











ITINERARY

GEORGIA & ARMENIA – Christian Heritage of Caucasus

Travel to the Caucasus and explore the most beautiful places of these two countries from Tbilisi to Yerevan; enjoy the scenery of dramatic Caucasus Mountains and visit Silk Road sites frozen in time. Experience local hospitality, sample traditional cuisines and listen to Georgian polyphonic singing.

<p>Day 01</p> 	<p>Arrival in TBILISI Meeting at the airport and transfer. Hotel accommodation. Short rest. Tbilisi is the capital of Georgia. It was founded in the 5th century by Vakhtang Gorgasali, the Georgian King of Kartli (Iberia), and made into a capital in the 6th century. Located strategically at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and lying along the historic Silk Road routes, Tbilisi has often been a point of contention between various rival powers and empires. The history of the city can be seen by its architecture, where the Rustaveli Avenue and downtown are blended with the narrower streets of old Tbilisi district. Despite being overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian, Tbilisi is one of the few places in the world where a synagogue and a mosque are located next to each other in the ancient Bath district, several hundred meters from the Metekhi Church. Tbilisi night city tour. Welcome dinner in Georgian restaurant. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 02</p> 	<p>TBILISI – MTSKHETA - TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Tbilisi and Mtskheta full day tour. A moderate combination of sightseeing and walking tour of Tbilisi: excursion in old Tbilisi, visits to Narikala Fortress, Sioni Cathedral, Metekhi church, Sameba Cathedral, coffee-break at café-streets of Shardeni and Erekle with their fascinating atmosphere and souvenir shopping possibility, a walk along the Rustaveli Avenue (downtown) - will give visitors the opportunity to experience fully the rhythm and the beauty of the capital of Georgia. Proceed to Mtskheta - the ancient capital of Georgia and the important religious centre. It is situated at the convergence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers. There are a number of very significant archaeological and religious monuments in and around the town: Jvari Monastery (6th c.) - standing on the rocky mountaintop, with its architectural forms and decorative elements, Jvari is harmoniously connected with the landscape and overlooks Mtskheta; Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11th c.) - a grandiose cathedral of cross-dome design, known as the burial site of Christ's mantle and one of the major Orthodox Georgian temples. On the way back, visit to Tbilisi Open Air Ethnographic Museum - which exposes 14 ethnographic zones of Georgia with its architectural monuments and ethnographic materials - different kinds of tools, textile and ceramics. It occupies 65 hectares of land and is located to the west of famous "Turtle Lake". Free time. Return to the hotel and overnight.</p>
<p>Day 03</p> 	<p>TBILISI – TELAVI – SIGNAGI (Kakheti region) Breakfast at the hotel. Sightseeing tour of Kakheti region. Kakheti is synonymous with wine. Drive through the beautiful landscape of vineyards and wine-producing villages of this region and arrive in Telavi - one of the oldest cities of Georgia, the centre of Georgian winemaking located in the most beautiful Alazani valley on the slope of Tsvi-Gombor ridge. Telavi, named by people as "the heart of Kakheti", is famous for its numerous monuments of historic and archaeological significance that are found in and outskirts of the city. After the city tour, visits to: Alaverdi Cathedral (11th c.) –the second tallest religious building in Georgia with a height of over 55 meters and the outstanding example of medieval Georgian architecture, located on the Alazani Valley, 20 km from Telavi; and Tsinandali – a village noted for the estate and its historic winery which once belonged to the 19th-century aristocratic poet Alexander Chavchavadze. An excursion in the family museum and a walk in the park beautifully laid out in an English style with fine views and exotic plants leave unforgettable memories to the visitors. Afterwards - visit and wine tasting in Tsinandali Wine Factory, where the collection of the best Georgian oldest wines is kept. Proceed to Signagi – a rare example of historic city which kept its style during the centuries with open traditional balconies, unique fortress with churches and towers built in it and narrow beautiful streets to walk along. Signagi, also known as "a city of love", overlooks the Alazani valley and opens to visitors the magnificent views of the Great Caucasus Range. The other important site to visit here is the Monastery of Bodbe – the final resting place of Saint Nino, "Enlightener of Georgians" and one of the major pilgrimage sites in Georgia. Hotel accommodation and overnight in Signagi.</p>

<p>Day 04</p> 	<p>SIGNAGI – DAVIT GAREJA - TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Davit Gareja Monastery Complex. David Gareja Monastery is a remarkable rock-hewn monastery complex located on the half-desert slopes of Mount Gareja, some 60–70 km southeast of Tbilisi. It was founded by Davit, one of the 13 Syrian Fathers in the 6th c. who came to the Gareja desert with his disciples Lukiane and Dodo. They settled in a cave and established the monasteries, which then was known as Larva. The monasteries became centers of pilgrimage because it was said that 1/3 of Jerusalem's spiritual treasure was kept here; In 10-13th centuries excellent fresco school flourished here. The complex includes hundreds of cells, churches, chapels, refectories and living quarters hollowed out of the rock face. Proceed to Tbilisi. Hotel accommodation in Tbilisi. Time for leisure.</p>
<p>Day 05</p> 	<p>TBILISI – KAZBEGI - TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Kazbegi (1740m above sea level). Drive 157km from Tbilisi, on the south slops of Caucasus main range, along the Georgian military highway. This ancient route through the Caucasus has been much celebrated by everyone from poets to guidebook writers. It's remarkable for the landscapes; flora and fauna, people and history, and many travelers to Georgia will regard this place as a highlight of their visit. On the way all sightseeing including Ananuri fortified ensemble – built in the 16th century, once belonging to the Duke of Aragvi, is located on the left bank of the Aragvi River. It incorporates a circuit wall with turrets, a porch, a Church of Virgin, a minor Church of Gvtaeba, a tower with a stepped pyramidal roof of Svanetian type, a single-nave Church Mkurnali, tower Sheupovari, a bell-tower, a spring and a reservoir. Arrive and excursion in Kazbegi - a small town Kazbegi taking situated at the mountain bottom Kazbek, which is considered to be one of the highest points in all Caucasus, the height of the mountains reaches 5000 meters. These places are glorified by their nature with high mountains, gorges, passes, lakes and small rivers. One of the sites to visit is a small village Chargali, where a great Georgian poet Vazha Pshavela was born, and nowadays his house serves as a museum. Walk up the mountain to Gergeti Sameba church (optional), with beautiful panoramic views of Caucasus, including mount Kazbegi (5047m.). Return to Tbilisi. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 06</p> 	<p>Departure to Armenia: HAGHPAT – SANAHIN - YEREVAN Breakfast and transfer from Tbilisi to Georgia-Armenia border Sadakhlo. Visa/customs procedures, transportation change. Proceed to Yerevan. Monastery Complex of Haghpats (UNESCO World Heritage). The construction of this monastery is associated to the glory of the Bagratouni Royal Family. The oldest structure of the monastery was built in 977-991 and was called the Holy Cross church. Holy water fills the small pool in the church. Believers say this water has curative qualities for people with poor health. Monastery Complex of Sanahin (UNESCO World Heritage). Sanahin is a monastery complex the most prominent structure of which is the Savor's Church (956-967), built by architect Trdat for princes Gourgen and Smbat from the Kyurikian Kingdom. The eastern part of the church holds a bas-relief depicting the two princes holding the miniature copy of the actual church. The former village of Sanahin is located on the right side of the gorge. It has become a part of the town of Alaverdi. An interesting point is the Academy dating back to 1063, where famous scientist, philosopher and writer Grigor Magistros-Savor lectured. The Sanahin Monastery had many feudal properties, a great number of estates, lands, vineyards, oil-mills and factories. Hotel accommodation and overnight in Yerevan.</p>
<p>Day 07</p> 	<p>YEREVAN – DILIJAN – GOSHAVANK – LAKE SEVAN – YEREVAN Breakfast at hotel. Drive to Dilijan spa. Old district of Dilijan. Dilijan is a famous spa rich in curative mineral springs, some of which are comparable to those at Vichy in France and Davos in Switzerland. The surrounding mountains are covered by forests and Alpine meadows. The climate is rather mild with cool summers and warm sunny winters. Its picturesque locality, healthy climate, mineral springs and rich flora attract many tourists. Goshavank Monastery Complex. The monastery can be reached by a road by way of Parz (Limpid) Lake which originates in Dilijan. Goshavank was built in the 12th c. by Mkhitar Gosh, the famous scientist of medieval Armenia, famous author of fables. The oldest construction of the complex is the Virgin church (1196). There are monumental khachkars next to the main church. Trip to Sevan Lake - pearl of Armenia. Peninsula and churches of Sevan. Sevan, this wonder of nature, is 60 Km from Yerevan on a highway which cuts northward through mountains and rocks. Sevan is so austere and majestic that the gentle turquoise waters are astonishing. They fill the gigantic depression situated at the height of almost 2000 m above sea level. Sevan, with its pure air and sandy beaches, is a popular holiday resort. One of the most interesting sites in Sevan is the monastery on the rocky peninsula founded in 874 AD by King Ashot I and his daughter Mariam. Other monuments include Sevan Monastery (874) and Astvatsatsin Church. Return to Yerevan . Evening free. Overnight in Yerevan.</p>

<p>Day 08</p> 	<p>YEREVAN Breakfast at the hotel. Yerevan city tour. Yerevan is the capital of Armenia and one of the oldest cities in the world. It stretches under the gaze of biblical mountain Ararat and resembles a beautiful gilt bowl to those flying over it. A basalt slab with an Urartu cuneiform inscription, unearthed by archaeologists in the south-eastern part of the city shows the age of Yerevan to be 2783 years old. Modern Yerevan is mostly a rebuilt colourful city with buildings of unique architecture, constructed from basalt, marble, onyx and volcanic tufa stone and it is a contemporary to such ancient metropolises as Babylon and Nineveh. Visits to "Mayr-Hayastan" (panoramic view of Yerevan), Matenadaran (Depository and Museum of Ancient Manuscripts) and State Museum of History of Armenia. Evening free. Overnight in Yerevan.</p>
<p>Day 09</p>   	<p>YEREVAN – METSAMOR – ECHMIADZIN – ZVATNOTS - YEREVAN Breakfast at the hotel. Metsamor ancient place/excavations. St. Echmiadzin (Holy Sea) En route visit to Hripsime Church (masterpiece of architecture and a marvelous example of cross-cupola architecture of the 7th century.)Cathedral of St. Echmiadzin (UNESCO World Heritage) - This oldest Christian temple was founded in 301 and is one of the first churches in the Christian World.. It is an architectural monument of early Christianity. It houses a unique museum of religious artifacts. There is a small altar in the centre of the Cathedral where, according to legend, Christ descended from Heaven and with a golden hammer pointed to the site upon which the Cathedral was to be built. The remnants of a pagan temple have been discovered during excavations made inside the Cathedral. Zvartnots, built as Armenia's main cathedral in 641-661, was to suppress Echmiadzin Cathedral by its grandeur and extraordinary artistic splendour. This determined by the size of the temple, its layout and spatial arrangement, its structural features and its decoration which emphasizes the central axis of the building and its upward sweep. The building consisted of three polyhedrons with rich ornamentation of outer walls and capitals. Zvartnots collapsed as the result of an earthquake in 930 and was never restored. A few years ago the columns of the first floor were restored. The international airport is only a few kilometers from the area where the "angels have fallen down." Return and overnight in Yerevan.</p>
<p>Day 10</p>   	<p>YEREVAN – AGARAK – ARAGATS – HAMBERD - SAGHMOSAVANK Breakfast at the hotel. Drive to Agarak archeological site and Aragats mountain. Agarak archeological site - full of impressive stonework and ritual artifacts and promises sheds new light on the peoples of the Caucasus from the Early Bronze Age some 5000 years ago right up to the Middle Ages. Aragats mountain is shaped like an oval shield. A circle of four peaks rises in the middle of the shield. The highest of them has an elevation of 4090 meters. This circle of mountains is the remains of a crater from a big volcano. The Stone Lake with the Cosmic Rays' Scientific Research Centre is situated on the mountain of Aragats. Hamberd fortress stands at an elevation of 2300 meters above sea level on the high cape, in the canyon of two rivers high upon the southern slope of Mount Aragats. It is considered to be the only preserved monument of secular type on the territory of Armenia. The fortress, founded in the 7th century by Pahlavouni princes, had its own water-supply pipe which channels springs from the Aragats Mountain. The church inside the fortress was built in 1026 as shown by the date inscribed on the door. The church itself, the palace bathhouse with two domes, a floor heating system and a secret passage to the gorge are considered to be the most well-preserved monuments of Hamberd. Proceed to Saghmosavan Village. Monastery Complex of Saghmosavank (Psalm Church). Return to Yerevan. Evening free. Overnight in Yerevan.</p>
<p>Day 11</p>   	<p>YEREVAN – GARNI – GEGHARD - YEREVAN Breakfast at hotel. Half-day trip to Garni Pagan Temple and Geghard Monastery. This pagan temple of Garni was built in 1st. c. AC and was devoted to one of the Armenian Pagan Gods - Mitra. After Armenia converted to Christianity in the 4th c., the rulers of the country used the temple as their summer residence. Garni was destroyed by and rebuilt several times during centuries. The temple consists of dwellings and bath quarters built in the 3rd century in the Roman style. The fantastic landscape of Garni canyon shakes the human imagination. Geghard was initially known simply as Ayrivank (Cave Monastery). The present buildings comprising it date back to 10-13th cc., at which time it was renamed as Geghard meaning "lance" (spear) in Armenian. The name refers to the biblical lance used by a Roman soldier to pierce Christ's body to find out if he was alive or not. The lance was kept in Geghard for a long time before being moved to the museum of Echmiadzin Cathedral. The main church, constructed in 1215, is the oldest building in the monastery complex. The monastery has withstood many assaults during a period of seven hundred years. Its walls have sheltered many scholars and it was revered throughout Armenia as one of the greatest spiritual and cultural centres in the country. Hundreds of khachkars (cross-stones) and caves are built in the rocks surrounding the Monastery. Return to Yerevan. Evening free. Overnight in Yerevan.</p>
<p>Day 12</p>	<p>Transfer to Yerevan airport and departure.</p>