

# TREASURES OF GEORGIA, ARMENIA & AZERBAIJAN

7 SEPTEMBER 2024 - 28 SEPTEMBER 2024

Tour Cost (\$AUD):\$16,950

Single Supplement (\$AUD):\$2,995

Tour Duration:22 days



## OVERVIEW

*The Southern Caucasus is a region of breathtaking scenery dominated by magnificent mountains, sublime lakes and exquisite religious architecture. Treasures of Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan is a remarkable 22-day journey to this culturally diverse region where Europe and Asia meet in the lush green heart of the Caucasus.*

Our tour begins in little-visited Azerbaijan, with a two-night stay in the extraordinary capital, Baku, located on the Caspian Sea. We then head to the ancient city of Sheki before crossing the border into the very heart of the Caucasus, Georgia, with its fabulous cuisine and culture, incredibly diverse landscapes, and exceptionally warm and friendly people. We enjoy a three-night stay in the sublime wine-growing region of Kakheti before heading west to the vibrant and exciting Georgian capital, Tbilisi – a maze of charming, winding streets, giving a flavour of old Persia. Next stop is the wonderful spa town of Borjomi, nestled in a picturesque valley within the Agura River gorge. Our final stop in Georgia is the extraordinary medieval cave city of Vardzia, carved into the sheer rock face of Mt Erusheti. Moving south we cross the border into Armenia – the Cradle of Christianity – and after an overnight stay in Gyumri, proceed to the beautiful forests and streams of Dilijan. After two nights here we visit 'The Pearl of Armenia' Lake Sevan, before arriving into the Armenian capital Yerevan, with its imposing views of Mt Ararat, where the ark landed as the flood waters receded. This is our base to explore the World Heritage-listed Geghard Monastery, and the important religious site of Echmiadzin – where Christianity was established in 301 A.D. Join us for a truly memorable journey to mountains, lakes and historical sites of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan!

**Tour Fitness Level: Moderate**

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TOUR MAP



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## 07/09/2024 Australia - Dubai

Depart from your chosen Australian airport for your flight to Dubai.

**08/09/2024 Dubai - Baku (LD)**  
**Depart Dubai Emirates EK 2198, 08.10**  
**Arrive Baku 11.05**

After clearing customs and immigration formalities we transfer to our hotel. After lunch we begin to explore the new part of the city.

### Fairmont Hotel

Baku

## 09/09/2024 Baku (BLD)

Located on a peninsula washed by the Caspian Sea, Baku has a history of more than two thousand years. Having carefully preserved the cultural treasures that have been accumulated over centuries, Baku entered the 21st century as one of the most modern and beautiful cities in the world. Today we set out on foot and explore the Old City.

## 10/09/2024 Baku - Sheki (BLD)

After breakfast we begin the 350km drive to Sheki, located on the picturesque hillsides of the Caucasus Mountains with a backdrop of snow-capped peaks. After lunch we explore the city including the magnificent Palace of the Sheki Khans. Built in 1762, the palace complex was constructed without the use of a single nail, and with beautiful coloured glass imported from Venice.

### Sheki Palace Hotel

Sheki

## 11/09/2024 Sheki - Kakheti (BLD)

After breakfast we head to the border with Georgia, en route to Lake Lopota. Our first stop is the town of Telavi and the palace of Tsinandali. This was the home of Tsar Alexander the 3rd and is surrounded by a beautiful park. Later we drive through beautiful scenery to the eastern wine growing region of Kakheti and onto Lake Lopota. Surrounded by forests, the small lake lies in the foothills of the southern Caucasus and will be our base to explore some of the most amazing wine growing country in the world.

### Lopota Resort

Kakheti

## 12/09/2024 Kakheti (BLD)

Wine is an inherent part of Georgian culture and everyone here agrees that the best wines come from this fertile province which Alexander Dumas referred to as "the garden province of Kakheti". As we pass alongside the beautiful Alazani valley, horse drawn carts amble through green pastures dotted with hayricks. Wine making in Kakheti stretches back some 7,000 years and 500 of the world's 2000 grape varieties are found in Georgia. In 2006 Russia banned Georgian wine, forcing the country to find new markets for its products, and today Georgia exports its wines all over the world. But wines are not all that Kakheti has to offer: it is an area rich in history with many beautiful churches, castles and mansions, and warm and friendly people.

## 13/09/2024 Kakheti (BLD)

Today we continue to explore the lush wine growing region of Kakheti.

## 14/09/2024 Kakheti - Tbilisi (BLD)

After breakfast we head to the Georgian capital Tbilisi, the beating heart of the Caucasus. After lunch

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we take a cable car from Rike Park – opposite the Old Town – to Narikala Fortress where the statue of Mother Georgia looks down over the city below. The views from here are superb, with striking examples of modern architecture sitting side by side with centuries old buildings. Later we visit the Godirdi Baths, which for hundreds of years were one of Tbilisi's main attractions.

### Marriott Hotel

Tbilisi

### 15/09/2024 Tbilisi (BLD)

Today we continue to explore this eclectic city with a visit to the National Museum and a walking tour of the delightful Old Town. A labyrinth of winding streets and twisting alleys, Tbilisi Old Town is a fusion of Asian and European influences, with doorways leading to hidden courtyards and buildings adorned with picturesque sagging balconies and carved pillars. Walking through these winding streets gives a flavour of old Persia.

### 16/09/2024 Tbilisi – Kazbegi – Tbilisi (BLD)

After breakfast we drive along the Georgian Military Highway to Kazbegi. On arrival at Kazbegi we board our 4WD vehicles for the exhilarating drive into the Royal Range of the Caucasus where we enjoy a barbecue amongst the spectacular scenery of the towering mountains. Later we return to Tbilisi.

### 17/09/2024 Tbilisi – Gori – Borjomi (BLD)

Leaving Tbilisi we head north for the amazing cave city of Uplistsikhe. Inhabited since the 6th century BC, Uplistsikhe was home to some 20,000 people. The cave city now has an area of 40,000 square metres and has wonderful views of the Mtkvari Valley. After our visit here we head to the town of Gori. This town is synonymous with Stalin as this is where he was born and went to school. Visiting this town is like stepping into a giant history book which

brings Stalin back to life. We visit the museum of Stalin and the house where he spent the first four years of his life. We also see his bullet proof train carriage. Later we continue our journey to Borjomi.

### Borjomi Likani Resort

Borjomi

### 18/09/2024 Borjomi (BLD)

Borjomi is a town of 10,500 residents lying in a picturesque valley within the Agura River gorge. It has an international reputation for its geothermal spring mineral water resources, and today Borjomi mineral water is one of Georgia's biggest exports and is sold in over 30 countries. A scenic cable car within Borjomi Central Park offers unparalleled views of the verdant forest on the ascent, with spectacular views over the town from the summit.

### 19/09/2024 Borjomi – Akhaltsikhe (BLD)

After breakfast we board our coach for the drive to the town of Akhaltsikhe – a melting pot of multiculturalism, tolerance, and diversity. Georgians, Jews, Armenians and Turks have lived here side by side for centuries, and it is clearly reflected in the historical monuments of the town. The focal point of Akhaltsikhe is Rabati Castle – one of the most impressive fortresses in Georgia. Originally built in the medieval period, and re-purposed later by the Ottomans and the Russians, the double-walled complex is a delightful mix of architectural styles reflecting different epochs of history. From the gilded mosque to the Imperial-style garden pavilions and Moorish-inspired, Alhambra-like pools, it is completely unique among Georgia's many fortresses.

### Akhaltsikhe Inn

Akhaltsikhe

### 20/09/2024 Akhaltsikhe – Vardzia – Gyumri (BLD)

Leaving Akhaltsikhe, we head to the remarkable

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monastery complex at Vardzia. Carved into a sheer rock wall between 1156 and 1203, the Vardzia cave complex includes 15 churches, chief among them being the Church of the Assumption of Mary which is famous for its beautiful murals. After our exploration of the caves, we continue to the border, and after all formalities are completed we continue on the the Armenian town of Gyumri for an overnight stay.

### Nane Hotel

Gyumri

### 21/09/2024 Gyumri - Dilijan (BLD)

After breakfast we drive east to 'the Switzerland of Armenia' - Dilijan - home to lush oak and hornbeam forests and surrounded by imposing snow-capped mountains. It has historically been a retreat for artists, composers and cinematographers. Walking through pastures of mushrooms and herbs it is easy to see why people gather inspiration from Dilijan. We enjoy a BBQ lunch deep in the deciduous forests of the region.

### Best Western Paradise

Dilijan

### 22/09/2024 Dilijan (BLD)

Today we immerse ourselves in nature and the beauty of our surrounds. We visit the lovely village of Haghartsin and its monastery nestled within the forest, and later board 4x4 vehicles for an exciting drive into the mountains where jaw-dropping views are all around and there is a magical sense of serenity amongst the open grasslands and dense forests.

### 23/09/2024 Dilijan - Lake Sevan - Goris (BLD)

We leave Dilijan today and drive to Lake Sevan, the Pearl of Armenia, which is surrounded by beautiful villages and picturesque mountains. Lake Sevan is the largest freshwater lake in Transcaucasia and, at

more than 2000 metres above sea level, one of the highest in the world. It is the pride of Armenian people and where almost all Armenians spend their summer holidays. We explore the lake and its surrounds by boat and enjoy a lunch of Sig, a delicious fish that is endemic to Lake Sevan. Later, we continue to the town of Goris.

### Mirhav Hotel

Goris

### 24/09/2024 Goris - Tatev - Yerevan (BLD)

This morning we depart for nearby Tatev. Perched on a natural fortress of rock on the edge of the Vorotan, the location of Tatev monastery is simply jaw-dropping. We take the longest aerial tramway in the world, 7.5km to the fortress. After our visit here we climb onto a high plateau before reaching the iconic location of Khor Virap Monastery. Situated on a hillock, and surrounded by pastures and vineyards, the monastery lies at the foot of Mount Ararat. The vista of the snow-capped mountain and the monastery is simply awe-inspiring. We continue onto the nearby Armenian capital, Yerevan.

### Tufenkian Historic Hotel

Yerevan

### 25/09/2024 Yerevan (BLD)

With its imposing views of Mount Ararat, and dating back to 8th century BC, Yerevan is located across a gorge through which the Hrazdan River meanders on its journey to Lake Sevan. Legend has it that the name 'Yerevan' derives from an Armenian expression made by Noah as he looked towards the city after the ark had landed and the flood waters had receded: 'Yerevants!' he cried, which means 'it appeared!' Today we explore this ancient city, visiting the markets, the Genocide Memorial, Swallow Fortress and Mair-Hayastan for a panoramic view of the city.

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26/09/2024 Yerevan (BLD)

After breakfast we make the short journey to Echmiadzin, where in AD301 Grigor Lusavorich saw a beam of light fall to the earth in a divine vision. He built the Mother Church of Armenia on the site and today it is a place of unparalleled importance as the birthplace of Christianity. We then move on to Garni temple. Originally pagan and dating back to the 1st century, it became a summer house for Armenian royalty after Christian conversion. We then drive through a stunning canyon to reach the ancient monastery of Geghard. Surrounded by cave churches, Geghard was named after the lance that pierced Christ's side at the crucifixion. Indeed the spear itself was kept here for five centuries and is now housed at Echmiadzin. In the afternoon we enter the brandy factory of Ararat, home to what is

reputedly the best cognac in the world. Churchill himself ranked this as his favourite brandy and Stalin used to send him 300 bottles of 20-year-old Ararat cognac every year.

### 27/09/2024 Yerevan - Dubai (B)

After an early breakfast we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai.

**Depart Yerevan Emirates EK 2207, 12.10**  
**Arrive Dubai 15.15**

On arrival in Dubai connect with the flight to your chosen Australian capital city.

### 28/09/2024 Dubai - Australia

We arrive home in Australia today.