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Tour Notes

Ancient Armenia

Tour Duration – 10 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ●○○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore incredible Armenian architecture from ancient and medieval times
- ✓ Try your hand at making traditional Armenian flatbread at a Lavash masterclass
- ✓ Marvel at the views of Mt Ararat from Khor Virap Monastery
- ✓ Breathe in the pristine air at picturesque alpine Lake Sevan
- ✓ Explore the second city of Gyumri
- ✓ Plenty of time to take in the diverse city of Yerevan
- ✓ Visit the spiritual heart of the Armenian Church at Echmiadzin
- ✓ Enjoy the beautiful scenery of Dilijan – known as the little Switzerland of Armenia
- ✓ UNESCO sites such as Haghpat and Geghard monasteries





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Tour Map – Armenia - Ancient Armenia



Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	Mix of comfortable mid-range hotels with private bathrooms
Included Meals:	Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size:	Maximum of 12
Start Point:	Yerevan
End Point:	Yerevan
Transport:	Minibus (size of will depend on the group size)
Countries:	Armenia



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Ancient Armenia

Armenia is a fascinating mixture of cultural influences. Proud of its independence, its alphabet, and its Christian heritage, Armenia has more than a whiff of former Soviet Republic, indeed crossing Yerevan's busy Republic Square (built over a nuclear bunker) risks being run over by one of many shiny white Lada Nivas. Except for Georgia, relations with neighbouring states are best described as mixed. The Armenian Genocide, despite overwhelming evidence, is denied by the Turkish government, while the unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno Karabakh still festers. However, among contemporary Armenians, certainly in the towns and cities, these realities lead to a strong sense of identity and a desire to live life loud. Fine wines, an excellent local cuisine and a penchant for jazz are perhaps manifestations of this – Charles Aznavour was Armenian, but then again so is Kim Kardashian? Among Graeco-Roman ruins and ancient monasteries the country's landscape is characterised by wide expanses, grassy plains and big skies – Armenia feels like a frontier state, and that's because it is.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. For very small group sizes the tour may operate with a driver/guide.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrival

Upon arrival in Armenia transfer to hotel accommodation in central Yerevan. Overnight Royal Plaza Hotel or similar.

Please note: *If arriving on an early flight we can arrange for early check-in and/or extra sightseeing activities at extra cost.*

Yerevan

Set on the edge of a ravine above the River Hrazdan, Yerevan is a mixture of architectural styles, with some imposing Soviet-era buildings as well as residential homes where different types of stone are used. Concentric boulevards spill outwards from the city centre interspersed with parkland, and this sense of space and greenery gives Yerevan an almost rural feel at times. The main street of bars, restaurants and shops is Abovian, running north from Republic Square. The cathedral of St Gregory the Illuminator was built with money from the enormous Armenian diaspora to celebrate 1,700 years of Christianity in Armenia. The covered market stands opposite the Blue Mosque, which has been recently restored. A range of museums cover everything from art to natural history – one of the most impressive is the Matenadaran, devoted to ancient manuscripts.



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Day 2 – The sights of Yerevan (*Approximate driving time: two-hours*)

Today's tour of Yerevan includes Victory Park with its viewpoint over the city and the unmistakable snowy peak of Mount Ararat (across the border in Turkey), the Cascade staircase and Gafeschian Centre of Art, The North Avenue, the Opera House and expansive Republic Square. Later we visit the Genocide Memorial, eternal flame and museum, dedicated to the victims of the Great Genocide that took place in 1915. There's also time to call in at Matenadaran - a museum and scientific institute for ancient manuscripts, which houses a unique collection covering philosophy, law, mathematics, medicine and geography. Later, there's a guided tour of the Yerevan Brandy Factory, now owned by Pernod Ricard, producers of Ararat Brandy, a favourite of both Churchill and Stalin. The day's tour ends with a visit to craftsmen specialising in khachkars, characteristic Armenian stone crosses. Overnight Royal Plaza Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 3 – Yerevan - Lake Sevan – Dilijan – Haghpat (*Approximate driving time: four-hours*)

After breakfast we drive to Lake Sevan, climbing steps to the top of the peninsula to enjoy breath taking views of the lake and surrounding mountains. Afterwards we continue Dilijan, also known as Armenian Switzerland. Here, we stroll through the picturesque old quarter, particularly Sharambeyan Street, renowned for its pottery, carpentry and other artisan shops. Later, at Haghpat, we explore the monastery, a masterpiece of medieval Armenian Church architecture. Our hotel lies in a beautiful location near Dedbed Gorge. Overnight Hotel Qefo or similar. (BLD)

Lake Sevan and Sevanavank Monastery

Lake Sevan is one of the largest freshwater high-altitude lakes (1900m above sea level) and covers an area of 940 sq. km and is 80km long and 30km at its widest point. The lake supports a healthy fish population, including the endangered ishkhani (prince trout), named for a row of spots like a crown on its head.

Sevanavank Monastery, one of the main attractions of Armenia thanks to its magical setting with distant mountains and Sevanavank, is a stunning 9th century monastery situated strategically on the peninsula which used to be an island.

Dilijan

Also known as the Switzerland of Armenia, Dilijan attracts visitors with its lush forests, fertile meadows, and the rushing rapids of the River Aghstev. The climate is very different to elsewhere in Armenia and enjoys a sense of peaceful nature. During Soviet times this was a known retreat for cinematographers, composers, artists and writers to come and be creative.

Haghpat Monastery (UNESCO)

The monastery of Haghpat was founded in 976 AD during the reign of king Ashot III Bagratouni and used to be a spiritual, cultural and educational centre of the region. Of all the structures only the main church of St. Nishan (967-991) with sculptural images on the outside and frescos (13th-14th centuries) inside, St. Gregory Church (1005), the small dome church of St. Astvatsatsin (12th-13th centuries), the 13th-century cafeteria, the 13th-century book depository, the belfry (1245), and khachkars have survived. The village and the monastery lie over a deep "crack" formed by a small river flowing into the Debed River. Haghpat is now under protection by UNESCO as a world heritage site.

Day 4 – Haghpat – Gyumri - ArmAs Winery - Yerevan (*Approximate driving: four-and-a-half-hours*)

Today we drive to Gyumri, cultural capital of Armenia and the birthplace of arts and crafts, to attend a ceramics workshop. Afterwards there's time to explore the streets of the old town and soak up the atmosphere. At nearby ArmAs Winery Estate 180 hectares of previously desolate and disconnected rock-strewn countryside has been diligently transformed into vineyards, orchards, and a world-class winery. A guided tour of the vineyards and winery is followed by tastings. Later we return to Yerevan. Overnight Royal Plaza Hotel or similar. (BL)



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Gyumri

Gyumri is the second largest city of Armenia, known for its excellent 19th century Tsarist architecture which suffered greatly in the 1988 earthquake. It is the hometown for many talented Armenian artists, poets and musicians; Gyumri is famous for its museums, galleries, art centres, and churches.

Day 5 – Yerevan - Khor Virap - Areni - Noravank – Goris (Approximate driving time: four-hours)

Today we drive close to the Turkish border through the fertile Ararat valley to the picture postcard monastery of Khor Virap. Dating from the 4th century, the monastery is one of the sanctuaries of the Armenian Apostolic church and an important pilgrimage site. Khor Virap is notable for the 14-year imprisonment of Christian preacher Gregory the Illuminator in a deep pit – the pit pre-dates the monastery and still exists. Afterwards we continue to the 13th century monastery of Noravank, surely one of the most majestic monuments of medieval Armenia. We spend time exploring the complex before travelling to Goris for our overnight stay. Overnight in Goris. (BLD)

Khor Virap

Standing on a hill in the middle of Ararat Plain and affording glorious views of Mount Ararat, Khor Virap, which translates as 'deep dungeon', is a monastery with great historical significance as it was the place where St Gregory the Illuminator, patron saint of Armenia, was imprisoned by King Trdat III in the 3rd century. Most of the monastery dates from 1661, but in St George's chapel you can still see the cell where the unfortunate monk was held - a pit 6m deep which can be reached by ladder.

Noravank Monastery

Situated in a scenic valley and founded by Bishop Hovhannes in 1105, Noravank (New Monastery) is one of the most spectacular sites in Armenia and should be included on every visitor's itinerary. The complex includes the 13th-century Surp Karapet Church, built next to the ruins of an earlier church also dedicated to St John the Baptist. Attached to this is a small 13th-century chapel dedicated to Surp Gregor; it is home to a carved lion-human tombstone dated to 1300. The main structure is the 14th-century Surp Astvatsatsin Church (1339), built on top of the mausoleum of Burtel Orbelian, who is buried here with his family. Historians say the church is reminiscent of tower-like burial structures created in the early years of Christianity. There's a wonderful carving of Christ flanked by Peter and Paul above the door.

Day 6 – Goris - Khndzoresk/ Tatev Monastery - Yerevan (Approximate driving time: five-hours)

This morning we drive to the cave village of Khndzoresk, a huge site where we spend some time exploring. The village is also connected with David Bek, an 18th military commander who led campaigns against Ottoman forces. Afterwards we drive to Tatev Monastery and visit this important 9th century Armenian Apostolic outpost before returning to Yerevan. Overnight Royal Plaza Hotel or similar. (BL)

Tatev Monastery

An important 9th Century historical monument, Tatev is one of the oldest and most famous monastery complexes in Armenia. During medieval times Tatev Monastery was a vital scholastic, enlightenment and spiritual centre and played a singular role in the country's history. Here you will see mighty fortress walls upon massive cliffs, an ancient oil mill with stone grinders, pendulous columns with unique medieval structures and ancient frescoes by European masters.

Day 7 – Yerevan – Echmiadzin - Zvartnots – Yerevan (Approximate driving time: two-hours)

Today we drive to Vagharshapat site of the Mother See of Etchmiadzin, the spiritual heart of the Armenian Church and seat of the Catholicos of All Armenians, and Mother Cathedral. Nearby we visit the ruined cathedral of Zvartnots, dating from the 7th century. Later we enjoy a gastronomic master class of Armenian dishes before finishing the day at Yerevan's fascinating Vernissage flea market, a large open-air market for



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handmade souvenirs, carpets, silver, jewellery, and just about everything else. Overnight Royal Plaza Hotel or similar. (BL)

Echmiadzin

The spiritual centre of the Armenian Church, Echmiadzin was the setting for a series of visions by St Gregory the Illuminator, where columns of fire turned into churches. The first monastery was built, like many others in Armenia, on the site of a pagan temple in the 4th century, rebuilt in the 5th century in a different style and then renovated in the 17th century. The cathedral treasury is a museum of religious relics, and is where the spear from Geghard that is said to have pierced Christ as he hung on the cross is stored. The treasury also contains a piece of wood said to be from Noah's Ark, which came to rest on the summit of Mt Ararat, today situated in Turkey but long part of Armenia.

Day 8 – Yerevan – Garni - Geghard (UNESCO) - Megeryan Carpet – Yerevan

(Approximate driving time: two-and-a-half-hours)

After breakfast we leave Yerevan again, travelling to Kotayk province to explore Geghard Monastery, founded in the 4th century by Gregory the Illuminator, and partly carved from the living rock of the mountainside.

Afterwards, by way of balance, we continue to nearby Garni and visit its remarkable 1st century colonnaded Graeco-Roman temple dedicated to the Sun god Mihr. We have lunch in the village of Garni, simultaneously taking part in a lavash (Armenian flatbread) masterclass. Afterwards we return to Yerevan and visit Megeryan Carpet, a workshop where we learn about the centuries-old traditions of Armenian carpet weaving. Overnight Royal Plaza or similar. (BL)

Optional Walk: *1 hour walk in the gorge of the Azat River. with no difficult passages. The walk starts from the village of Garni, taking you down to the Azat river gorge and the famous "Symphony of Stones" basalt columns, located at an altitude of about 50 meters above the ground. Difficulty: Easy to Medium.*

Geghard

Geghard means 'spear', and this church set in a narrow gorge is reputed to have once contained the spear which pierced the side of Christ on the cross; the spear now lies in the treasury at Echmiadzin. Built up against a cliff face, the main cathedral was constructed in 1215, but the first monastery on the site is thought to date from the 4th century AD. The monastery is decorated with reliefs depicting animals, crosses and geometrical shapes.

Garni

Garni is a heathen temple which is the only surviving monument of the Hellenistic period in Armenia. The temple is dedicated to the God of the sun Mithra and was built in the 2nd half of the 1st c A.D. during the reign of king Trdat I. Destroyed by an earthquake in 1679, the temple of Garni was reconstructed in the 1970's and is now made up of both original and replacement masonry and is situated in a splendid location overlooking an impressive natural canyon.

Day 9 – Yerevan

Today, the last full day in Armenia, is free to explore Yerevan independently at your own pace, perhaps taking in some museums or shopping for souvenirs. Overnight Royal Plaza Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 10 – Tour Departure

Today the tour ends after breakfast when airport transfers depart to meet onward flights. (B)



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Tour inclusions/exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation
Transportation throughout
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Travel Insurance
Visas if applicable
Drinks
Items of a personal nature
Tips (Discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At this time there are no warnings in place for areas we travel to on our small group tour to Armenia. It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

On our tour of Armenia tour you can expect private bathrooms throughout the trip. Most hotels will have a restaurant and bar.





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We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that on occasion lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £5

Dinner £10 -£15

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £2 - £3

Bottle of Water £0.5 - £1

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is commonly recognised as a way of rewarding guides and drivers for good service. A reasonable amount to bring for tips would be around \$50-60, split between the guides and drivers, if you are travelling on a group tour. For private tours, you should allow more.

Waiters and bar staff in the region are generally low paid and it is common practice to leave a small tip – around 10% of the bill.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Yerevan is well equipped with ATMs for obtaining money

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are widely accepted in the main cities in larger restaurants and hotels

Local Currency: Armenia – Dram (AMD)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollar

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you



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Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

UK passport holders do not need a visa for Armenia but many other nationalities do, although this is often obtained as an e-visa online. We recommend that you check with your nearest embassy for the most up to date details.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for travel to Armenia. However, we recommend that you speak with your doctor for the most up to date advice regarding any vaccinations that may be recommended.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.



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Preparing for your tour

Climate

Generally speaking, the best time to visit the Caucasus region is between April to October, however the tour can be run outside of this time. It can get very hot in the middle of summer at lower altitudes such as Yerevan. Temperatures at the higher altitudes such as Lake Sevan are somewhat cooler and at night it can be quite cold. Rain showers can be expected at any time of year. Spring can be a lovely time for wildflowers. September and October tend to be the busiest time for tourists but also is generally the driest time of the year with pleasant temperatures.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy. Please note that it can get quite cool at higher elevations in the evening and first thing in the morning.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. It is usually advisable to bring a torch/head torch in case of any electricity outages. You may wish to take walking poles if you are used to using them although this not a trekking tour.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended. When we are travelling between places sandals or other comfortable footwear is fine.

Journey times

All journey times are approximate and these may be impacted by unforeseen incidents such as mechanical problems, roadworks, poor weather etc. The journey times mentioned is the approximate overall driving times each day but of course this is interspersed with the stops mentioned on each day.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two round pins.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 14 November 2019