THE CAUCASUS

DETAILED ITINERARY

AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA AND GEORGIA

Jun 01/26

Situated between Russia in the north and Iran and Turkey in the southwest, lies the region best known as the Caucasus. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia were all former Soviet Republics, each with their own rich and unique history, language and culture.

We begin our journey in Baku, Azerbaijan, one of the first oil cities of the world. The architectural marvel of Heyday Aliyev serves as an aspirational platform for an optimistic future. Along the Caspian coast is Gobustan (UNESCO) where over 4000 Stone and Iron Age petroglyphs have been discovered in the hill caves above town.

Continuing into the mountains we enter Georgia and get our first taste of their renowned wines in the Kakheti region. Later continue to the beautiful capital of Tbilisi. Heading north we travel the famed Georgian Military Highway to the Caucasus Mountains. Everywhere we turn we see evidence of Georgian pride and religion in their majestic churches.

Crossing into Armenia we stop at Lake Sevan, one of the highest fresh water lakes in the world. We will use

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 20 days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Baku, Azerbaijan and finish in Yerevan, Armenia • All meals included • Explore the medieval town of Baku • Visit 6000-year old Stone and Iron Age petroglyphs • Visit the wine region of Georgia • Travel along the famed Georgian Military Highway to the Caucasus Mountains • Explore the sites Tbilisi & Yerevan & enjoy delicious cuisine and wine! • See Lake Sevan in Armenia • Explore the cave monastery of Vardzia • Visit the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Geghard and Echmiadzin • Visit Khor Virap monastery with stunning views of Mt Ararat.

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

May 04 - May 23, 2027 - $8695 USD

Activity Level: 2-3

Comfort Level: Some rough roads, long drives.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable accommodations with private bathrooms.

the capital, Yerevan as our base to explore the Armenian countryside as we visit cave monasteries, churches and pilgrimage sites, with holy Mt. Ararat our constant companion. We also visit the 7,500 year old astrological site of Karahunj (3,500 yrs older than Stonehenge), and the ancient cave dwellings of Khndzoresk.

DAY 1 ARRIVE IN BAKU

Upon arrival in Baku, you will be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel. Baku is one of the five biggest cities in the former USSR and the most prosperous of the Caucasian capitals. The remainder of the day is free to explore on your own before meeting with the group for dinner and our orientation meeting.

Overnight in Baku.

DAY 2 BAKU - OLD TOWN, SHIRVAN SHAH'S PALACE

Today your introduction to Baku and the Caucasus will begin with sightseeing at Memorial Hill with a breathtaking view of the Caspian and city shoreline. We continue our walking tour of 'Icheri Shey-Har', the old town (UNESCO), with its maze of narrow, cobblestone streets lined with small mosques nestled between terraced cafes and grand turn-of-the-century architecture. This atmospheric medieval town is surrounded by an impressive defensive wall, that dates from the 12th century. Our tour will include visits to the State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpets and Applied Folk Art, and the Shirvan Shahs Palace - a royal palace built in the 15th century and the finest surviving example of Shirvan architecture. We end our sightseeing this day with a leisurely cruise on the Caspian Bay (pending the conditions of the weather and water levels.)

Overnight in Baku.

DAY 3 GOBUSTAN

This morning we will continue further along the Caspian coast to Gobustan (UNESCO) where over 4000 Stone and Iron Age petroglyphs have been discovered in the hill caves above town, depicting scenes of hunting and dancing rituals and a varied repertoire of animal figures, along with thousands of artifacts and tools. This afternoon we will visit Heyday Aliyev cultural center in Baku, which is noted for its unique architecture and curved style, challenging the notions of geometry and gravity. The centre now includes a museum, a national library and a concert hall.

Overnight in Baku.

DAY 4 BAKU TO SHEMAKHA, LAHIJ AND SHEKI

Today we head northwest along one of the most scenic routes in Azerbaijan. We will pass through stark, arid landscapes dotted with mud volcanoes, before arriving in Maraza where just off the main road lies Pir Diri Baba Mausoleum built precariously into the side of a cliff.

Continuing past small villages nestled among steep mountains and lush valleys dotted with vineyards, we will also stop in Shemakha, a city that served for many centuries as the capital and commercial center of western Azerbaijan before being replaced by Baku in the latter part of the 19th century. Nearby sits the famed Yeddi Gumbaz (Seven Tombs), of which only three remain completely intact. These were the royal tombs of the last Shirvan Khansto rule before the region became part of the Russian Empire. In town, we will stop at Juma Meschid, or Grand Mosque, whose 10th century foundations are part of the first mosque built in the Caucasus. Later we will leave our bus and transfer to a minivan to make the drive up into the mountains to explore the craft town of Lahij, whose small population still speak their own language. The town is famous for its coppersmiths.

Later continue to Sheki and overnight.

DAY 5 SHEKI

With an early start to the morning we visit the large Sheki market. Afterwards we visit the main attraction of this charming town which is the exquisite Khan's Palace, set in the midst of dilapidated fortress walls and adorned with detailed mosaics and Shebaka windows made from fragments of colored glass and hand-shaped wooden cross-pieces. We will have the chance to visit Shebaka workshop as well as a silk shop.

In the afternoon we will visit Kish Church, a beautiful Albanian Caucasus church which dates from the 1st century, located just outside of Sheki. Afterwards, a local woman will teach us how to make baklava in her workshop next door to the church.

Overnight Sheki.

DAY 6 SHEKI TO TELAVI, GEORGIA

This morning we depart for Georgia and lunch at a local winery in the Kakheti region of eastern-Georgia (which is synonymous with wine) as a fitting place to begin our introduction to the world-renowned Georgian hospitality and delicious food.

A short drive from Telavi will take us to Gremi and its impressive citadel complex consisting of a 16th century domed church, tower and king chamber. We will also visit Alaverdi Cathedral which was built in the 11th century and at 155 feet (55 m) is the 2nd tallest religious building in Georgia.

Overnight in Telavi.

DAY 7 TELAVI TO DAVID GAREJA, TO TBILISI

Today we will visit the cave-monastery complex of Davit Gareja located near the Azerbaijan border with Georgia. Founded in the 6th century, David Gareja is the largest monastery complex in Georgia and was once the royal monastery. In 1616, the Persian Shah Abbas massacred 6000 monks and had the monastery sacked. The complex is known for its amazing range of artistic and architectural styles ranging from the 6 - 18th century. Afterwards continue on to Tbilisi.
Overnight in Tbilisi.

DAY 8 TBILISI

Tbilisi was founded in the 5th century and became the capital of Georgia in the 6th century. Since that time, the city has been destroyed and rebuilt on nearly 30 different occasions following a long history of fighting off Persian, Arab, Turkmen, Mongol, Turk and finally, Russian invaders. Tbilisi today is one of the most modern and cosmopolitan cities in the Caucasus. We begin our visit with a walking-tour through Tbilisi's narrow streets and inner courtyards and stroll down Rustaveli Avenue, the main thoroughfare running east through the city. We will also visit Metekhi Church of the Virgin, Sioni Cathedral and the Anchiskhati Basilica and then take a funicular ride to the old fort overlooking the city of Tbilisi.
Overnight in Tbilisi.

DAY 9 TBILISI TO GUDAURI

Today we will drive north along the famed Georgian Military Highway, the main transport artery linking Georgia with Russia into the mountainous provinces of the Greater Caucasus. Our first stop of the day will be in sacred Mtskheta (UNESCO), the ancient capital of eastern Georgia, at the southern end of the highway. Georgia's conversion to Christianity occurred in Mtskheta in 337 AD and it is considered one of Georgia's most important religious centers. We will visit Church of Jvari perched on a cliff overlooking the city, and the Sveti-Tskhoveli Cathedral, the first Christian church to be built in Georgia and its largest functioning cathedral.

Continuing our journey into the mountains, we will stop in Ananuri to see the incredible 16th century fortress complex built by the warring dukes of Aragvi in an attempt to control the main road.

This evening overnight in Gudauri, a popular winter mountain resort-town, which will serve as our base for the next 2 nights.

DAY 10 GEORGIA PASS - GUDAURI

Continuing our journey up and north through alpine meadows and mountain passes littered with medieval watchtowers, we will reach Dariali Gorge, a 9 mile (14 kilometer) gash in the Earth. We will marvel at the snow-capped Mount Kazbek (the highest mountain in Georgia), an extinct volcano that surrounds us and reaches to just over 16,500 feet (5047m).

We drive to the base of the hill and then walk across the meadow leading to the Tsminda Sameba Monastery - a 14th century church built on a mountain peak at 7,200 feet (2200m). After Tbilisi, it is the most popular sight in Georgia.

Later, we return to Gudauri for the night.

DAY 11 TO BORJOMI VIA GORI

We journey down from the mountains today stopping in Gori, a town whose place in infamy is secured, as it is the birthplace of Joseph Stalin. We then travel through the Borjomi Gorge and make a stop in the Borjomi Forest for our walk to the Chitakhevi St. George (Green) Monastery, built between the 9th and 10th centuries.

Overnight in Borjomi.

DAY 12 TO VARDZIA

Today venture further into the southwestern region of Samtshke-Javakheti, named after two of the original Georgian tribes, the Meskh and Javakhs and often seen as the cradle of Georgian culture. The road to Vardzia leads past arid and stone-terraced landscapes including the famed 10th century Khertvisi Castle, one of the oldest fortresses in Georgia. Vardzia history is inextricably linked to Queen Tamar, Georgia's most famous and loved royal who reigned during the 12th century. Crowned as co-ruler by her father, Giorgi III, she became the first woman to ascend to the throne of feudal Georgia and is credited with extending and unifying Georgian rule with successful defeats against Muslim and Turk forces. With Georgia's strong economic and political position, she founded the cave town of Vardzia which became the most important monastery and primary center of culture in Georgia. We will explore the monastery to view the remarkably well-preserved frescoes depicting the young queen.

Overnight in Vardzia.

DAY 13 VARDZIA TO TBILISI

Today we return to Tbilisi, stopping enroute to visit the Phoka St. Nino Nunnery. Established on July 23, 1992 by the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia, Ilia II, the convent is situated in an Alpine zone 6,890 feet (2,100m) above the sea. As the legend goes, this very place was Saint Nino's entrance point to Georgia and she then followed the river Paravani to the city of Mtskheta. A beautiful basilica dedicated to St. Nino was built here in the 10th century and was later restored by the monastery in 2005. We will also visit the Janashia Museum of Georgia, which houses an extraordinary collection of gold filigree work dating from the 6th century BC, among other items of repoussé work and jewelry.

Overnight in Tbilisi.

DAY 14 TO HAGHPAT, LAKE SEVAN, ARMENIA

Marvel at the mountain scenery as we cross into Armenia today. After clearing customs, we will continue on to Haghpat Monastery (UNESCO). We will then travel to Lake Sevan, a popular summer resort and one of the world's highest freshwater lakes at just over 6,200 feet (1890 m). Lake Sevan, which was part of the famed Silk Road, is surrounded by steep mountains and pine forests. We will have the opportunity for a short hike around the lake shore, viewing the stunning turquoise waters or you may simply relax and enjoy the dramatic scenery.

Overnight Lake Sevan.

DAY 15 TO SEVAN MONASTERY, SELIM PASS, TATEV, GORIS

Today we will visit Sevan Monastery. Located on the Sevan Peninsula, the monastery was built in the 9th century. Traveling south along Lake Sevan we will eventually climb up into the mountains and travel through the Selim Pass, where we will visit an ancient but well-preserved caravanserai that was built in 1332. Our final stop before reaching Goris is

the 9th century monastery complex of Tatev, situated on the edge of a deep gorge. In the 14th and 15th centuries Tatev Monastery hosted one of the most important Armenian medieval universities, which contributed to the education of science, religion and philosophy, the reproduction of books and development of miniature painting. Once a long and difficult journey, Tatev can now be reached by cable car - the longest ride in the world at 5.7 km (3.5mi). Our lunch stop today is at Old Bridge where you will have the chance to sample the excellent local wine.

Overnight in Goris.

DAY 16 TO KHNDZORESK, KARAHUNJ, NORAVANK, YEREVAN

This morning we visit the cave village of Khndzoresk, comprising over 400 cave dwellings hewn into the soft rock along the canyon walls. Continuing further south we will visit one of the most fascinating places in Armenia and perhaps the world - the megalithic stone structures of Karahunj. 3500 years older than Stonehenge, scientists believe there is a connection between this ancient observatory and its much more famous English counterpart.

Overnight Yerevan.

DAY 17 TO GEGHARD, GARNI, YEREVAN

For the remaining days, Armenia's capital Yerevan will serve as our base from which to explore the local sights. Our first visit will be to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Geghard, a magnificent monastery partly carved out of a mountain. We will also visit Garni, site of the Roman Temple of the Sun, built in the 1st century. Soon after, Armenia adopted Christianity and the temple became the summer residence of Armenian royalty. Featuring a sacrificial fire pit and Roman bathhouse within the complex, the temple was destroyed by an earthquake in the 17th century and was reconstructed from its ruins within the last forty years. We also visit the Museum of History, which hosts the oldest shoe in the world - dating from 3500 BC.

Overnight in Yerevan.

DAY 18 YEREVAN

Yerevan, as one of the most continuously inhabited cities of the world, has a history that dates back 2,800 years. Modern-day Yerevan underwent massive rebuilding under the Soviet era in an attempt to create the perfect city along the plans of classic European cities such St. Petersburg and Vienna. Today we will walk around The Cascade, one of the city's most famous public spaces. The Cascade is a huge terraced staircase with fountains, sculptures, gardens, cafés, and viewpoints overlooking the city. We also visit the Genocide Memorial and Museum, and we stop at a brandy factory for a tour.

Overnight in Yerevan.

DAY 19 TRIP TO KHOR VIRAP MONASTERY

Our first stop this morning is the historic Khor Virap Monastery, one of Armenia's most revered religious sites. Set against the dramatic backdrop of Mount Ararat, the monastery offers some of the most spectacular views in the country. Khor Virap is closely associated with the origins of Armenian Christianity, as it was here that Saint Gregory the Illuminator was imprisoned for thirteen years before converting King Tiridates III and helping establish Armenia as the world's first Christian nation.

We return to Yerevan in the afternoon, where you will have free time to explore the city at your own pace. You may wish to stroll through the lively cafés and boutiques of the city center or visit one of the local markets.

Overnight in Yerevan.

DAY 20 DEPART YEREVAN

Transfer to the Yerevan Airport for your departure flight.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. Small groups allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit museums and local villages. We also have talks and discussions on many aspects of the history and culture of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, but this is only one aspect of what we do. We believe that it is equally educational to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are spent having a cold drink with locals in a street market.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All land transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We have our own vehicles for road travel, we use a van or coach depending on the group size.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in comfortable hotels with private bathroom facilities.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

We travel to the Caucasus region in the shoulder season to avoid the extreme heat of midsummer and the cold climate in winter. In general, the Caucasus has a Mediterranean-type climate and temperatures are between 68 - 80 F (18 ñ 26 C) during the day. Up north in the mountains it will be cooler due to the higher elevation.

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of $500 USD (plus insurance if you desire it) is due as soon as you decide to go and will reserve your place on the tour. The balance of the land payment is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and these are outlined in the "Terms & Conditions" section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit

10. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. In many cases, we simply order a number of shared dishes, so that we can try everything.

11. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries, not group flights. Stop over enroute, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the adventure, please call our office for more details. A Trip Specialist will be happy to answer your questions. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.