

*Full Itinerary*

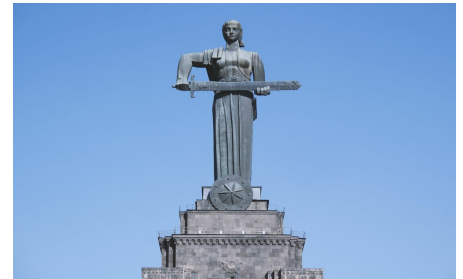
## HIGHLIGHTS OF GEORGIA & ARMENIA



TALK TO OUR WELL TRAVELLED TEAM OF EXPERTS

0844 3350 197

Monday to Friday 09:00 - 18:00 GMT



### JOURNEY SNAPSHOT

**ACTIVITY LEVEL:**

Level 2

**DESTINATION:**

Highlights of Georgia & Armenia

**DURATION:**

13 days / 12 nights

**FLIGHT INFORMATION:**

Please arrange your flights to arrive into Yerevan Airport [EVN], Armenia on Day 1 and depart from Tbilisi Airport [TBS], Georgia on Day 13

**PICKUP LOCATION:**

Yerevan Airport [EVN], Armenia

## OVERVIEW

Choose your own departure date for your group.

Discover the highlights of Armenia & Georgia as we showcase the cultural & natural highlights the Caucasus Region has to offer. From historic churches, local handicrafts, wine tasting & fantastic food, you'll be enthralled by the region!

In the Caucasus Mountains lie the fascinating countries of Armenia and Georgia, each with its own distinct history and culture. Surrounded by showstopping natural beauty, the area is filled with history.

From some of the world's oldest churches, we'll also discover pagan temples, and cities where Orthodox and Gregorian chapels lie alongside synagogues and mosques. Along the way, we'll stop at ancient caravan sites of the Silk Road and explore the oldest wine production area in the world! We'll visit handicraft markets, taste local produce like cheese and dumplings, and be treated to a unique concert in a UNESCO World Heritage rock church!

This new tour will really showcase the highlights Armenia & Georgia have to offer!

## ITINERARY SUMMARY

**DAY 1** - Welcome to Yerevan

**DAY 2** - Discovering Yerevan

**DAY 3** - Zvartnots, Ejmiatsin & Ararat Brandy

**DAY 4** - Monasteries, Temples & Markets

**DAY 5** - Historic Churches & Wineries

**DAY 6** - Bridges, Cable Cars & Gorges

**DAY 7** - Karahunj, Armenia's Stonehenge

**DAY 8** - Crossing the Border to Georgia

**DAY 9** - Tales of Tbilisi

**DAY 10** - Georgia's Historic Capital & Royal Family

**DAY 11** - Kazbegi & Khinkali Dumplings

**DAY 12** - Kakheti, the "Cradle of Wine" & Signaghi, the "City of Love"

**DAY 13** - Goodbye, Georgia

## FULL ITINERARY

### DAY 1 - WELCOME TO YEREVAN

Welcome to Armenia.

Upon arrival at Yerevan Airport, you will be met and transferred to your hotel in the city, Armenia's capital.

The day is at leisure for you to explore the beautiful sights of the capital Yerevan at your own pace before we join together this evening for a dinner in a local restaurant.

N.B - As most international flights arrive into Yerevan very early morning, accommodation is reserved from the night prior to allow for early check-in

**Included meals:** Dinner

**Accommodation:** Yerevan

### DAY 2 - DISCOVERING YEREVAN

Today we will enjoy a city tour of Yerevan.

During our tour, we will pass by the most beautiful sights in Yerevan such as the Republic Square, home of over 3000 years' of history and the Opera and Ballet Theatre, projected by the architect of Yerevan, Aleksander Tamanyan.

Afterwards, we will admire the enchanting panorama of Yerevan and the biblical Mount Ararat from the top of the Cascade Monument before a brief visit to the Cafesjian Museum of Modern Art and the treasury of the Armenian manuscripts - Matenadaran, before stopping at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex, dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

Our last stop for today is a visit to a local Duduk master. The Duduk is a traditional Armenian woodwind instrument known for its impressive, beautiful sound. We will learn about the history of duduk and enjoy the performance while savoring coffee in the master's garden.

We return to the hotel to freshen up before a welcome dinner at a traditional Armenian Restaurant with a folk show.

**Included meals:** Breakfast & Dinner

**Accommodation:** Yerevan

### DAY 3 - ZVARTNOTS, EJMIATSIN & ARARAT BRANDY

After having breakfast at the hotel, we will drive out of the city to Zvartnots Temple.

Built in the 7th century and now lying in ruins, Zvartnots is noted for its circular exterior structure, unique in medieval Armenian architecture before heading to visit the Holy Seat of Ejmiatsin - one of the first Christian churches in the world. Built in 301-303 AD and designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site, it is called the "Mother Cathedral of Ejmiatsin" by Armenians, being among the most ancient examples of Christian architecture anywhere in the world. Many scholars contend Ejmiatsin Cathedral, is the oldest Christian cathedral in the world.

This afternoon we will also visit the world famous Ararat Brandy Factory, which is one of Armenia's must-visit places. Here we'll learn about the factory's history on a guided tour of the museum and have an opportunity to taste the best types of brandy.

**Included meals:** Breakfast & Lunch

**Accommodation:** Yerevan

### DAY 4 - MONASTERIES, TEMPLES & MARKETS

This morning we will drive to Geghard Monastery. Inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage list. it is known locally as "Ayrivank", which means the "church carved out from the rock". There is a myth about the healing water sourced inside the church, according to which, it can cure any sickness when you drink a sip of it.

Here we will enjoy an exclusive vocal concert, performed in the monastery especially for us. The sacred music and the incredible acoustics will make it an unforgettable experience.

From here we will drive to Garni Pagan Temple. Dating back to the 1st century AD, the temple holds immense historical and cultural value. Standing on a hilltop overlooking the dramatic Azat River Gorge and surrounded by breathtaking natural beauty, it was initially built as a place of worship dedicated to the sun god, Mihr.

Here at a local house we will have our lunch and will have an opportunity to participate in baking Lavash (Armenian traditional thin bread).

We will drive back to Yerevan where we'll visit Vernissage Market, one of the most popular hotspots for both tourists and locals, showcasing a wide variety of traditional Armenian crafts, artworks, souvenirs, antiques, jewellery, textiles, and many more.

**Included meals:** Breakfast & Lunch

**Accommodation:** Yerevan

## DAY 5 - HISTORIC CHURCHES & WINERIES

We depart Yerevan after breakfast as we head into Armenia.

We'll first visit Khor Virap, the cradle of Armenian Christianity. The monastery complex here, now a pilgrimage site, sits on a rocky outcrop above the river plain, and offers a magnificent view of Mount Ararat. Khor Virap plays an integral role in the history of Armenia due to the legend of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the first Armenian Catholicos, who was imprisoned there for 13 years.

Then we'll drive to Vayots Dzor province to visit Areni -1 cave, with an exciting and mysterious past. Archaeological excavations in the cave led to the discovery of the earliest known winery in the world, dating back some 6100-years as well as the world's oldest shoe, a 5,500- year-old leather shoe! Researchers mention that the winery consists of fermentation vats, a wine press, storage jars and pottery sherds. Near the winery there were grape seeds, remains of pressed grapes, prunes and desiccated vines.

Here at a modern day local family-owned winery we will have lunch and wine tasting and will learn about wine production history in this region.

Our final stop will be Noravank – a 13th century Monastery. The view from the gorge in Noravank is breathtaking, the rocks resembling ancient sculptures, towering high above the valley floor. The gorge is deep and narrow, adding to the dramatic effect of the scene. The colours of the rocks change according to the angle of the sun, from shades of grey to brown and orange. We continue on to Goris, our base for the next two nights where we'll check in and enjoy dinner.

**Included meals:** Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

**Accommodation:** Goris

## DAY 6 - BRIDGES, CABLE CARS & GORGES

Today is a day for lovers of heights as we explore two of Armenia's highest attractions!

We'll first drive to the village of Khndzoresk, where you will see the famous swinging bridge, which is 160 meters long, 1,5 meters wide and rises 36 meters above the ground! The bridge connects the two banks of the village.

Next, we will drive to Halidzor, where we take the longest aerial cableway in the world, called the "Wings of Tatev", rising above a deep gorge of Vorotan River to Tatev Monastery, built in the 9th century. Tatev is well known as the bishopric seat of Syunik and has played a significant role for hundreds of years as an economic, political, spiritual and cultural centre of the region. The spiritual power of the monastery and its surroundings will take you back to ancient times.

**Included meals:** Breakfast

**Accommodation:** Goris

## DAY 7 - KARAHUNJ, ARMENIA'S STONEHENGE

After having breakfast at the hotel, we check out and drive to visit Karahunj (also called Zorats Karer) which is a prehistoric site known as the Armenian Stonehenge. It is believed to be around 3500 years older than the British Stonehenge! The site was only officially named Karahunj Observatory in 2004 when studies found that it was likely once an observatory.

Next we'll visit Selim Caravanserai, located at the Selim Pass, one of the well-preserved caravanserais along the historic Silk Road, which connected the Armenian Plateau with the rest of the Silk Road trade routes.

From here we continue to Noratus - an ancient cemetery with eight hundred stone stelae with a cross motif. The oldest date back to the 12th Century. Not far from Noratus, we'll stop by a family farm that makes its own milk from their own livestock grazing on the mountain pastures. This natural milk is turned into a variety of cheeses unique to this area made using wine and cognac coverings, as well as traditional types of Armenian cheeses, such as the popular horats cheese.

Our drive to Dilijan takes us past Lake Sevan, the second largest high mountain lake in the world, on whose peninsula lies the 9th century Sevanavank Monastery.

Dilijan, our rest stop for the evening is the resort town of Armenia. we overnight and enjoy dinner in Dilijan.

**Included meals:** Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

**Accommodation:** Dilijan

## DAY 8 - CROSSING THE BORDER TO GEORGIA

It is time to check out this morning as we bid farewell to Armenia and start our journey to Georgia.

Before leaving Dilijan, we will walk along the Sharambeyan Street, which is one of the oldest streets of the city, which is a great spot for some last minute souvenirs and a chance see the life of the small city.

We will also visit a local family, where we will participate in preparation of the Armenian traditional sweets, "Gata" and afterwards, visit Haghpats Monastery, one of the unique masterpieces of Armenian architecture. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Haghpats Monastery was one of the largest religious, cultural and educational centres of medieval Armenia.

After having lunch, we will drive to Sadakhlo border crossing. Here we bid farewell to our Armenian guide and drive and meeting their Georgian counterparts. After crossing the border and completing formalities, we drive on to Tbilisi, Georgia's capital to check in and enjoy our first dinner in Georgia.

**Included meals:** Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

**Accommodation:** Tbilisi

## DAY 9 - TALES OF TBILISI

Today we discover Georgia's capital city, Tbilisi..

Along our way, we will pass by the Old Tbilisi Sulphur Baths, Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Gregorian churches, as well as the Jewish synagogue, and Turkish mosque which sit side by side, reflecting city's acceptance and tolerance of different religions.

We will also spy some more recent monuments - Tbilisi Sameba Cathedral, the largest cathedral in the Caucasus; Metekhi Church, which is erected on the cliff, overlooking the Mtkvari River and Narikala fortress, established in the fourth century.

After a walk downtown and discovering Shardeni Street, lined with fashionable cosy cafes and art galleries, it is time for lunch at a local restaurant, enjoying a delicious Georgian lunch and savour wine made by the host family.

Finally, after lunch, our tour takes to Rustaveli Avenue, where attractions, such as the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre, the Parliament, Rustaveli Theatre, different art galleries and cafes, will draw your attention and provide a cosmopolitan atmosphere. The rest of the day is at leisure to explore Tbilisi.

**Included meals:** Breakfast & Lunch

**Accommodation:** Tbilisi

## DAY 10 - GEORGIA'S HISTORIC CAPITAL & ROYAL FAMILY

Today we head out of Tbilisi to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mtskheta, the ancient capital of the Georgian Kingdom.

Here we will tour a number of important sights, such as the magnificent 11th century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. The Cathedral holds an important piece of Christian history, as it is a place, where Christ's robe was buried. We'll also stop by the 6th century Jvari, or the Holy Cross Church, which stands where a sacred wooden cross was erected in the 4th century by St Nino before she converted Mtskheta to Christianity.

Our next stop is the captivating Uplistsikhe Cave Town-Fortress – an ancient rock-hewn settlement. Uplistsikhe holds great historical importance in Georgian history, spanning nearly 3000 years.

Finally, we continue our drive to Chateau Mukhrani where we'll discover the history of Georgian royal family and explore legends. We will visit castle of Prince Ivane Mukhranbatoni, its beautiful garden and old cellar.

Here we'll stop for lunch before returning to Tbilisi in the afternoon.

**Included meals:** Breakfast & Lunch

**Accommodation:** Tbilisi

## DAY 11 - KAZBEGI & KHINKALI DUMPLINGS

This morning, we embark on a stunning drive from Gudauri along the Tergi River to Kazbegi – the main town in the region.

Along the way, we pass Ananuri Castle and the beautiful Jinvali water reservoir. En route, we'll stop and see different local handicrafts such as thick felt, embroidery and iconographic painting.

In Kazbegi, we board 4x4 Jeeps for the drive through the mountains to Gergeti Trinity Church, located at 2170m above sea level. Weather permitting, you may catch a glimpse of one of the highest glaciers in the Caucasus – Mt Kazbegi (5047m).

We drive back to the town to have lunch at Ketino's Guesthouse, where Ketino herself will give a master class on making Georgian traditional dumplings – khinkali.

After a hearty lunch, we drive back to Tbilisi and enjoy the rest of the day at leisure.

**Included meals:** Breakfast & Lunch

**Accommodation:** Tbilisi

## DAY 12 - KAKHETI, THE "CRADLE OF WINE" & SIGHNAGHI, THE "CITY OF LOVE"

Our final day's exploring takes us to Kakheti – “the cradle of wine”.

The local winemaking method using Kvevri, a unique ancient vessel, has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage.

We'll stop en route to Kakheti at Tsinandali to explore the manor house museum dedicated to a prominent Georgian aristocrat, poet, and military figure who lived in the early 19th century – Alexander Chavchavadze.

From here, we continue to Kakheti, considered as “the cradle of wine”, stopping at a unique wine cellar known as Kvareli Wine Cave. The cave is carved into the Caucasus rock massif. We'll enjoy an authentic local lunch washed down with wine before continuing to Signaghi, a picturesque town overlooking the stunning Alazani Valley.

Known as the "City of Love", Signaghi is famous for its charming cobblestone streets and beautiful architecture.

We drive back to the capital, Tbilisi, for our farewell dinner to round off our fantastic time.

**Included meals:** Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

**Accommodation:** Tbilisi

## DAY 13 - GOODBYE, GEORGIA

Sadly, our adventure draws to an end today as it is time to check out and say goodbye to Georgia.

You will be transferred to the airport in time for your departing flight

**Included meals:** Breakfast

**Accommodation:** none

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Meet & Greet at Yerevan Airport [EVN] on arrival
- Transport in an air-conditioned deluxe vehicle
- Accommodation as detailed in the itinerary
- Meals as detailed in the itinerary
- English speaking tour guide
- All activities, visits and excursions as detailed in the itinerary
- Tour Director from The Big Journey Company as well as the local tour guide (subject to minimum group size being reached.)

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- ATOL Protection
- Return international flights to Yerevan Airport [EVN], Armenia and from Tblisi Airport [TBS], Georgia - flight quotations available on request, please contact us for further details
- Drinks
- Gratuities
- Travel and medical insurance
- Any personal items and anything not mentioned under included in price above
- Any meals not mentioned in itinerary
- Any optional activities offered
- Any COVID tests or related entry & exit requirements

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Please note, flights to Armenia and from Georgia are not included in this package. The Big Journey Company would be happy to provide a quotation for your flights - please contact us for further details
- Please let The Big Journey Company know prior to travelling if you have any medical needs or take any medication that we need to be made aware of to ensure that you have a safe and pleasant tour.
- Please consult your doctor for advice on vaccinations and inoculations before travel.
- Check in is after 2 - 3pm and check out is before 10am unless otherwise specified in the itinerary.
- Cancellation 90 – 0 days prior to departure cancellation fee is 100%. It is your responsibility to ensure the correct travel insurance in place to protect you against the need to cancel your holiday. Deposits are non-refundable.
- Further terms and conditions apply and will be provided upon request or at the time of booking. The Big Journey Company reserves the right to withdraw any offer prior to accepting a reservation request. This does not affect your statutory rights. This offer is subject to availability and space is limited.



## BOOK YOUR JOURNEY

*Choose from the list of dates below*

*Call to Book*

**0844 3350 197**

Monday to Friday 09:00 - 18:00 GMT