

**We invite you to join us, October 1 - 17, 2017 to discover the Caucasus**, bordered by the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east, comprising the independent republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Situated at the crossroads of East and West, along the western end of the ancient Silk Road, the Caucasus has been a meeting place of cultures, ethnicities, and religions, giving birth to one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse regions on Earth. Travel with us to experience incredibly varied landscapes, breathtaking scenery, ancient archeological sites, churches, monasteries, and museums. As we explore the secrets of this hidden land from Baku to Yerevan, we will enjoy Caucasian hospitality at its best: visiting local wineries, attending cooking demonstrations, watching folk dances, and listening to duduk performances and choral polyphony. We have planned the tour so we are in each of the capital cities at a time most likely to offer ballet, opera, and concerts but schedules are set only a few weeks in advance.

## CONTENTS AND COSTS

### Prices per person sharing a double room

**\$4,250**



### Supplement for single occupancy

**\$725**

### **Package prices include Accommodation in well-located, four or five star hotels**



Breakfast each day



Lunch or dinner every day



All meals in Armenia



Airport transfers on  
arrival and departure



Ground transport  
by private coach



Folklore performances  
as indicated in the itinerary



Concerts, opera, and ballet  
as available



Tours with expert guides



## YOUR ITINERARY

**Sunday, October 1:** Depart Houston, arriving in Baku the following evening. We recommend that you take advantage of our group air arrangements, via Lufthansa. See additional information in the column to the left; exact schedule and prices will be available in November. Your Azeri guide and tour hosts will meet you at the airport and accompany you to our hotel in the old city of Baku.

### **AZERBAIJAN (October 2 - 6)**

**Azerbaijan**, situated on the shore of the Caspian Sea, is one of the most ancient sites of civilization. With more than 6,000 historical sites across the country, you never have to go far to experience what this fascinating country has to offer. We will visit the Stone-Age settlement of **Gobustan**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with amazing rock art petroglyphs left by humans as much as 40,000 years ago; **Atashgah**, a Zoroastrian Fire Temple, where ancient worshippers watched eternal flames fed by underground natural gas. "Azerbaijan" is thought to derive from two Persian words, "Azer," meaning "fire," and baijan, "protector or keeper" – a reference to fire-worshippers of the once-dominant Zoroastrian religion. To wander through Azerbaijan's capital city, **Baku**, is to wander through centuries of history. At the center is the "Old City," with its aging palaces, high walls, and beautiful mosques, some dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Our Baku program will include a private tour of the **National Carpet Museum**, with the largest collection of Azerbaijan carpets in the world. We will also do a boat tour of the Baku Bay.

On our way north to Georgia, we sojourn in **Sheki**, a beautiful and ancient city set against a gorgeous backdrop of the Caucasus Mountains. The architectural treasure and a "true travel gem" on the historic trade route of the Silk Road, Sheki boasts the magnificent **palace of the Sheki Khans** (1762), constructed without a single nail and decorated with magnificent frescos and exquisite stained glass called "shebeke."

## GEORGIA (October 6 – 11)

**Georgia** is home to some of the most glorious landscapes anywhere in Eurasia. The high snow-capped Caucasus Mountains descend to the subtropical Black Sea coast; fertile valleys and rushing rivers give contrast with dramatic semi-deserts. We make our way to the capital city of Tbilisi through Georgia's wine country. The most fertile part of Georgia, **Kakheti** is a step back in time – horse-drawn carts on the quiet country roads, fields dotted with haystacks, rivers winding through green pastures, and sweet grapes harvested by hand. On arrival in the beautiful hill-town, **Sighnaghi**, we'll be treated to a supra dinner, complete with polyphonic singing and a multitude of toasts. One day will be dedicated to exploring that area, including the Alaverdi cathedral, a wine tasting at the Chavchavadze estate, a walk through **Telavi**, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century **Gremi** architectural complex, ending up in **Kvareli**, the heart of the Kakhetian wine region, where we'll enjoy yet another tasting and dinner at the **Khareba** winery.

### **GROUP FLIGHTS**

We are working with Lufthansa to provide group fares on the most convenient route, from Houston to Baku and from Yerevan to Houston.

The precise schedule and fares, in economy, premium economy, and business class, will be available in late November.

Please indicate your preference on your reservation form.



### **Advantages of Group Air**

◆ **Best available prices**  
◆ **Advance payment not required** ◆ **Prices locked in**  
◆ **In case of delayed or cancelled flights, the group is rebooked together**

A multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious city on the crossroads of history, **Tbilisi** is neither European nor Asian but a blend of both East and West. Highlights of our visit will include the 4<sup>th</sup>-century **Narikala Fortress**, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century **Metekhi Church**, and the 7<sup>th</sup>-century **Sioni Cathedral**, considered one of the most sacred places in the country since it houses the holy cross of St. Nino, the young woman who converted Georgia to Christianity in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. A number of lovely **Art Nouveau** structures, many sadly deteriorating, stand as a reminder of Tbilisi's economic well-being early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. **The National Art Museum** houses a stunning treasury of medieval jeweled icons, inlaid crosses, and some of the finest cloisonné. **Khakhuli triptych**, one of the highlights of the museum, is the largest piece of cloisonné in the world.

We will take a day-trip to **Mtskheta**, the ancient capital of Georgia, and **Gori**, the birthplace of Joseph Vissarionovich Jughashvili, better known as Joseph Stalin. The historic churches of Mtskheta, including the 11<sup>th</sup>-century **Svetitskhoveli Cathedral** and 6<sup>th</sup>-century **Jvari Monastery**, are outstanding examples of medieval religious architecture in the Caucasus and UNESCO World Heritage sites. **Svetitskhoveli Cathedral** is considered one of the holiest places in Georgia, since the Robe of Christ is reputedly buried here, having been brought to Georgia in the 1<sup>st</sup> century by a Jew from Mtskheta named Elias. In Gori, we have arranged for a special lecture on Stalin over lunch. After lunch, we drive to another UNESCO World Heritage site, **Uplistsikhe**, an ancient Silk Road cave city and former center of pagan worship, dating back to the first millennium BC.

## ARMENIA (October 11 – 16)

**Armenia** is a country that remains relatively untouched by commercial tourism. Proud of its unique cultural heritage, rich with historical churches, monasteries, monuments, and magnificent masonry, it was the first country to proclaim Christianity its state religion, in 301 AD. At the crossroads of East and West, Armenia has always been a buffer state between competing empires and centers of power. As Christians in an Empire of Muslim Ottomans from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on, Armenians suffered persecution, which culminated in the Ottoman government's systematic extermination of its minority Armenian subjects during first World War – when 1-1.5 million Armenians were driven out of their homes and either massacred or force-marched into the desert until they died. We visit the **Genocide memorial** and hear a lecture on the Armenian Genocide at the **Genocide Museum** in the capital city of Yerevan.

One is often reminded that Armenia was the world's first Christianized nation: the country boasts countless monasteries, some dating back as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Many are UNESCO-protected and built in places of incredible natural beauty, making the sites of monasteries we visit on our way to Yerevan, such as **Noravank**, **Goshavank**, **Haghpat**, and **Sevanavank**, well worth a visit even without the impressive, millennia-old monasteries found there.

**Lake Sevan** is the largest lake of the Caucasus, located about 6,500 feet above sea level, making it one of the world's highest fresh water lakes. Maxim Gorky once said that the waters were like “a piece of the sky that had descended to the earth among the mountains.” On the shore of the lake stands the village of **Noratus** with its field of khachkars (intricately carved memorial stones), some of which date back 2,000 years. We will take a boat tour to the monastery of **Hayravank**, and follow the ancient route of the Silk Road, stopping at the **Selim Pass** to enjoy views of Lake Sevan below and to see the amazingly intact **Caravanserai**, an important trading post on the Great Silk Road where little has changed since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. We make our way to **Khor Virap** Monastery, set against the snow-capped peaks of the majestic biblical Mount Ararat – and offering a spectacular view of the mountain.

Art-lovers will not be disappointed with **Yerevan**, home to dozens of museums. We will visit **Matenadaran** – one of the world's richest depositories of medieval manuscripts and books, boasting 17,000 illuminated Armenian manuscripts and ancient Arabic, Assyrian, Hebrew, Russian and Persian texts from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The **History Museum** is the largest in the region, housing over 400,000 artifacts, including archeological and ethnographical exhibits as well as decorative-applied art.

Outside Yerevan, **Garni** and **Geghard** are must-sees. The former, located on the edge of a picturesque gorge, is the only remaining pagan temple in Armenia dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, which seems out of place here on the upland plateau of Armenia, so far from the Hellenistic world. The latter, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a 4<sup>th</sup>-century monastery set carved into the mountain among soaring cliffs, which was founded by Saint Gregory the Illuminator, revered for converting Armenia to Christianity. Another UNESCO World Heritage site we visit is the **Echmiadzin** complex, seat of the Armenian Catholicos (the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church). Near Echmiadzin are the ruins of the 7<sup>th</sup>-century **Zvartnots**, once Armenia's imposing main Cathedral. A unique example of Armenian architecture of the early Christian period, the Cathedral collapsed in a 10<sup>th</sup>-century earthquake and was never rebuilt.

We cap off our days in Yerevan with a visit to the famous **Ararat brandy factory**. Ararat brandies boast a variety and a broad spectrum of taste, distinguished by their rich, lasting flavor and amber color. The story goes that during the Yalta Conference in 1945, Winston Churchill was so impressed with the Armenian brandy given to him by Stalin that he asked that several cases be shipped to him each year!

**Monday, October 16:** Depart Yerevan early morning, arriving home the same afternoon

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
<b>Oct. 1 Sunday</b>	<b>Travel day</b> Those traveling with the group depart around 4:00 PM on Lufthansa flight #441		
<b>Oct. 2 Mon</b>	Morning arrival in Frankfurt You might want to have a little snack during the layover in Frankfurt	Afternoon departure for Baku <i>(There will certainly be at least a light meal on the flight)</i>	Evening arrival Baku; transfer to hotel; check-in and light supper
<b>Oct. 3 Tues</b>	Baku sightseeing. Visit Old Town. Shadier Xiyabani or Martyrs' Lane; Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower	After lunch, visit Zaha Hadid's Aliyev Center	
<b>Oct. 4 Weds</b>	Drive into the countryside nearby to see the petroglyphs of Qobustan (UNESCO Site) and the mud volcanoes	Return to Baku, visiting Bibi Heybat mosque on the way in; after lunch, visit the Carpet Museum, notable both for its collection and architecture	Harbor cruise (weather permitting)

<b>Oct. 5 Thurs</b>	Drive to the Absheron peninsula visiting the Zoroastrian Fire Temple in Surakhany; continue to Shamakhi with stops at the Deri Baba & Seven Domes mausoleums; lunch in Shamakhi		Overnight in Sheki with dinner on your own
<b>Oct. 6 Fri</b>	Visit the Sheki Bazaar and Market and the 18 <sup>th</sup> -century Summer Palace of the Sheki Khans (Khansarai), a magnificent work of Islamic architecture; continue to the village of Kish to visit the round-towered church and learn about Caucasian Albania. Lunch near Sheki		Cross into Georgia, continuing to Signaghi; dinner with traditional polyphonic singing
<b>Oct. 7 Sat</b>	Following a morning stroll through Signaghi we drive to Tsinandali, the estate of the Chavchavadze family for a 5-wine tasting; continue to Telavi with a brief walk and free time for a quick lunch or snack; in the afternoon, we visit Alaverdi Cathedral and Gremi Monastery		We arrive in Kvareli where we enjoy a wine tasting dinner at the Khareba winery
<b>Oct. 8 Sun</b>	Drive to Tbilisi where we tour Old Town, including the Church of Metekhi, Sioni Cathedral, and the Anchiskrati Church	Following lunch, we take a cable car up to Narikala Fortress and stroll back down to visit the bath houses	Possible Festival Performance
<b>Oct. 9 Mon</b>	Day trip to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, and Gori town, the birthplace of Joseph Stalin with a lecture on Stalin over lunch. Afterwards, we drive to Uplistsikhe Cave Town (UNESCO World Heritage site), an ancient Silk Road cave city and former regional center of pagan worship		Possible Festival Performance
<b>Oct. 10 Tues</b>	Art Nouveau walk in Old Tbilisi	Following lunch, you will have free time for the National Gallery and/or the Museum of Fine Arts	Possible Festival Performance
<b>Oct. 11 Weds</b>	Depart for Armenia, with morning visits to Haghpats and Sanahin Monasteries; after lunch in the Haghpats area, continue to the Tavush region of Armenia, called by locals the "Little Switzerland," where we explore Goshavank monastery; our day ends with a walk in Old Dilijan, famous for its craftsmen and historic district		Dinner and overnight near Dilijan
<b>Oct. 12 Thurs</b>	Visit Sevan monastery and enjoy views of Lake Sevan, continuing to Hayravank monastery and the necropolis of Noratus – a field of cross-stones	After lunch, we cross the Selim Pass (Great Silk Route) with a stop at Selim caravanserai to Noravank Monastery.	Dinner near Noravank includes a cultural program, wine tasting and lavash-making class; late arrival in Yerevan
<b>Oct. 13 Fri</b>	Yerevan sightseeing, including the Matenadaran Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, plus the Cascade center of modern arts, and ruins of Erebuni Fortress (782 BC). After lunch on Republic Square we visit the Genocide Memorial and Museum.		Dinner and a possible performance at the Yerevan International Festival
<b>Oct. 14 Sat</b>	Drive to Garni to see the fortress, including a duduk performance in the temple; continue to Geghard Monastery, carved from living rock, including a program of spiritual songs	Following lunch, drive into the Ararat valley to Khor Virap, which offers a panoramic view of Mount Ararat	Return to Yerevan for dinner and a possible performance at the International Festival
<b>Oct. 15 Sun</b>	Drive to Echmiatsin, seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church (UNESCO World Heritage Site) including the Cathedral (in time for mass), St. Hripsime, St. Gayane, and the ruins of Zvartnots Cathedral; return to Yerevan for lunch and a tasting at a brandy factory		Farewell dinner with music and dance – an early night is advisable!
<b>Oct. 16 Mon</b>	Early morning departures; group flights, via Vienna and Frankfurt arrive in Houston early this afternoon		

***PLEASE NOTE: This schedule, although “final,” remains open to change, as required.***