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## GEEO ITINERARY

Armenia and Georgia 9/21/2024

### **Day 1: Yerevan Arrive in Yerevan at any time. Meet your group for a welcome meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m.**

Arrive in Yerevan at any time. Due to the potential for flight delays or cancellations, we recommend that you plan to arrive in Europe at least a day in advance. This will also give you time to adjust to the time difference, overcome any jet lag, and avoid any disruption to your trip due to flight delays or cancellations. We can book extra hotel nights for you in Yerevan before the trip.

Please note that hotel check-in usually opens around **2:00-3:00 p.m.**, so if your flight arrives early in the morning, you may wish to book a pre-trip hotel night so that you can rest when you arrive. There are no planned activities until an intro meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., usually in the hotel lobby. Check for a sign or ask at the reception desk about the exact time and location of the group meeting. Please make every effort to arrive in time for this meeting. If you are delayed and will arrive late, please inform us. Your tour leader will then leave you a message at the front desk informing you of where and when to meet up tomorrow.

After the meeting, you might choose to get dinner at a nearby restaurant with your traveling companions and your tour leader to further get to know one another.

### **Day 2: Yerevan (B) Drive to Echmiadzin and visit the cathedral. Later, enjoy a city tour of Yerevan, followed by a visit to the Genocide Memorial. Take some free time to explore the city of Yerevan.**

Today we begin by driving to Echmiadzin, Armenia's ancient capital city. We will stop at its famous cathedral, one of the world's first Christian churches (built in AD 301). Learn about the cathedral's history and change in architectural style after it was damaged in the late 400s.

Afterward, we drive back toward Yerevan. We will visit the Armenian Genocide Memorial and Museum to better understand and reflect on the first genocide of the 20th century. Commemorating the massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1922, the Museum explains the story of this horrific historical event. Over 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed by the governing Ottoman Empire and then the Republic of Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Even today, a century later, Armenia has a population of only 3 million people.

Then take a guided wander around the lively and colorful city of Yerevan. Visit sites including the City Park, Abovyan Street, and Republic Square. Enjoy a contemporary art-walk through the Cafesjian Center of Art, before taking in ancient Armenian treasures and manuscripts at The Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran).

Approximate travel time: 1 hr by private vehicle

### **Day 3: Yerevan/Khor Virap/Garni (B, L) Explore the Khor Virap Monastery, then enjoy an excursion to the Roman Temple of Garni. Visit Garni Gorge, enjoy lunch in a local home, and watch how lavash bread is made. Return to Yerevan with time to visit the main market or stroll the cafe-lined streets of the city.**

In the morning we get back into our vehicle and pass through villages and vineyards before arriving at Khor Virap, a pilgrimage site and monastery built in 1662 that's still used for services today. The structure is built around a pit, used to imprison Saint Gregory the Illuminator who was confined for 14 years by his pagan King for preaching Christianity. Explore the grounds and enjoy the fantastic views of Mount Ararat.

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Next, we have an excursion to the Roman Temple of Garni, dedicated to the God of the sun, Mithra. The temple is one of the last standing pagan structures left in Armenia. The Temple grounds have other standing ruins such as a bathhouse, a church, and a cemetery. An earthquake destroyed the temple in 1679, but, under the guidance of the architectural historian Alexander Sahinian, the temple was rebuilt by 1974. Visit Garni Gorge to admire the formations of basalt columns known as the "Symphony of the Stones."

We then sit down to a traditional Armenian lunch with the company of a local family. Watch as your hosts demonstrate "Lavash" bread baking and traditional barbecuing using an underground oven. Get your hands messy during a lesson on how to prepare an Armenian sweet before sitting down to a delicious lunch. End the experience with a sip of local apricot vodka or grappa in the cozy garden of this rural home.

We then return to Yerevan and have the rest of the afternoon for free time exploring this amazing city.

Approximate travel time: 3 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 4: Yerevan/Haghpat (B, L) Drive to Lake Sevan and visit charming monasteries along the way. Continue to Haghpat via Molokan-minority villages, stopping to enjoy a local lunch. Overnight in Haghpat surrounded by breathtaking views of the Debet canyon.**

We leave Yerevan and drive to the largest lake in the Caucasus region, Lake Sevan, and visit charming monasteries along the way. The first is Sevanavank Monastery founded in 874 by King Ashot I, picturesquely standing on a peninsula, this site was used both for the purposes of pilgrimage and as a place of exile for disgraced Armenian noblemen. Continue your drive and stop in the forested town of Dilijan where you can take in the fresh air on a short walk around this quaint town. Then travel to the heart of the forest to discover the impressive, fairytale-like Haghartsin Monastery, or "Monastery of the Playing Eagle."

The Molokan are a minority population in Armenia derived from settlers exiled from Russia for not obeying the rules of the Church. Their name derives from "Milk" due to the great amount of milk they would consume, especially during the fasting period determined by the Orthodox Clergy. Stop in a Molokan village en route to Haghpat to get a glimpse into daily life, and enjoy a traditional afternoon tea.

We will overnight in Haghpat surrounded by breathtaking views of the Debet canyon.

Approximate travel time: 4.5 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 5: Haghpat/Telavi (B) Visit Haghpat Monastery and UNESCO-listed monastic complex of Sanahin. Cross into Georgia to be welcomed and greeted by your Georgian tour leader before transferring to Telavi.**

We start the day with a visit to the Haghpat Monastery. Built in the 10th through 13th centuries, the Haghpat Monastery was once one of the largest centers of science in the region with a rich collection of manuscripts.

Next, we visit the Sanahin Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that dates back to the Byzantine era. The monastery is made up of several buildings including the main church, the Cathedral of the Redeemer. Admire this beautiful example of medieval Armenian architecture and the view of the surrounding hills.

We then cross into Georgia (this takes 1-2 hours) to be welcomed and greeted by your Georgian tour leader before transferring to Telavi, located on the foothills of the Tsiv-Gombori Range.

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Approximate travel time: 3 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 6: Telavi/Kakheti Province/Tbilisi (B, L) Experience a full day in the Kakheti Province, dotted with churches and vineyards. Stop for lunch at a local village house to for lunch and local wine. Head to Tbilisi and enjoy a guided tour of the city.**

Today, we experience a full day in the Kakheti Province, which is dotted with churches and vineyards. Enjoy breathtaking views of the Kizikhi area and Sighnaghi.

For lunch, join a local family for a cooking demonstration. Watch on as your hosts demonstrate how to prepare famous dishes from the area including Georgian bread, "mtsvadi" or pork barbecue and "churchkhela", a traditional Georgian sweet.

We then drive to Tbilisi, Georgia's capital. Its maze-like, cobblestoned old town reflects a long, complicated history, with periods under Persian and Russian rule. Its diverse architecture encompasses Eastern Orthodox churches, art nouveau buildings with ornate balconies, and Soviet Modernist structures. Looming over it all are Narikala Fortress, a reconstructed 4th-century citadel, and Kartlis Deda, an iconic statue of Mother Georgia.

Enjoy a city tour with included visits to the Old Town, Metekhi Temple, the Abanotubani 'bath district' and the Narikala, the main fortress in Tbilisi.

Approximate travel time: 2 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 7: Tbilisi/Gudauri (B) Drive the famous Georgian Military Road to Mtskheta. Visit the Jvari Monastery and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Continue to Uplistsikhe cave town and through the dramatic Aragvi River Valley. Return to Tbilisi for the evening.**

Today, we drive the famous Georgian Military Road to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here we will visit the Jvari Monastery and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, both of which showcase examples of medieval architecture on ancient trade routes.

Then we drive to Uplistsikhe, an ancient cave town dating back to the 7th century BC. The name translates to "the lord's fortress," and the town continued to be a religious and political stronghold until the 14th century before being attacked by the Mongols. While many travelers have never heard of this ancient city before visiting, after a few hours of climbing around the rocks and caves, Uplistsikhe quickly becomes a highlight of any trip to Georgia.

Afterward, we drive back to Tbilisi for another evening in this amazing city.

Approximate travel time: 1.5-2 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 8: Tbilisi (B) Depart Tbilisi at any time.**

There are no planned activities today, so you may depart Tbilisi at any time. If you wish to extend your stay in Tbilisi, consider booking post-tour accommodation with us.

Please note that check-out time from the hotel is usually mid-morning, but luggage storage services are available at the reception desk.

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