 tents, trying fresh cheese and yogurt. Drive to Byurakan, check in at hotel.

Overnight: *Hotel in Byurakan*

Meal plan: *Breakfast*

Day 10

Mount Aragats

Early morning start your trek to Mount Aragats (4,090m), an extinct volcano, the highest peak of Lesser Caucasus. Reach Stone Lake whose waters glitter like polished mirror in the sunlight. Our local guides at Aragats have plenty of experience 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. Back to Yerevan.

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

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.

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 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.

6. Accommodation

We choose hotels/guesthouses that combine comfort and great service with unique ambiance 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.

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!

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.

