

# A Journey Idea to Armenia, Azerbaijan & Georgia



Prepared for  
Steppes Travel Clients  
14 Days

## QUICK REFERENCE ITINERARY

Day 1	Fly London Heathrow/Yerevan
Day 2	Yerevan
Day 3	Yerevan
Day 4	Drive Yerevan/Lake Sevan/Dilijan
Day 5	Drive Dilijan (Armenia)/Tbilisi
Day 6	Tbilisi
Day 7	Drive Tbilisi/Telavi
Day 8	Drive Telavi/Tbilisi
Day 9	Drive Tbilisi/Kazbegi
Day 10	Kazbegi
Day 11	Drive Kazbegi/Tbilisi. Train Tbilisi/Baku (overnight)
Day 12	Arrive Baku
Day 13	Baku
Day 14	Fly Baku/London Heathrow

## YOUR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

DATE	ROUTE	FLT NO.	CHECK IN	DEPART	ARRIVE
Day 1	London Heathrow Term 1/Yerevan	BD931	12:10	14:10	23:10
Day 14	Baku/London Heathrow Term 1	BD928	06:30	08:30	10:30



# DETAILED TRIP ITINERARY

## Day 1



### Fly Heathrow/Yerevan

This afternoon depart London Heathrow on the British Midland flight to Yerevan. Following your arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel. An early check in will be booked for your immediate occupancy.

## Day 2



### Yerevan

The morning is at leisure.

In the afternoon begin your sightseeing programme. Visit Matenadaran, a depository of ancient manuscripts and one of the world's finest libraries containing no fewer than 14,000 documents. The oldest illustrated manuscript is the Etchmiadzin Gospel dating from AD989 and the oldest book written in Armenian dating from AD1512 and printed in Venice.

Continue on to visit the largest church in Yerevan, that of St Gregory the Illuminator. It was built in 2000 AD to celebrate the 1,700 yr anniversary of Christianity. Like most Armenian churches it is simple but unusual in that it has pews.

Finally, visit the Genocide Memorial and Museum. Located on a hilltop overlooking the city it is a powerful reminder of Armenia's turbulent and violent history. A 44m black stele rises into the sky symbolising the survival and spiritual rebirth of Armenia. The museum was added in 1995 on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacres.

*Overnight at your hotel (Breakfast).*

## Day 3



### Yerevan

Today you have a full day trip outside the city. Khor Virap Monastery sits on the Arats Plain 20 minutes south of the capital and is utterly dwarfed by Mount Ararat, which rises majestically behind it. This is the proud site of Armenia's adoption of Christianity in around 300AD. Khor Virap literally means 'big hole' and the man responsible for Armenia's religious renaissance, St Gregory the Illuminator, was reportedly thrown into one (at Khor Virap) as a punishment by Trdat III.

See Geghard church, which means 'Holy Lance' - a reference to that used to pierce Jesus' side as he hung on the cross. Several dark chambers display intricate carvings only just discernable in the flickering candlelight. Forged into the rock behind the main church is another chapel, which has the most incredible acoustics. You may encounter small animal sacrifices here (as at other churches in Armenia).

On the outskirts of Yerevan visit Etchmiadzin. Etchmiadzin means 'the coming of the Only Begotten' and is the religious

centre of Armenia. Legend has it that Jesus Christ descended from Heaven to indicate the perfect location for a church and this is now the seat of the Supreme Catholicos of the Armenians. Inside the main church you can also see what are (allegedly) the Holy Lance and a piece of Noah's Ark.

*Overnight at your hotel (Breakfast).*

#### Day 4



#### Yerevan/Lake Sevan/Dilijan

Depart after breakfast for Dilijan visiting Lake Sevan en route.

The lake is well known for the many different colours that the water turns, depending on the weather, which can change rapidly. Rolling mist can often be seen racing down the hills that surround the lake. Two churches, part of Sevan Monastery (Sevanavank) on the edge of Lake Sevan, Arakelots (874 AD) and Astvatsatin, now sit on a peninsula rather than the island on which they were built after over irrigation by the former Soviet authorities. Walk up to churches and beyond to the summit for fine 360° views of the lake and surrounding land. There are many small restaurants by the lakeshore serving tasty lake fish.

In the afternoon continue to Dilijan, just over an hour away via the Sevan pass (2114m) through hills covered with deciduous trees.

The two monastic complexes of Haghartsin and Goshavank are well worth seeing. They have some interesting features and are in beautiful locations. After leaving the main road and after travelling for about 15 min through beech forest you will arrive at Haghartsin monastery. There is a well-preserved refectory (1248 AD) and just beyond it, outside, is a ruined kitchen and oven. There are 3 churches here and a small chapel.

The Goshavank complex (1188 AD) has one large main church and two smaller chapels. There is a wonderful engraved khachkar near the entrance, which is said to be the finest in Armenia. In the main church (1191 AD) carved letters go half way up the wall. There is also an interesting library (1231 AD) but no books.

*Overnight at the 4\* Dilijan Resort or 4\* Old Dilijan Tufenkian Complex (Breakfast, lunch).*

#### Day 5



#### Dilijan/Tbilisi

This morning you will be taken to the Armenia/Georgian border to meet your Georgian guide. Before continuing to Tbilisi visit both Haghbat and Sanahin monasteries both UNESCO World heritage sites and both dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The two monastic complexes represent the highest flowering of Armenian religious architecture, whose unique style developed from a blending of elements of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture and the traditional vernacular architecture of the Caucasian region.

The name Sanahin literally translates from Armenian as "this one is older than that one", presumably representing a claim to having an older monastery than the neighbouring Haghpat. The two villages and their monasteries are similar in many ways, and lie in plain view of each other on a dissected plateau formation, separated by a deep "crack" formed by a small river flowing into the Debed river. Haghbat monastery was founded

by Saint Nishan (Sourb Nshan) during the reign of King Abas I.  
*On arrival in Tbilisi check in to your hotel (Breakfast).*

## Day 6



### Tbilisi

Spend the full day sightseeing. The National Museum houses an extraordinary collection of pre-Christian gold and silver as well as collections of archaeology, history and ethnography. A good view of the city can be had from the 4<sup>th</sup> century Narikala Fortress that stands on a hill above the gorge of the Mtkvari River. Take a walk in the old town where Tbilisi's sun-warmed streets are lined with an assortment of leaning houses, their wooden balconies trailing pot-plants. The ancient bath houses still function, their domed roofs poking above the roofline. You may be lucky enough to witness a service at one of the many churches and you will see the Sioni Cathedral.

*Overnight at your hotel (Breakfast).*

## Day 7



### Tbilisi/Telavi

You will set out today from Tbilisi on a circuit to David Garezhe, the 6<sup>th</sup> century monastic complex which housed 6,000 monks at it's height in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Now just a handful remain. Set in the middle of near desert it is a lonely and spiritual place close to the Azeri border. John the Baptist monastery is the simplest of the three associated with the complex with a watchtower and various caves. The Lavra monastery is quite idyllic and the most complete in structure. A steep 30 to 45 minute climb over a hill will bring you to the Udabno Monastery. This is undoubtedly the most stunningly remote and wild of the three. Entirely carved into a steep cliff and overlooking the wild Azeri plains it also boasts some beautiful 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century frescoes.

The path can be unstable here and visitors must wear sensible footwear and proceed carefully. **Please be aware that many poisonous snakes inhabit the undergrowth and the shade of the rocks and caves.**

Continue north to Telavi, the centre of the Georgia's biggest wine growing region, Kakheti. Before arriving in Telavi stop in the fortified walled hill-town of Signagi. There are usually fine views of the Kakheti area and eastern Caucasus summits. It is an eclectic mix of old and new. The old section has narrow cobbled streets lined with typical houses complete with wooden balconies and shuttered windows.

*Overnight in home stay or 3\* Rcheuli Marani Hotel (Breakfast, lunch).*

## Day 8



### Telavi/Tbilisi

Today you will visit Alaverdi, Georgia's tallest church. It is only a half hour drive from Telavi and beautifully set on a flat plain with the Caucasus main range for a backdrop. Sometimes buffalo graze nearby and fields of sunflowers bloom in the late summer. 10 km outside the city surrounded by beautiful mature forest is Shuamta. There are two parts; Dzveli (old) Shuamta which consists of three churches dating from 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries hidden away in a clearing on a hillside and Akhali (new) Shuamta with frescoes of King Leon of Kakheti,

Queen Tinatin and their son Alexander. You will then return to Telavi and visit the King's Palace, former home of King Arakli II who proudly sits mounted on a bronze horse at the entrance. Inside the palace is a small museum of history and ethnography and in the grounds two small churches dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

You will return to Tbilisi today visiting en-route the house-museum of Alexander Chavchavadze at Tsinandali. The national poet counted Pushkin amongst his friends and was the godson of Catherine the Great. His pretty Italianate villa contains family portraits and furniture and is set in beautiful gardens and woods. If they are open, you may be able to visit the Tsinandali cellars and sample some of the estate's wine. (wine tasting is not included). Before reaching Tbilisi you will also visit the church at Ninotsminda, a picturesque ruin with some good frescoes if time permits.

*Overnight at your hotel (Breakfast, lunch).*

## Day 9



### Tbilisi/Mtskheta/Ananauri/Kazbegi

After breakfast, head north up the Georgian Military Highway towards Kazbegi.

Your first stop will be in Mtskheta, about 40 minutes from Tbilisi. Mtskheta lies in a lush valley on the confluence of two rivers, the Aragvi and the Mtkvari. It is overlooked by the marvellously simple church of Dzhvari (586), a perfect example of early Georgian Christian architecture. You will also visit the Sveti Tsikhoveli, Georgia's largest remaining church and burial place of the Georgian kings, notably members of the Bagration family. It has an extraordinary interior combining paintings, frescoes and small bettel, a domed chapel used for the Christmas service.



After a further ½ hour you will stop at Ananauri Fortress. The one time home of the tyrannical Aragvi dynasty sits in a green valley overlooking the Aragvi Valley and Zhinvali Reservoir.

Continue North to Kazbegi driving deeper into the Caucasus Mountains.

*Overnight at the 3\* Stepantsminda Hotel (Breakfast, lunch, dinner).*

## Day 10



### Kazbegi

Kazbegi was named after one of Georgia's most famous national poets. Kiosks line the square selling anything from fizzy drinks to dried, salted fish. The main street is flanked by poplar trees and, if you look up, you will see the snow-capped tip of Mount Kazbek, Georgia's highest mountain. From the town you can walk up to the Trinity Church standing on a wide ridge with spectacular views of the surrounding area. (It is also possible to drive to the church for a supplement payable locally).

*Overnight at the 3\* Stepantsminda Hotel (Breakfast, lunch, dinner).*

## Day 11



### Tbilisi/Baku

This morning you will return to Tbilisi and continue your sightseeing programme.

Visit Mtatsminda - Holy Mountain or David Mountain named in honour of St. David Garezhi who lived as a recluse in a cave on one of its slopes. From the mountain you will also have fine views of the city. Finally, visit the Open-air Ethnography Museum which displays examples of folk architecture and craftwork from various regions of the country. The museum is located west to Turtle Lake. It is essentially a historic village populated by buildings moved there from all main territorial subdivisions of Georgia.

Later this afternoon you will be transferred to the railway station for the overnight train to Baku. The train departs at 17.00 (subject to change).

*Overnight on board train (Breakfast, lunch).*

## Day 12



### Arrive Baku

The train arrives in Baku at 10.20. You will be met and taken to a local restaurant or hotel for breakfast. You will then depart for your days sightseeing programme.

Baku nestles in a bay and offers stunning views from the surrounding hillsides. Built on a site inhabited since the Palaeolithic period, the Walled City of Baku reveals evidence of Zoroastrian, Sasanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian presence in cultural continuity. The Inner City (Icheri Sheher) has preserved much of its 12th-century defensive walls. There are also magnificent 19<sup>th</sup> century mansions built by the wealthy oil barons.

Visit the Maiden's Tower that was originally at the water's edge. The 12th-century tower (Giz Galasy) is built over earlier structures dating from the 7th to 6th centuries BC.

Later stroll in the old town and see the many old buildings, many of which are shops, and the various caravanserais that dot the atmospheric area. Some of these caravanserais are now restaurants. Finally, see the 15<sup>th</sup> century Shirvan Shah Palace. This is the biggest monument of the Shirvan-Absheron branch of architecture, situated in the Inner City of Baku. The complex contains the main building of the palace, Divanhane, the burial-vaults, the shah's mosque with a minaret, Seyid Yahya Bakuvi's mausoleum, a portal in the east - Murad's gate, a reservoir and the remnants of the bath-house.

Return to your hotel mid-afternoon.

*Overnight at your hotel (Breakfast).*

## Day 13

### Baku

This morning travel outside the city to the Absheron Peninsula. The peninsula has a number of natural and man-made structures worth looking at. Azerbaijan has built its wealth on oil and here on the peninsula is evidence of it as oil wells are much in evidence.

Visit the Zoroastrian Temple of Fire (Ateshgyah) which, since

the 6<sup>th</sup> century, has been a centre of worship although the present temple dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The square temple courtyard housed the main fire and small rooms that surround the outer walls provided accommodation for the pilgrims and priests. In the small village of Amircon see the mosque and finally see the natural phenomenon that is Yanardag. This is burning crater of natural gas. The peninsula was once covered in them and they were mentioned by Marco Polo in his travels during the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The afternoon is at leisure.

*Overnight at your hotel (Breakfast).*

## **Day 14**

### **Baku/London Heathrow**

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for the British Midland flight to London Heathrow arriving in London later the same afternoon. *(Breakfast).*

## TRIP PRICE

<b>Prices:</b>	<p>Staying at hotels listed plus following options in Yerevan, Tbilisi &amp; Baku</p> <p>£3,550.00 per person in 3* hotels -</p> <p>Yerevan / Shirak Hotel or University Guesthouse Tbilisi / City Hotel Baku / Noah's Ark Hotel</p> <p>£3,715.00 per person in 4* hotels -</p> <p>Yerevan / Ani Plaza or Tufenkian Avan Villa Tbilisi / Courtyard by Marriott Baku / Azcot Hotel</p> <p>£3920.00 per person in 5* hotels -</p> <p>Yerevan / Golden Tulip Hotel Tbilisi / Tbilisi Marriott Baku / Atropat Hotel</p>
<b>Includes:</b>	<p>International flights in Economy Class, air passenger taxes where they can be collected as part of the air tickets PLUS</p> <p><b>Armenia</b> - Accommodation in twin/double room (including early check in in Yerevan), meals as indicated, transfers &amp; transportation (air-conditioned car), sightseeing programme where specified and entrance fees to tourist sites, English speaking guide to accompany clients on all long distance road journeys, permissions necessary.</p> <p><b>Georgia</b> - Accommodation in twin/double room, meals as indicated, transfers &amp; transportation (air-conditioned car, 1<sup>st</sup> Class 2 berth train compartment), sightseeing programme where specified and entrance fees to tourist sites, English speaking guide to accompany clients on all long distance road journeys, permissions necessary.</p> <p><b>Azerbaijan</b> - Accommodation in twin/double room, meals as indicated, transfers &amp; transportation (air-conditioned car), sightseeing programme where specified with English speaking guide and entrance fees to tourist sites, permissions necessary, Azeri visa support letter.</p>
<b>Excludes:</b>	<p>Visas (no visa required for British passport holders to Georgia. Armenian visa can be obtained on arrival for USD50 per person / subject to change. Visas for Azerbaijan must be obtained in advance), travel insurance, items of a personal nature, camera/video fees, meals unless indicated, early check in or late check out at hotels unless indicated, gratuities.</p>

**Notes:**

The international air fares that we use are special discounted IT (inclusive tour) fares, which, whilst good value for money do carry strict booking conditions (e.g. have to be bought in conjunction with elements on the ground and are subject to certain restrictions, conditions and class availability).

Prices are based on twin/double room/compartments and are subject to availability at the time of booking.

The rates quoted are subject to the availability of all services, currency fluctuations, written confirmation and Steppes Travels terms and conditions.

**Please note** that the above is only a suggested journey, allowing in-depth visits to the highlights of these countries and the chance to explore the wide range of possibilities. We specialise in tailoring individual itineraries to your particular interests and requirements. This journey idea serves more as a general guide on what there is to see and do, as well as a guide on price.

## Why Travel with Steppes?

Steppes Travel was founded in 1989 with the objective of creating a travel company where service and knowledge are of the highest priority. We aim to design itineraries and include the highlights of any country, whilst taking travellers off the beaten track to see lesser known, interesting places not frequented by large numbers of tourists. We offer individuals the ability to travel safely in remote areas, with the knowledge that we have travelled there before.

### Financial Protection

Steppes Travel is a fully bonded tour operator that complies with the Civil Aviation Authority bonding conditions of the UK. This fully guarantees your money in the unlikely event of us going out of business before you start your holiday. Our ATOL number is 6945 and we have full insurance to cover the financial failure of an airline. In addition, all accommodation-only bookings (such as hotels, lodges and boats) which are not covered by the ATOL regulations are financially protected with all payments being held in a separate trust account until the date of departure. This is in accordance with the Package Travel Regulations Act 1992.

### Specialist Knowledge

We demand and employ only a very high calibre of staff. All of our specialists have a wealth of travel experience and have travelled, and continue to travel, extensively throughout their regions of specialisation. You can therefore rely on their first hand knowledge and expertise. Some have been with us for more than ten years. They will tell you about those intimate, friendly hotels and introduce you to our charismatic guides - those little extra qualities that make your holiday both unique and special.

### A Tailor-made Journey

After an initial discussion with you, one of our specialists will create a unique itinerary for your trip, designed around your own interests, preferred style of accommodation and the pace at which you like to travel. This will be fine tuned until you are completely satisfied with it. Throughout this whole process, you will be dealt with by the same specialist and you are welcome to call them at any time.

### 24 hour Emergency Service

We have an emergency service so that we can be contacted 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Recognition

More than 65% of our business is achieved through recommendations, referrals and repeat bookings. This, for us, is the highest endorsement we could have. In addition, our 20 years of experience in this specialist travel sector confirms our expertise.

**Please contact Steppes Travel on 01285 880 980 or visit our website [www.steppestravel.co.uk](http://www.steppestravel.co.uk) for further information.**