

Armenia Discovery



HIGHLIGHTS

This trip takes in the best of Armenia's varied landscape and splendid cultural heritage. We travel to the verdant north with its hidden churches. We then visit 2000 metre Lake Sevan and Selim Caravansaray on our way to the south, where we venture into the Zangezur Mountains to Tatev monastery, hike Vorotan Gorge, with some spectacular hiking. Finally we travel north visiting Noravank and Khor Virap (pictured above) monasteries before returning to Armenia's capital, Yerevan which we use as a base for visiting the Garni pagan temple and the world's oldest official church at Echmiadzin.

GUIDE – MATT MALCOMSON & ANDREY CHESNOKOV

Matt became interested in Armenia in the 90s while travelling in the region, and soon became involved in a sustainable tourism project and also studying the Armenian language. He returned to the UK in 2005 and set up Oxalis Holidays.

Andrey is originally from Russia but came to Armenia during the Soviet period and has since settled here and is now an Armenian citizen. He has 21 years experience of trekking and mountain climbing in the Armenian mountains and speaks fluent English and Armenian apart from his native Russian. Andrey is one of our in-country guides for our Armenia trips and has a wealth of experience leading foreigners through the natural splendours of the Armenian landscape. He is a member of the Armenian Alpinism Federation.



14 days, 13 nights

Van-supported walking and hiking visiting the highlights of ancient Armenia.
Accommodation in hotels, tents.

Meet/Depart:

Yerevan Airport

Places visited:

Yerevan · Ashtarak · Agarak · Dilijan · Lake Sevan · Selim Caravansarai · Yegheghis village · Karahunj ancient observatory · Khndzoresk caves · Tatevi Anapat monastery · Lernashen village · Vorohtnavank monastery · Noravank monastery · Khor Virap monastery · Echmiadzin

Level :

Moderate

The tour includes 10 days of hiking, mostly 5 - 10 km per day. Travel between hiking locations is by minibus, so you only need to carry a daypack while hiking.

Dates:

Saturday August 26 - Friday September 8 2006

Group size:

Maximum: 8 Clients Minimum: 2 Clients

Prices for 2006:

Group size 2 or 3 £1,450/€2,095/\$2,545
Group size 4 to 8 £1,195/€1,725 /\$2,095

Includes:

All domestic transport, accommodation, meals

Does not include:

International Flights, drinks with meals

Booking

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INTRODUCTION

Yerevan · Ashtarak · Agarak · Dilijan · Lake Sevan · Selim Caravansarai · Yegheghis village · Karahunj ancient observatory · Khndzoresk caves · Tatevi Anapat monastery · Lernashen village · Vorotnavank monastery · Noravank monastery · Khor Virap monastery · Echmiadzin

Our trip takes us through the varied landscapes of northern and southern Armenia. At every turn we will discover ancient stone churches, small villages, humbling mountain landscapes and the heartfelt hospitality that only a country where mass tourism has not arrived could offer.

The first half of the tour takes in the bronze age sites and stone churches of northern Armenia, nearly always in the shadow of Mount Aragats, Armenia's highest mountain at 4,000 metres. In Armenia's northern provinces, near to the border with Georgia, we search out monasteries and churches, often in remote locations in the mountains. Interspersed with exhilarating walking and hiking, we find khachkars (stone crosses) reminiscent of the Celtic crosses of Ireland, and pass through rural villages.

Moving on via dramatic Lake Sevan, one of the world's highest lakes at 2,000 metres, we pass to the south of Armenia, the Zangezur region, bordered by Azerbaijan and Iran. Dramatically situated Tatev Monastery overlooking the Vorotan Gorge, built in the 9th century and at one time home to more than 1,000 monks, was an important centre of learning from the early 10th century and there are frescoes as well as intricate wooden carvings.

From Tatev we travel north to Vorotnavank and Noravank Monasteries before visiting Khor Virap Monastery, which sits below the towering Mount Ararat, the biblical landing site of Noah's Ark.

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY:

DAYS 1-2: ARRIVAL IN YEREVAN

You will be met at Yerevan Airport, and then transferred to your hotel in central Yerevan. There will be time to relax followed by a city tour. We will visit Erebuny fortress (782 B.C.) and museum. Afterwards we will have lunch at a local restaurant. Lastly we will visit the State Museum of the History. Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

DAY 3: TRAVEL TO ASHTARAK AND DEGHERI VANK MONASTERY (4 miles hiking: Approximately 2 hours)

We will travel north of Yerevan by road to the provincial town of Ashtarak, with its many churches. The oldest of the churches is Tsiranavor (5th century). Lunch. From Ashtarak our next stop is Hamberd fortress and churches, built in the 11th and 13th centuries lying on the mountain slopes below Mount Aragats. Amberd lost its significance of a strategic citadel in the period following the invasions of the Turks and the Tatars, and was completely ruined by Tamerlane at the end of the 14th century. The remains of the citadel walls and the castle, the church, the royal bathhouse, and some other buildings have survived. Following the visit we will travel towards Degheri Vank monastery (13th century). Dinner and camping near the monastery.



DAY 4: AGARAK (3 miles hiking: Approximately 1.5 hours)

Leaving camp we will travel by road to the early Bronze Age site of Agarak and Dashtadem village and fortress (10-19th centuries).

Our next stop will be Horom, a citadel from the Urartian Kingdom of the 1st millennium B.C. It is one of the most impressive of its kind in Armenia. Following lunch, we will visit Benyamin village and site of early Bronze Age.

Our last stop for day will be the impressive Marmashen monastery (10-13 centuries) sitting north of the city of Gyumri and near the Turkish border, which includes four churches built between 986 and 1029 by Prince Vahram Pahlavuni. This impressive monastic complex, 8km far from Gyumri, sits in a picturesque spot with fruit trees above the Akhuryan River, beside a stream that ends in a waterfall. Dinner and camping near the monastery.



DAY 5: KARAKHACH MOUNTAIN PASS (5 miles hiking: Approximately 2.5 hours)

We will hike this morning to the massive Khuchapi vank monastery (13th century), which stands as high as a five story building. Khuchapi is situated on Armenia's northern border with Georgia, in a thick forest at the foot of Lalvar Mountain. You will notice the beautiful coloured stones and intricate carvings. Following lunch we will travel to Stepanavan and hike to Lori-Berd fortress, a former feudal capital of Armenia, famed for its excellent fortifications aided by the steep surrounding ravines. Dinner and camping.



DAY 6: ODZUN, SANAHIN AND HAGHPAT (4 miles hiking: Approximately 2 hours)

Today we start off at Dendro Park, a 35 hectare botanical garden, founded in 1931. Next we visit Odzun Church, with its 6th century funeral monument.

The Sanahin and Haghpat monasteries, which we visit next, are outstanding examples of Armenian architecture, and were important as places of learning with the studying of medicine and science. Built around the 10th and 11th centuries, there are numerous churches and other monastic buildings, as well as many khachkars (stone crosses).

Odzun village and basilica (6th c.). Visit Sanahin and Haghpat monastic complexes (10-13 cc.). Lunch. Noyemberan. Visit Makaravank monastery (10-13 cc.), hiking in the forest. Dinner and camping near Achajur village. **Hiking 2-2,5km**

DAY 7: DILIJAN (4 miles hiking: Approximately 2 hours)

Dilijan, with its lovely 19th century wooden houses and verdant hills, makes a restful stop before we hike through the forest to Haghartsin monastery (10-13 centuries). We will eat lunch here and then travel to Lake Sevan, at 2,000 metres one of the world's highest lakes. We will eat dinner and stay at a hotel near the lake.

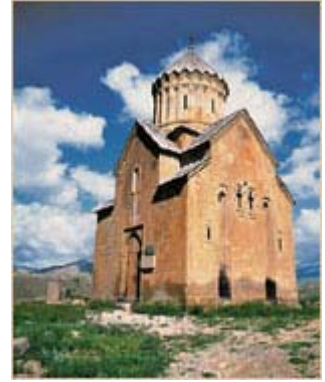


DAY 8: SEVAN TO VAYOTS DZOR (7 miles hiking: Approximately 3 hours)

Today you will see the contrast in landscapes between the north of south Armenia, as we drive south over the Selim mountain pass to the drier more dramatic south. On the way we will stop at the Selim Caravansary, built in 1332 as a place of rest for travelers by Prince Chesar Orbelian. As we descend into the Vayots-Dzor region, we will visit Yeghegis village and hike towards Tsakhats-Kar monastery (10-11 centuries) and Smbataberd fortress (5-10 cc.) which sits high in the mountains. The visit will be followed by dinner and camping.

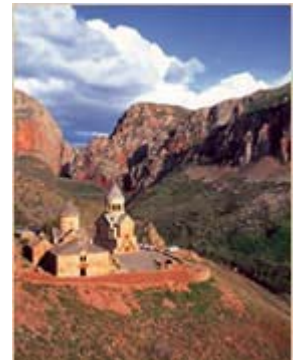
DAY 9: KARAHUNJ AND KHNDZORESK (3 miles hiking: Approximately 1.5 hours)

Zoratskarer, also known as Karahunj, is an ancient observatory from the 5th to 3rd millennium B.C. Its layout is similar to stone circles in the UK and Ireland, although Zoratskarer is indeed several thousand years older than Stonehenge and the stones are smaller and more worn. Its position near the Vоротan Gorge and beneath the Mets Ishkhanasar mountain is very evocative. We will next drive to Khndzoresk – an ancient village carved out of rocks. The area is ideal for exploring and we will hike for about 3 miles through the gorge. After lunch we will drive to Bheno-Noravank monastery (10-11 centuries). Dinner and camping near the monastery.



Day 10: TATEV AND THE VOROTAN GORGE (5 miles hiking: Approximately 2.5 hours)

Tatev Monastery sits in a spectacular position high above the Vоротan Gorge. In its heyday home to more than 1,000 monks and an important place of learning in medieval Armenia. The surrounding area is dotted with small villages and walking trails. We will descend into the gorge and hike beside the Vоротan river, visiting Devil's Bridge and its warm mineral springs. After lunch we will drive to Tatev monastery, eat dinner overnight in tents near the monastery.



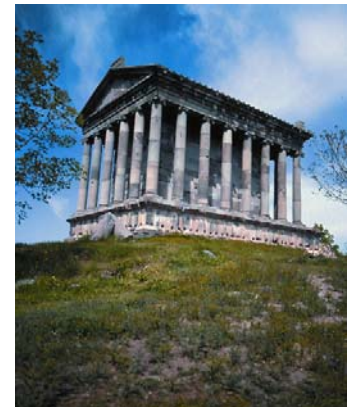
DAY 11: DRIVE TO VAYOTS DZOR REGION (9 miles hiking: Approximately 3.5 hours)

From Tatev we will hike for about 9 miles to the village of Lernashen. From there we will drive to the Vayots Dzor region, visiting on the way the hot mineral springs near Vоротan village and the isolated Vоротnavank monastery (10-13 centuries). After lunch we will visit the 7th century tomb monument in Aghoudi village, Shaki waterfall. Drive towards Gndevank monastery, founded by Princess Sophia and built in the 10th century. Surrounded by high cliffs, the monastery itself is enclosed in fortress-like walls. We will enjoy dinner and camping in a beautiful setting near the monastery.

DAY 12: TRAVEL TO YEREVAN

On our return to Yerevan today we will visit Noravank monastery (13-14 centuries) and travel through the Ararat Valley in the shadow of the 5,165 metre Mount Ararat. You will taste the delicious apricot and grapes of which the famous Armenian wine and brandy are made. Next we will stop at Khor-Virap monastery (4-17 centuries), widely known for its fortress and underground prisons where the establisher of Christianity in Armenia, Grigor Lousavorich (the Illuminator) was kept in confinement for seventeen years and finally won his freedom after he cured King Trdat and in 301 baptized Armenians.

Echmiadzin is the centre of the Armenian Church and seat of the Armenian Patriarch, and we will visit the cathedral from 303 A.D. After lunch we will visit Zvartnotz temple (7th century) and then return to Yerevan. Dinner will be at a local restaurant. Overnight at Yerevan hotel.



DAY 13: YEREVAN (3 miles hiking: Approximately 1.5 hours)

On our last day we will drive to Garni, a pagan temple from the 1st century. From there we will hike to Havuts Tar monastery and have lunch. Afterwards we will visit the Geghard monastery complex, which was begun in the 4th century, and was partly carved out of solid rock.

We will return to Yerevan for our farewell dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at the hotel.

DAY 14: DEPARTURE

Transfer to the airport, departure.

TRIP NOTES

Equipment & Clothing

When we receive your booking we send you a dossier, which contains a suggested gear and clothing list. If you do have queries at this initial stage do ring us and we will be pleased to offer advice.

Hotels

5 nights in modern comfortable hotels in Yerevan and Lake Sevan. 8 nights camping in locations throughout Armenia. All tents, sleeping bags, kitchen equipment and food is carried by the guides.

Please note that single rooms are normally only available in hotels – where a single room supplement may apply.

Meal Plan

All meals are provided.

Important Notes

Every effort will be made to keep to the above itinerary, but we cannot make absolute guarantees! Changes to the itinerary will normally be to introduce an improvement. Weather conditions, road and transport conditions, and the health of walkers can all contribute to changes. The guide will ensure that the trip runs according to plan, but an easy-going nature is an asset!