

## **Nature and Heritage of Caucasus**

### **Armenia and Georgia**

#### **Day 1 Arrival in Tbilisi**

Arrive at Tbilisi International Airport. Meet with the guide and driver. Transfer to hotel for overnight. (-/-/-)

#### **Day 2 Tbilisi – Khada Gorge – Kazbegi**

After breakfast. Head north, along the Georgian Military Highway to Mtiuleti and Khevi provinces. This ancient road is still important as a main link connecting all south Caucasus countries with Russia. Hiking in fascinating Khada gorge. Picnic lunch. After the hike, meet with the driver and continue to Kazbegi. Dinner and overnight in local guesthouse. **(B/L/D)**

#### **Day 3 Kazbegi**

This morning hike up to Gergeti Trinity church dated back 14<sup>th</sup> century, located at 2180 m from where one can enjoy amazing view of Mt. Kazbeg. Continue hiking to Sabertse (3100 m). Picnic lunch. Descent to the centre of Kazbegi and back to guesthouse. Dinner and overnight. **(B/L/D)**

#### **Day 4 Kazbegi – Juta – Chaukhi – Tbilisi**

Breakfast. There will be a 4x4 drive till the village Juta. Start hiking towards Chaukhi Mountain massif. Picnic lunch. Drive back to Tbilisi. Transfer to hotel for rest. Overnight. **(B/L/-)**

#### **Day 5 Tbilisi Sightseeing Tour – Sadakhlo**

Breakfast. Brief sightseeing tour of Tbilisi – capital of Georgia from 5<sup>th</sup> century. The city is extraordinary for its turbulent history, elegant and remarkable architecture, destroyed and restored through centuries but keeping entire style of Georgian orthodox religion and traditions. Walk through old city. Visit to Metekhi church dated 13<sup>th</sup> century, Sulphur Baths, and Narikala fortress of 4<sup>th</sup> century.

This will be followed by a transfer to Georgia-Armenia border at Sadakhlo. After completing border formalities meet a new set of crew and continue to Armenia. Drive to Haghpat monastery, a journey of around 2 hours from the border through beautiful scenery. Haghpat, (10th century UNESCO Heritage site) used to be a spiritual, cultural and educational centre of the region. The monastery is one of the masterpieces of Armenian medieval architecture. We also visit Sanahin monastery a further masterpiece and UNESCO site dating to the same century. Overnight Qefo Hotel or similar **(B/L/-)**

#### **Day 6 Lake Parz and Goshavank complex**

We start today's walk from Lake Parz (1350 m). The road goes through thick forest, where you can find birch and oak trees and wide meadows on the way passing several little rivers and from where one can enjoy the beautiful scenery opening towards Ijevan Mountain Range. From the beautiful meadow we descend to the village of Gosh where Goshavank monastery is beautifully nestled.

Overnight in Dilijan. **(B/L/-)**

*Walking duration: 3-4 hours*

*Ascent 230m, descent 270m*

*Walking distance: 8 km*

*Hotel (breakfast, lunch and dinner)*

### **Day 7 Hike from Amberd Fortress to Byurakan (B/LB/-)**

Today's day starts with a transfer to Amberd fortress (2200 m). From here we start our hike towards Byurakan village. The route is about 8 km. From Amberd fortress, descend to Arkhashen canyon passing the river we ascend towards the forest where you can admire the oak trees, nice flowers. After passing 400-500 m you'll find yourself in Byurakan village. Drive to Yerevan/. **(B/L/-)**

Total walk- 5-6 hours

Ascent-500 m

Descent-700 m

Walking duration: 8 km

*Hotel (breakfast, lunch and dinner)*

### **Day 8. Garni-Geghard –hiking in canyon**

After breakfast drive to Geghard Cave Monastery (4-12 cc) World UNESCO Heritage site). The monastery is situated 40 km away from Yerevan and is partially carved in the scale, assuring the great acoustics of the sacred place.

Hiking along narrow serpentine near Azat River on the one side of which the great view of Khosrov national reserve is opened and from the other side stately the natural monument called Symphony of stones or Basalt organ is situated.

Walking high above the canyon you can admire the dramatic scenery of the canyon with rocky hewn Geghard monastery below till you descend to the canyon itself. The path leads through the meadows filled with fragrant flowers and as you continue to descend the views become more impressive after this descent we then continue with a downhill toward the Symphony of Stones- one of the geological wonders.

After hiking visit Garni pagan temple (1st century AD - World UNESCO Heritage sight) with king bath roman mosaic). Garni is the only pagan temple that remained in Armenia after adoption of Christianity from where the great panoramic view of Azat river gorge and Khosrov state reserve opens. Extremely touching duduk (national musical instrument made of apricot tree) performance will be organized in the temple.

**In 2005, UNESCO proclaimed the Armenian duduk music as a Masterpiece of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity**

Special Lunch will be organized at the house of an Armenian rural family (or in a local restaurant) with demonstration of Armenian Bread "Lavash" baking in an underground traditional oven - Tonir. The hosting family will also perform a master class of Armenian traditional barbeque making (marinated fresh lamb or pork or chicken), potato and seasonal vegetables (peppers, egg-plants, and tomatoes) prepared in Tonir. The group may take part in preparing/cooking these old and delicious food/meals in traditional Armenian way. There will be a hands-on cookery demonstration and culinary lesson of traditional Armenian sweet which is called by locals as Armenian "Snickers". Guided by the host – a local family from the village, the group may learn about the spices and utensils used in traditional barbeque, marinate fresh meat with herbs and garlic, later start barbeque-making in the wood burning oven in the ground. Meat, fresh tomatoes, eggplants and peppers take turns to become crusty, mouth-watering components of the finest barbeque you will ever have. The group can enjoy local apricot vodka/grappa in the cosy garden of this typical Armenian rural house and have a local spirit tasting. After lunch return to Yerevan. (B/L/-)

#### **Day 9.City tour-Echmiatsin**

Yerevan City Tour with a high-scale view point over the city, **City Park, Abovyan Street, Republic Square etc.** Visit Genocide **Memorial** and also the museum dedicated to the victims of the Great Genocide that took place in 1915 and the memorial with eternal fire. The Cascade with Gafesjian Centre of Art dedicated to bringing the best of contemporary art from all over the world to Armenia and presenting the best of Armenian culture to the world. Inspired by the vision of its founder, Mr. Gerard L. Cafesjian, the Centre offers a wide variety of exhibitions, the majority of which are derived from Mr. Cafesjian's own extensive collection of contemporary art.

**Matenadaran** – a Museum and Scientific Institute of ancient manuscripts, hosts the treasures of Armenian science and 20.000 ancient manuscripts – the largest collection in the world. The short tour in Matenadaran will be exclusively guided by the most prominent specialists of the Institute.

After lunch drive to Echmiatsin. Echmiadzin city (so called Armenian Vatican city) including Main Cathedral (303 AD World UNESCO Heritage). Reputed to be one of the world's oldest cathedrals, Echmiadzin (World UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site) is also a special place of pilgrimage for all Armenians around the world Echmiadzin is the official residence of the Catholikos (Highest clerical rank of Armenian Apostolic Church similar to the Pop for Catholics) of all Armenians. The Cathedral built in the IV century is the first official Christian Church in the World.

**Optional: Yerevan Brandy Factory.** ARARAT brandies are legendary, embodying Armenia, its cultural and historical heritage. This product has been an inalienable attribute of life for many generations.

And today it's on the most famous and successful brand in Armenia as well as worldwide. ARARAT has been preserving the traditions of brandy production since 1887. Only local varieties of grape with special properties are used in the production of an authentic Armenian brandy, based on the unique microclimate of the Ararat Valley. **Exclusively guided excursion** in the factory and degustation of various types/ages of famous Armenian Brandy at the Brandy Gallery. **(10 USD p/p)**

Welcome dinner in an authentic style restaurant with very nice and friendly atmosphere.

Drive back to the hotel. **(B/-/D)**

#### **Day 10 .Departure**

Transfer to airport.