



ANCIENT CROSSROADS: AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA & ARMENIA

Journey to the heart of the Caucasus on an extensive exploration which reveals three countries whose history and culture became intricately entwined with movement along the great Silk Road.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Europe, Georgia, Armenia,
Azerbaijan



17 days from AU\$17,045 pp



Private

Journey Overview

Journey to the heart of the Caucasus on an extensive exploration which reveals three countries whose history and culture became intricately entwined with movement along the great Silk Road. Framed by dramatic valleys and rugged mountain scenery, the region abounds with medieval villages, vineyards and ancient monasteries plus a rich handicraft legacy, flavoursome cuisine, distinct musical traditions and diverse architectural styles

Journey Highlights

- Discover the futuristic architecture of cosmopolitan Baku on the shores of the Caspian Sea
- Gain insight to the traditional crafts of the Caucasus in silk studios, pottery workshops, stained-glass ateliers and carpet factories
- Taste Georgia's finest wines in the birthplace of viticulture
- Appreciate the rich polyphonic vocal traditions of Georgian music
- Admire Khor Virap monastery set against biblical Mount Ararat



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Baku, Azerbaijan

Arrive into the Azerbaijan capital and transfer to your hotel situated beside the Caspian Sea. Your guide will invite you for a cocktail briefing on the adventure which lies ahead.

Four Seasons Hotel Baku

Day 2: Baku

Your day in Baku reveals this vibrant and sophisticated city at its best. Head to Martyr's Lane for a stroll through the park, a memorial to those killed by the Soviet Army between 1988 and 1994 fighting for independence, and from this vantage point get excellent views of the city and the Bay of Baku. Head into the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site which dates to the 6th century. Wander along its cobbled alleyways pausing at Shirvanshah's Palace, the last residence of the Shirvan rulers, before climbing to the top of the spectacular 12th century Maiden Tower, the symbol of Baku, and gazing out across the Caspian Sea. This afternoon head to the distinctive Zaha Hadid-designed Heydar Aliyev Centre which has become a signature landmark in Baku.

Four Seasons Hotel Baku | Meals: BL

Day 3: Baku - Sheki

Travel west towards Shamakhi in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. Visit the 10th century Juma Mosque, which is the oldest in the region, constructed on the site of an ancient Zoroastrian temple. Meet a local family for a hands-on yogurt making demonstration and head to the medieval village of Lahij for a home hosted lunch. Afterwards stroll through the cobbled streets of this handicraft centre, pausing in the workshops of carpet makers, potters, coppersmiths, wood carvers and leather craftsmen. Travel onwards through the Muganly mountain pass arriving in Sheki this evening.

Sheki Palace Hotel | Meals: BLD

Day 4: Sheki - Kish - Sheki.

Start your discovery of the picturesque Silk Road town of Sheki at the local farmer's market and then explore the khan's summer palace, adorned with exquisite Persian frescoes and only recently added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Visit a stained-glass workshop to see craftsmen at work on this centuries old Azerbaijani tradition. Visit the upper caravanserai, an 18th century roadside inn, and attend a traditional silk scarf decorating demonstration. After lunch visit the 12th century Caucasian Albanian church located in the village of Kish, approximately five kilometres to the north, before refuelling at a traditional tea house.

Sheki Palace Hotel | Meals: BLD

Day 5: Sheki - Tsinandali, Georgia

Today you travel northwest and cross the border into Georgia for the next part of the journey which takes you into the most picturesque part of Georgia - Kakheti, which borders the Great Caucasus range. This area is the birthplace of viticulture and winemaking and you'll spend the afternoon driving through vineyards and past beautiful churches. Stop off at the 16th century citadel and church in Gremi before lunch and wine tasting at Shilda winery in Kvareli. Watch traditional Georgian bread being baked, learn how to prepare mtsvadi, Georgia's famous barbecue pork dish, and join in a demonstration to make the traditional candle-shaped sweet, Churchkhela. Finish the day at the grand Tsinandali estate, an historic winery once home to the noble Chavchavadze family.

Radisson Collection Hotel Tsinandali Estate Georgia | Meals: BL

Day 6: Tsinandali - Tbilisi

This morning travel west to the capital, Tbilisi, stopping on the way at the 9th century Bodbe Nunnery before arriving at the pretty fortified town of Signaghi, famous for its wine and carpet making. Meander through the narrow streets before lunch with a local family serving up traditional dishes from the region, and of course matching wines.

Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace | Meals: BL

Day 7: Tbilisi

Tbilisi is a surprising blend of cultures. Today's adventure starts with a walk through the cobbled streets of the atmospheric old town. Visit the 12th century Metekhi Church and a 19th century Jewish synagogue. Admire the old Georgian houses with their distinctive wooden, curved balconies and the Sioni Cathedral. You'll see the oldest surviving church in town before getting a bird's-eye view of the city from the Narikala Fortress which can be accessed by cable car, or on foot. On the way back down, stop at the Sulphur Baths, with an optional treatment available, and the National Museum of Fine Arts or History.

Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace | Meals: B

Day 8: Tbilisi - Kazbegi

The World Heritage site of Mtskheta is your first stop today. Georgia's cultural and religious centre, it is also one of the country's oldest towns. Visit the early medieval Jvari Church and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Heading along the Georgian Military Highway, take in the Ananuri Architectural complex, with churches and towers dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Arrive into the sleepy town of Kazbegi later this afternoon where views of Mt. Kazbek are breathtaking – especially from your hotel room.

Rooms Hotel Kazbegi | Meals: B

Day 9: Kazbegi

This morning head for the beautifully situated 14th century Gergeti Holy Trinity Church which perches high on a hill overlooking the town and surrounding mountains. Get up close by 4WD or, for the more energetic, on foot. Visit a local studio to observe the traditional craft of felt making where local masters demonstrate how they convert fibres from sheep and goats into warm and sturdy felt, used for rugs, clothing and decoration. Converse with the artisans over Georgian herbal tea and homemade jams – a wonderful opportunity to share stories and learn more about their lives and love for felt making. More traditional Georgian hospitality today over lunch with a local family. This afternoon you will enjoy the stylish Nordic atmosphere of your hotel before sundowners on the terrace.

Rooms Hotel Kazbegi | Meals: BL

Day 10: Kazbegi - Tbilisi

Today's adventure is to the fertile Kartli province where you visit the ancient rock hewn town of Uplistsikhe, one of the oldest urban settlements in Georgia and an important centre of pagan worship. Breathe in thousands of years of history as you stroll past long abandoned halls, dwellings, cellars and public buildings. Your next stop, in total contrast, is Gori, the birthplace of Stalin, where a controversial museum traces his life. Lunch is in the atmospheric brick cellars of Château Mukhrani where a vineyard was first established in the late 19th century.

Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace | Meals: BL

Day 11: Tbilisi

Continue your exploration of Tbilisi visiting the Holy Trinity Cathedral, the main cathedral of the Georgian Orthodox Church constructed between 1995 and 2004. Later, meander through Dry Bridge market where you'll find all kinds of curiosities from antiques and shepherds' hats to jewellery, musical instruments and Soviet memorabilia. A walking tour through the cobbled streets of the Sololaki district, a former enclave of wealthy merchants and artists, will reveal another side to the city. Admire the crumbling architecture and stop in at some of the bars and cafés which populate the neighbourhood.

Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace | Meals: B

Day 12: Tbilisi - Yerevan, Armenia

Cross into Armenia this morning at the Sadakhlo border. Less than an hour south stop at the Haghpat monastery whose unique style is representative of Armenia's finest religious architecture, blending Byzantine ecclesiastical elements with the traditional vernacular of the Caucasian region. Continue to the spa town of Dilijan with its beautiful mountain scenery. Stop for coffee in Sharambeyan Street which has been preserved as a centre for arts and crafts. Continue to Lake Sevan, the largest body of water in Armenia and the Caucasus region, and on to Yerevan, which stretches along the banks of the River Hrazdan, under the wistful gaze of biblical Mount Ararat and guarded by the tremendous statue of Mother Armenia at Victory Park.

Grand Hotel Yerevan | Meals: BL

Day 13: Yerevan

Your introduction to the capital begins with a guided tour of the city, which was founded in 782 BC, making it one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited metropolises. See the beautiful government buildings, the Central Post Office and banks and visit the State History Museum as well as the Cafesjian Modern Art Museum which exhibits collections of Armenian and international contemporary artworks. There is also time this afternoon to pore over the myriad stalls at the Vernissage flea market, a short walk from the hotel. Best buys include wooden carvings, traditional carpets, old coins, books, jewellery and musical instruments.

Grand Hotel Yerevan | Meals: B

Day 14: Yerevan

A biblical focus this morning on a visit to Etchmiadzin Cathedral and museum. This ancient place of worship is headquarters for the Armenian Orthodox church and is believed to be the oldest Christian establishment initiated by a state in the world. Relics in the church collection include one of the lances said to have pierced the side of Christ and wood from Noah's Ark. Later take in the nearby ruins of the famous 7th century Zvartnots Cathedral, a 49-metre-high three-tiered pyramidal church embellished with beautiful carvings. During excavations, a large architectural complex with the entrance halls of the patriarch's palace, a bath-house and other buildings to the south and west were found. Lunch today is at the family owned Megeryan Carpet Factory & Museum. Get comfortable as you admire the exquisite handmade carpets before a traditional Armenian lunch in the rustic, but atmospheric, restaurant. End the day with a poignant visit to the Genocide museum and Memorial.

Grand Hotel Yerevan | Meals: BL

Day 15: Yerevan

The morning begins with a special, and spiritual, vocal performance in the acoustic hall of the ancient Geghard Monastery. Partly carved from a cave, Geghard is another incredible architectural complex. Inscriptive and documentary references to the monastery, also known as Ayrivank, date from the 7th and 10th centuries, respectively. Afterwards, visit the pagan Temple of Garni, which dates to the Hellenistic era, built to honour the Sun God Mitra, and is a symbol of pre-Christian Armenia. Built around 77 A.D. as a summer residence for the then empress, it is said that Emperor Nero contributed to its construction. It is the only Greco-Roman colonnaded building in the country. Afterwards, take part in a centuries-old Armenian cultural tradition at a hands-on lavash making ceremony. The dough is kneaded, rolled and baked in the wood-fired oven before being served for lunch with barbecued meats, spicy peppers and curds in a local home. Drive back to Yerevan and discover why Armenian brandy is world famous at a special tour and tasting at the Ararat Brandy Factory.

Grand Hotel Yerevan / Meals: BL

Day 16: Yerevan

Today you are driven to the Ararat Plain and Khor Virap, one of Armenia's most beautiful monasteries with breathtaking views of Mount Ararat. After lunch in a local restaurant visit the 13th century Noravank monastery complex spectacularly situated against a backdrop of sheer red cliffs. This is one of the most admired monasteries in the country. Return to Yerevan for a traditional Armenian dinner with folk music at Tavern Yerevan.

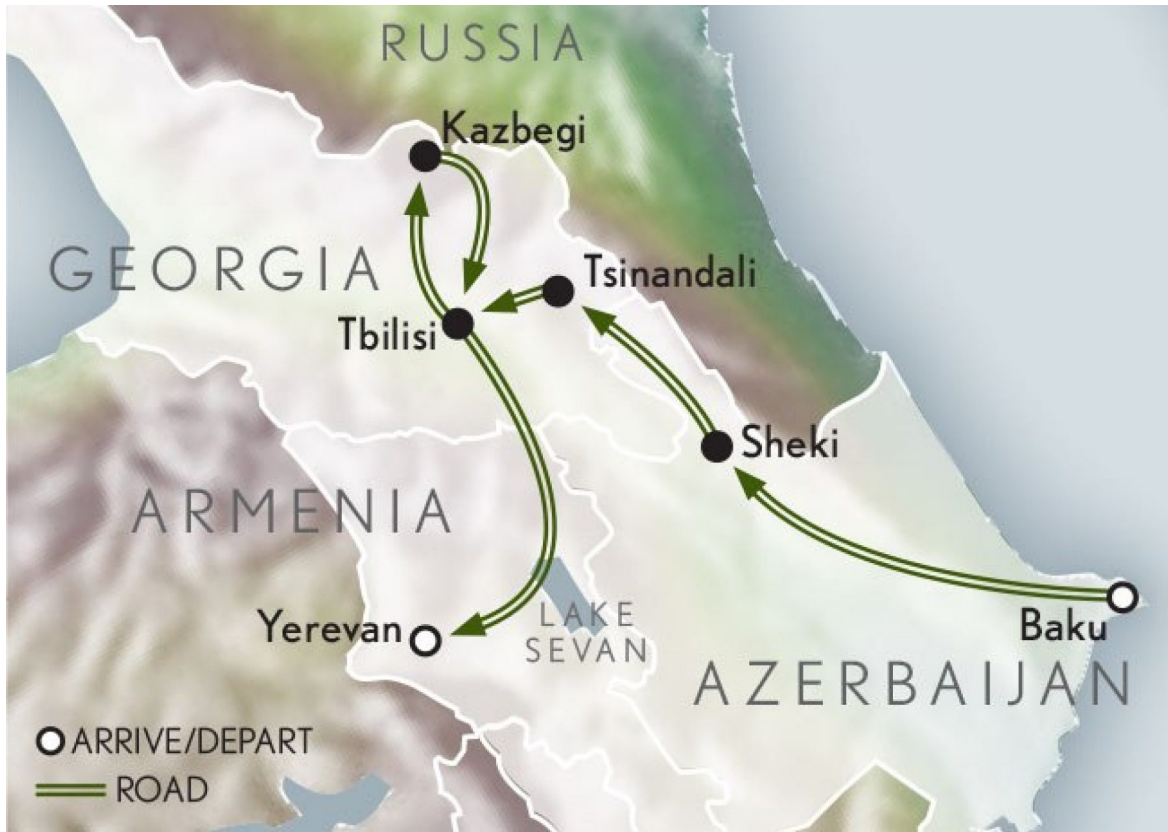
Grand Hotel Yerevan / Meals: BLD

Day 17: Depart Yerevan

Transfer to the airport for departure flight.

Meals: B

Map



Accommodation

Grand Hotel Yerevan



Grand Hotel Yerevan is an elegant and refined hotel with a long and storied history. Its excellent location, within a short walking distance from Yerevan's central Republic Square, makes it easy to explore the attractions of the capital and the captivating city.

The luxurious rooms of Grand Hotel Yerevan, with their stylish furniture and attention to the smallest detail ensure a luxurious stay, with the more luxurious suites offering spacious balconies, wine on arrival and access to the onsite spa as part of the room rate.

The hotel's Nairi Restaurant offers authentic Armenian fare with an innovative twist, served up by the Italian Michelin-starred chef. Savour the delicious dishes while drinking in panoramic views of Charles Aznavour Square below.

Guests can relax and rejuvenate with a visit to the hotel spa for a massage, or sipping cocktails as you admire the stunning city views from the rooftop pool.

Sheki Palace Hotel



Relax in Azerbaijan style with a stay at the Sheki Palace Hotel. Centrally located, you're mere minutes from Old Khan Palace and Silk Road's Karvansaray. The spacious, air-conditioned rooms are decorated with fine artisanal fabrics and elegant furnishings, paying homage to the culture of the surrounding city.

Savour a delicious buffet breakfast as you admire amazing views of Karvansaray below, before indulging in a swim in the pool, or a relaxing with a treatment in the spa. Rejuvenate with a session in the sauna or take some time to yourself in the Turkish bath. The award-winning Shebeke Restaurant serves an à la carte menu featuring classic Azerbaijan fare, while Lobby and Terrace Bar both offer a range of drinks and snacks throughout the day.

Rooms Hotel Kazbegi



With peaks reaching a formidable 5,000 metres, the Caucasus Mountain Range delivers a spectacular backdrop for Rooms Hotel Kazbegi.

The spectacular landscape takes centre stage in the careful design of Rooms Hotels Kazbegi's 155 rooms. For each category, front facing rooms have views over Mount Kazbeg and the Gergeti Trinity Church, while the back facing rooms overlook the surrounding forests and woodland. The rooms are decorated with rustic-chic with blending wood and industrial flourishes.

The restaurant serves traditional Georgian cuisine and international dishes, also accompanied by a cosy bar with its own fireplace and cigar menu.

The heated pool is ideally positioned to take in the stunning view over the surrounding mountainside through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Relax in the chic lounge chairs, get a massage or enjoy the perfectly equipped gym. Rooms Hotel Kazbegi has all the facilities to make your stay as pleasant as possible.

Why we like it:

Featuring a spacious lobby lounge, library, casino, gym, indoor swimming pool and a subterranean wellness area

Bathrooms include showers, bathrobes, complimentary toiletries, and hair dryers

The restaurant works with the region, collaborating with suppliers in the local town of Stepantsminda to serve seasonal dishes passed down through

generations.

Four Seasons Hotel Baku



This majestic flower-filled beaux-arts palace fits perfectly with central Baku's nouveau-Parisian image, while the indulgent pool and spa feel much more Roman.

Overlooking the Caspian Sea and Baku Old Town district with the Shirvanshahs' Palace, this 5-star hotel features a restaurant and lounge, a bar and an indoor swimming pool. Rooms come with air conditioning, and are bright and spacious with unique interiors, a flat-screen TV and a view of the city or sea.

Gastronomes can feast on Italian fare at the onsite Zafferano Restaurant, and you can relax with a drink in Piazza lounge or at Bentley's Whiskey Bar. A range of beauty treatments are available in the top-floor Jaleh spa centre, including a hammam, sauna and massages. Guests can also take a dip into the swimming pool or work out in the fitness centre.

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