

# Georgia & Armenia

May 26 – June 10, 2012

Tour Cost \$2,800

### GEORGIA

A land of endless wonders, unspoiled by modern tourism while retaining its authentic character – Georgia. Once experienced, it will stay with you forever. Exploring Georgia is a constant pleasure.

With the towering Caucasus Mountains forming the border between Europe and Asia, Georgia has long been an important contact zone. In this mystical land you will be captivated by a thrilling blend of eastern enigma and western elegance. The traditions of the East and West meet in Georgia to form a culture unlike any other in the world.

Little can describe Georgia's vast natural beauty. Legend has it that when God apportioned the Earth to all the peoples of the world, the Georgians arrived late. When the Lord asked them why they were tardy the Georgians replied that they had stopped on the way to drink and raise their glasses in praise of Him. God was so pleased with their response that He gave the Georgians the part of the Earth that He had been reserving for himself. A visit to Georgia will confirm that this legend is indeed true: Georgia is a natural paradise.

### ARMENIA

Armenia – acknowledged as one of the cradles of civilization - is a beautiful country with a rich history. It spans rocky highlands, lush forests and serene, turquoise lakes like Lake Sevan. There are remote regions and monasteries to explore like Tatev and Khor Virap. The capital, Yerevan, has a buzzing arts scene and café culture. While the country's ancient monasteries, candle-lit churches and high-walled forts are obvious highlights, your fondest memories of Armenia will most likely lie with the locals themselves. The people are gracious, humble and easygoing. Ties are best forged around a dinner table, where endless rounds of toasting accompany a meal bursting with fresh vegetables and grilled meats.



### Tour cost \$2,800 price includes:

- Accommodations, room tax
- All sightseeing tour and transfer services with A/C coach
- English-speaking locally-stationed guides
- Breakfast, lunch, dinners
- All entrance fees

### Not included:

- International airfare and tax: \$1,150 est
- Personal expenses
- Travel insurance
- Visa: \$15 est
- Tips: \$115 est
- Single Supplement (optional)

## ITINERARY:

### Day 1 Sat, May 26 Leave USA

Leave USA for Tbilisi, Georgia.

### Day 2 Sun, May 27 Tbilisi, Georgia

Arrive in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Transfer to hotel.

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**Overnight:** Hotel in Tbilisi                      **Meals:** None

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### Day 3 Mon, May 28 Tbilisi

We will start our full day of sightseeing in Tbilisi: The National Museum of History, which is home to a unique collection of pre-Christian gold artifacts and jewellery; Open Air Ethnographical Museum where we can see the examples of original Georgian regional architecture; Narikala Fortress - the 4th to 20th cc main citadel of the city; Sionie Cathedral of 7th c.; Metekhi (12th c) - cross-domed church; Sulphur Baths - a favorite place of Tbilisi citizens and foreign guests (A. Pushkin, A. Duma, A. Tolstoy among them); surrounding Old Town and Rustaveli Avenue which is the heart of 21<sup>st</sup> century Tbilisi.

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**Overnight:** Hotel in Tbilisi                      **Meals:** B/L/D

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### Day 4 Tue, May 29 Tbilisi – Gori – Bakuriani

After breakfast drive to Bakuriani via Stalin's House-Museum in Gori, where exhibits give us an opportunity to re-create scenes from the life of the dictator.

We will also visit Uplistsikhe - meaning "The Fortress of God" which is an ancient cave town from the 1st half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. Situated on the crossroads of important trade routes, it was the main centre of paganism, and represents a

complex of halls, caves, theatres, altars, pagan temples, secret tunnels, prisons, pharmacy, passages-streets all carved out of stone over an area of 4 hectares. At its peak of prosperity, the city had a population of 20 000. In 9th -10th cc AD a three-nave basilica was added to the complex. In the evening arrive in Bakuriani.

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**Overnight:** Hotel in Bakuriani                      **Meals:** B/L/D

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### Day 5 Wed, May 30 Vardzia — Sapara - Bakuriani

Today visit Vardzia rock-cut town and Sapara Monastery. After breakfast we drive to Samtskhe - Javakheti region, which is known by important historical events, numerous fortresses, churches and some of the oldest settlements, dry landscapes & healthy climate, cool water springs and steppe vegetation.

En route we will take short stops for photos of Atskuri & Khertvisi medieval fortresses. Visit Vardzia - the rock-cut town built in the 12-13th cc by Queen Tamar. Initially it was planned as a town-fortress, but later on the complex turned to well defended monastery and important political, cultural, educational and spiritual center of the country.

Excursion to Vardzia will take 2-3 hours (walking tour). After visiting Sapara Monastery return to Bakuriani.

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**Overnight:** Hotel in Bakuriani                      **Meals:** B/L/D

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### Day 6 Thu, May 31 Mtskheta — Tbilisi

Drive to Tbilisi visiting Mtskheta on the way. Situated at the confluence of the Aragvi and Mtkvari rivers, Mtskheta has been a site of human settlement since at least the second millennium BC. The town is named after Mtskhetos, son of Kartlos - the legendary progenitor of the Georgian people. Already a town of some significance in

pagan times, it gained importance as the site of the first Christian church in Georgia. Today it is no longer the capital of the country, but it is still the spiritual capital and home to two of Georgia's greatest churches - Svetitskhoveli and Jvari.

In Mtskheta we will visit Jvari Church, Svetitskhoveli, Samtavro and Mtskheta Museum.

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Tbilisi*                      **Meals:** *B/L/D*

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### **Day 7 Fri, June 1    Tbilisi – Yerevan**

This morning we will leave Tbilisi for Yerevan, Armenia. Upon crossing the border, we will first visit Haghpat Monastery from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, which is described as a masterpiece of religious architecture and which is in UNESCO World Heritage list. Then we will drive through the Armenian countryside and reach Yerevan late in the afternoon.

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Yerevan*                      **Meals:** *B/L/D*

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### **Day 8 Sat, June 2    Treasures of Yerevan**

We will start the day with a walking tour of Yerevan exploring various layers of its history medieval shrines hidden behind imposing Soviet-style façades, narrow streets of the old center with sunlight playing on its pink walls, Closed Market and Blue Mosque on Mashtots Avenue, Republic Square, Cascade and Mother Armenia, Opera House and ambitious projects of independent Armenia – North Avenue and spacious Grigor Lusavorich Cathedral consecrated by His Holiness the Patriarch of All Armenians in the presence of His Holiness Pope John Paul 11.

Our next stop is Genocide Memorial situated on the hills overlooking the city, a solemn reminder of the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Yerevan*                      **Meals:** *B/L/D*

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### **Day 9 Sun, June 3    Classical Armenia**

Explore the treasures of Armenia with a visit to the Vatican city of Armenia, Holy Echmiadzin. Experience a fascinating journey through time, descend to the ruins of the pagan sanctuary beneath the altar. On to Zvartnots, a temple consecrated in the presence of Emperor Constantine of Byzantium, it stands out as one of the most prominent creations of medieval architecture. Drive east to the magnificent Temple of the Sun at Garni and the legendary Monastery of Spear at Geghard. Explore the mosaic ancient baths and ruins of the royal palace.

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Yerevan*                      **Meals:** *B/L/D*

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### **Day 10 Mon, June 4    Amberd Fortress**

Early start today with a trip to the highest peak of Transcaucasia, Mount Aragats (4,090m), a dormant volcano. The first stop of our trip is Saghmosavank (Monastery of Psalms) perched on the edge of picturesque Kasakh gorge. Acclimatizing gradually as we ascend the beautiful countryside, we reach Amberd Fortress on the southern slope of Aragats. Breathtaking views of the fortress and citadel, snow covered peaks of Aragats, sun scorched grasslands dressed in wildflowers combine to provide an unforgettable experience this morning. Visit high-mountain camps of friendly Yezidi tribes who tend their sheep under the towering peaks of Aragats. A unique option this evening is a guided visit to Byurakan Observatory founded in 1946; star observations using 2.6 meter telescope, the second largest in Europe.

**Overnight:** *Hotel in Yerevan*                      **Meals:** *B/L/D*

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### **Day 11 Tue, June 5 Yerevan – Lake Sevan**

The day starts with a visit to National Museum of History, providing an excellent introduction to the history of the country. Next comes a cultural showcase not to be missed, Matenadaran, one of the world's oldest repositories of Greek, Persian and Arabic manuscripts.

On a lighter note; we will have a tour of Ararat Brandy Factory with the opportunity of tasting their products, before lunch.

In the afternoon, drive through the picturesque countryside to come to the shores of Lake Sevan, one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world, The Pearl of Armenia. We will enjoy the scenery, take a 20-minute walk to the top of Akhtamar Trail for the best photographic views of the Lake, explore romantic Sevanavank Monastery, and take a boat trip at the lake (time & weather permitting).

**Overnight:** Hotel at Lake Sevan      **Meals:** B/L/D

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### **Day 12 Wed, June 6 Silk Road Adventures**

After breakfast proceed to visit the Stone Garden at Noraduz with unique collection of exquisite khachkars, Armenian cross-stones and Hayravank Monastery.

Then a heart-pumping southward trip through the rugged Selim Pass. Climbing steep paths and enjoying the views of Lake Sevan below, we reach the amazingly intact Selim Caravanserai, an important trading post on the Great Silk Road where little has changed since the fourteenth century.

Before arriving in Goris, we will also visit Karahunj, Armenia's Stonehenge, an ancient observatory that has caused sensation in astronomical circles.

Then proceed to Goris, a quaint town surrounded by mountains, our base for the exploration of Southern Armenia.

**Overnight:** Hotel in Goris      **Meals:** B/L/D

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### **Day 13 Thu, June 7 Tatev Monastery – Goris**

Southern Armenia combines the magic of Armenia's finest mediaeval architecture with stunning landscapes. The first visit is to Tatev Monastery, an architectural masterpiece dating from the 10th century. Drive through a narrow ravine so deep that the sun hardly reaches the bottom, later ascend to a high-mountain plateau with striking views of jagged mountains and gorges. On the way back soar above the gorges in the world's longest aerial tramway, a must-see attraction opened in 2010. Then off to Khndzoresk cave town, to see the gorge with the mysterious caverns cut in the face of the rocks by people seeking refuge from persecution in the natural protection of high cliffs.

**Overnight:** Hotel in Goris      **Meals:** B/L/D

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### **Day 14 Fri, June 8 Khor Virap – Yerevan**

Driving back to Yerevan we have the last chance to experience the untamed beauty of Southern Armenia - surreal red rocks providing an eerie echo, honey-colored villages sandwiched between them. We are in the agricultural heart of Armenia.

On the way visit Khor Virap, the site of royal prison where St. Gregory the Illuminator was held for thirteen years before converting Armenia into the first Christian nation in 301. Guided by the remote majesty of biblical Mt. Ararat, we explore the underground chambers and elegant chapels. Arrive in Yerevan late in the afternoon.

**Overnight:** Hotel in Yerevan      **Meals:** B/L/D

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**Day 15 Sat, June 9      Yerevan**

Free day on your own for a last chance to enjoy Yerevan. Visit Vernisage, the huge arts & crafts market, the best place in Caucasus to buy souvenirs. Open only on weekends it is a lot of fun to wonder in. Explore the treasures of the cultural life of Yerevan, ramble in the oldest part of the city or just relax in shady parks or busy outdoor cafes, enjoying the young and lively atmosphere of this ancient city, the contemporary of Babylon and Rome.

***Overnight: Hotel in Yerevan                      Meals: B/L/D***

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**Day 16 Sun, June 10      Departure from Yerevan.**

***Meals: B/- /-***

# World Affairs Council of Houston

Georgia & Armenia, May 27 - June 11, 2012

## Traveler Information (one form for each traveler)

Last:		First:		M.I.:			
Address:		City:		State:		ZIP:	
Day Phone:			Email:				
Emergency contact (name, phone):							
Passport number:			Expiration date:				
Location issued:			Date of birth:		Citizenship:		

## Tour Cost

Basic tour cost	\$ 2,800	Terms: 1. Deposit of \$500 due 03/01/12 2. Deposit fully refundable up to 90 days before departure 3. Balance due 04/15/12 4. Balance partially refundable up to 45 days before dep. 5. Tips for guide, driver and bag handlers due 05/15/12
International airfare * (estimated)	\$ 1,150	
Air taxes TBD		
Single supplement (\$ TBD)		If sharing a room, with whom?:
Tips (estimated)	\$ 115	* Flights - you are welcome to make your own flight arrangements as long as you provide us with your flight itinerary and arrive no later than the tour group.
Total Charges (estimated)		

## Payment Information

Circle one: Master Card - American Express - Visa - Check		Amount: \$ 500.00	
CC #:		Exp date:	CVS code: (required)
Name (print as it appears on card):			
Signature:			
Do you have a theme, focus, or particular area of interest that you would like to study during the trip?			

**Important note:** Please include a color photocopy of your passport & health insurance card

Mail to:  
World Affairs Council of Houston  
PO Box 920905  
Houston, Texas 77292-0905

**OR** Fax to: (713) 522-7812

World Affairs Council of Houston  
Health information for

Name:

Are you healthy enough to travel internationally and keep pace with an agenda that includes:

Some stairs  
moderates walks  
mountain trails  
this is considered moderate activity level

Do you have any medical conditions that should be known?

Please list any medications that you currently take

Do you have any allergies?

Your doctors name and phone number

Your health insurance plan

Who to contact in case of emergency