EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Land of the Golden Fleece + Azerbaijan Extension (GFA 2015)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TOURDURAT
19
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Busy
Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Standard
tour Code: GFA

Tour Highlights - Land of the Golden Fleece + Azerbaijan Extension

- ✓ Garni - Walk into an impressive basalt gorge overlooked by a 1st century Hellenistic temple
- ✓ Lake Sevan - Enjoy the sublime beauty of the largest lake in the Caucasus region
- ✓ Tbilisi - Wander through the Old Town of Georgia's cosmopolitan capital
- ✓ Vardzia - Discover a fascinating and remote 12th century cave city carved out of a cliff
- ✓ Kakheti - Explore Georgia's wine region and enjoy a home-cooked lunch with a local family
- ✓ Baku - Marvel at the contrasts of Azerbaijan's chaotic capital

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	15 nights Standard Hotel 3 nights Simple Guesthouse
Included Meals:	18 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 8 dinners
Start Point:	Join tour: Yerevan
End Point:	Tour ends: Baku
Transport:	Bus
Countries:	Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan

Land of the Golden Fleece + Azerbaijan Extension

Journey through the Caucasus region of Central Asia and discover the diversity of a land straddling two continents, which formed part of the ancient Silk Road. We explore lively cities, walk through spectacular mountain scenery, sample the local tipple and learn about the history and culture of some of the most fascinating states of the former USSR.

Why Book this tour

This tour takes in three of the states of the former USSR and showcases the history, culture and stunning mountain landscapes of the region. Located along part of the Silk Road in the Caucasus region, Armenia and Georgia straddle Europe and Asia but feel very eastern European, a testament to their Soviet past, while Azerbaijan has a more classic Central Asian feel. Our extension to Azerbaijan is the perfect excuse to sample this little visited country.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Standard

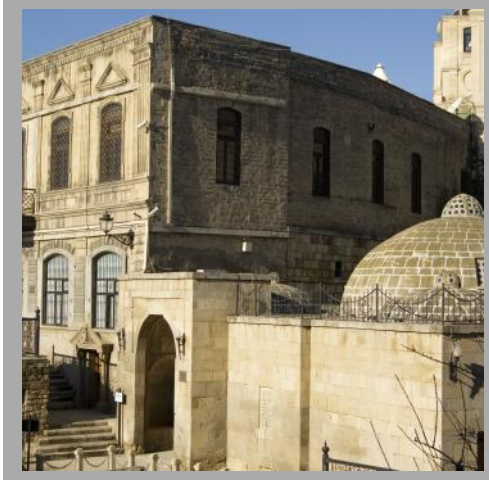
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Busy

There may be early starts, long journeys and tiring days along the way, but you'll return home feeling you've really experienced as much as you possibly could.



Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours. Handpicked and expertly trained, they are native to the region and bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Their passionate approach will make your tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others. Your tour leader will also take care of all the planning

and organisation throughout your journey, enabling you to relax and enjoy the experience fully.

The GFA tour is led by the same tour leader for throughout and is joined by a local guide for the Azerbaijan section.

DAY 1 Join tour in Yerevan

Arrive in Yerevan and check-in at the hotel. Passengers travelling on the group flight from London are not scheduled to arrive until the very early hours of the tomorrow morning. The capital of Armenia is a busy and cosmopolitan city, looking to the future but deeply rooted in its often tragic past. On a clear day there are splendid views across the Ararat Plain to the silhouette of Turkey's Mount Ararat (5165 m), the legendary resting place of Noah's Ark once part of 'Greater Armenia' and to many Armenians still symbolic of a glorious past. Find wide tree lined boulevards, grand 19th century buildings and several museums as well as many street side cafes perfect for sampling a strong Armenian coffee whilst people watching.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 From Yerevan visit the Holy City of Echmiadzin

This morning we head out of the city to visit the archaeological site of the 7th century ruins of the UNESCO listed Zvartnots, its remaining columns set against a magnificent backdrop of the snowy peaks of Mount Ararat. We continue on to Armenia's Holy City of Echmiadzin, the former capital, where we plan to visit the UNESCO listed Echmiadzin Cathedral in time to coincide with part of Sunday service. Returning to Yerevan, we pay a make our way to the Cascade complex - a Soviet period structure that resembles a giant stairway that houses a modern art museum. We continue on to see the expansive Republic Square before some time to enjoy a wander through the lively open air Vernisage craft market.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 From Yerevan visit sites of Garni and Geghard

Today we again leave the city behind as we drive east through small villages and a landscape of alpine meadows to out to the Hellenistic temple at Garni. This pagan monument dedicated to the worship of the sun was built in AD 77 and is an extraordinary sight to be found in Armenia, so far from the rest of the Hellenistic world. From the temple we take an easy walk down the Garni river gorge, where we can see the striking basalt rock formations that make up the towering walls of the gorge. We continue on to the nearby UNESCO listed Geghard Monastery found in a beautiful location surrounded by mountains. Partly made up of caves and partly built from local stone, this tranquil monastery dates from the 4th century and houses two main churches and a fountain of spring water alleged to have rejuvenating properties.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 From Yerevan visit Amberd Fortress

Today we head northwest and make an excursion to the imposing Amberd Fortress on the southern flank of Mount Aragats (4090 m). Its construction began in the 7th century and continued through into the 11th. The Fortress is surrounded by cliffs on three sides, which protected it for a long time until Tamerlane managed to sack it in the 14th century. Afterward we head towards Oshakan village, where a local family invite us into their home to see how they bake traditional Armenian flatbread known as 'Lovash'. We then enjoy a lunch prepared with this freshly baked bread, before returning to the city. Back in Yerevan we have time to visit the remarkable Matenadaran library, which houses over 17,000 rare manuscripts.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5 Drive to Lake Sevan via monasteries and winery

We depart Yerevan today and travel south through the vast plains of Ararat to visit Khor Virap Monastery. Mount Ararat is a constant companion on the horizon and provides a spectacular backdrop to the monastery. As we continue on our way the plains give way to undulating hills as we start making our way into the mountains. We pass through the wine-making village of Areni where we stop at a local winery to taste the best wine in Armenia. Continuing on our way, the scenery becomes more mountainous and we head into a spectacular gorge where we make a stop at the picturesque Noravank Monastery, taking pride of place in a lofty position overlooking the gorge below. After a break here for lunch we climb higher making our way over Selim Pass (2410 m) providing wonderful views

of the mountains and Alpine meadows with its many wild flowers in the spring. As Selim Pass was once part of the Silk Road we find can the remains of a caravanserai here, where travellers would find food and shelter on their journey. The road then starts a descent and once again we start to pass through villages, eventually catching our first glimpse of the expansive waters of the beautiful Lake Sevan with its backdrop of mountain peaks. Located 1900 m above sea level Lake Sevan is famous for its ever changing hues, and depending on the weather the colour of the water can range from a deep steely blue to a stunning turquoise. This huge body of water is the largest lake in the Caucasus region covering an area of 940 square km, and one of the largest fresh water high altitude lakes in the world. We have the chance to walk up to Sevanavank Monastery, where, from its high position we gain a different perspective of the lake. Our hotel for the night sits on the banks of the lake itself.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 Drive to Tbilisi via Monastery of Haghpat

Today we head to the Armenia/Georgia boarder at Sadakhlo. The scenery changes again as we find ourselves amongst hills and valleys covered in pine trees. In picturesque Dilijan town, we walk through a museum street, which has preserved houses dating back to the 18th century with typical fretwork wooden balconies as well as local handicraft studios. As we continue on the scenery changes again and becomes more dramatic as we drive by towering escarpments as we make our way into the copper mining are of Armenia. Our final stop is at the dramatically located Monastery of Haghpat, listed by UNESCO on account of its outstanding ecclesiastical architecture. Crossing the border in the afternoon, we cross a river to arrive in Georgia and continue to the capital of Tbilisi. Time permitting, there may be the opportunity to take a stroll up to the Narikala Citadel for fine views over the city or take a relaxing sulphur bath for which Tbilisi is famous.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7 In Tbilisi, walking tour of Old Town; free afternoon

The capital of Georgia is an ancient and cosmopolitan city; we can find a synagogue, a mosque, a Georgian basilica, an Armenian church and a Zoroastrian Fire-Worshipper's temple all within a 15 minute walk of one another. Tbilisi is one of Europe's most fascinating capitals, and we include a half day orientation tour on foot which takes us first through the picturesque Old Town to the important Church of Metecki, the Sioni Cathedral and then on to the fascinating State Museum. There is plenty of time free to explore the city further, perhaps a backstage tour of the Rustaveli Theatre or a wander through the narrow streets of the Old Town perhaps finding a quirky café to pass the time. A walk over the architecturally striking contemporary Peace Bridge is also a must.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Drive via Mtskheta to Kutaisi via Uplistsikhe cave town

Leaving the capital this morning, we drive to picturesque Mtskheta, the spiritual heart of Georgia. Here we visit the hilltop 6th century Jvari Monastery. From here we have spectacular views of Mtskheta and the confluence of two rivers below. We make our way down into the town where we visit Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. The 9th century basilica contains the grave of Sidonia, who was said to have been buried holding Christ's robe. From here we drive through villages to the cave town of Uplistsikhe. Here an entire town of streets, churches, palaces and residential buildings has been carved into the mountainside. Dating from the first millennium BC, it gradually grew to be an important city on the trade route linking Byzantium with India and China. After exploring this unusual place we drive via Khashuri and Surami into the hills towards the Rikoti Pass, claimed to be a watershed between Asia and Europe. Here the road winds through narrow, forested valleys before dropping onto the fertile plains of the Rioni, Georgia's most important river. Arriving in Kutaisi, the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Colchis, we check into our guesthouse for a two-night stay. Kutaisi has always been an important town throughout the ages and for many years was the capital of Georgia, when the Arabs occupied Tbilisi. The period between the reigns of King Bagrat and Queen Tamar (roughly 900 - 1200) was the golden age for Kutaisi and most of the significant buildings date from this time. Now it is the main city of the Imereti region and here the people are renowned for their sense of humour and also a special kind of 'khachapuri' - the cheese bread unique to Georgia.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 9 From Kutaisi visit Gelati Monastery; free afternoon

This morning we drive to the magnificent UNESCO listed monastery complex at Gelati, which includes an Academy that employed some of Georgia's greatest thinkers. It was founded in 1106 by King David the Builder in gratitude to God for his victories over the Turks. The King wanted it to serve as a centre of Christendom, so as well as scholars many religious artists studied here. Many of the

treasures which were made here have been lost over the centuries, however the buildings and frescos in them are extremely well preserved, and the setting of the monastery on a hillside with views over to the distant Caucasus peaks is attractive. Later we drive to the smaller monastery of Motsameta, spectacularly sited on a cliff-edge on the horse-shoe bend of a river, before taking a detour to a nearby area unique in Georgia for its underground caves. We explore one of the grottoes before heading back to our guesthouse in Kutaisi. During free time this afternoon, it is possible to walk from our guesthouse through the attractive back streets to the turquoise roofed Bagrati Cathedral for great views over Kutaisi or walk down into town to explore the back streets and riverfront observing local life.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 10 Drive to Bakuriani through Borjomi Gorge

Our journey today begins by retracing our route back to Khashuri before turning south to drop into the majestic deciduous forests of the Borjomi Gorge. We stop en route at a pottery and get the chance to see handmade artifacts being produced. We then start to ascend as we make our way to the winter ski resort of Bakuriani, where we can appreciate the amazing diversity of landscape in this small country with stunning views of pine covered hills and distant snow-capped peaks. Bakuriani's mountain climate is said to have restorative properties, and we can enjoy this wonderful air for two nights.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 11 From Bakuriani; explore cave town of Vardzia

Today we visit Khertvisi Fortress, dramatically situated on a cliff above the confluence of two major rivers. Afterwards we drive through a remote and beautiful landscape of rolling hills, with mountains peaks on the horizon and pine trees occasionally standing like sentries along the sides of the road. Our destination is one of Georgia's most significant sites, the cave town of Vardzia, which is cut into a towering cliff; the first sight of it is most impressive. Established by King Giorgi III in the 12th century as a stronghold against the Turkish Sultanate (the Turkish border is only 10km away). Vardzia was subsequently developed by his daughter, Tamar (later to become Queen Tamar), who created a cave monastery that became a centre of Georgian culture. This network of caves above the Mtkvari (Kura) river once numbered 3000, with up to 19 tiers in some places. Much of it was destroyed after a huge earthquake in 1456 and only 550 caves have been since discovered. There are numerous churches, meeting halls, refectories and wine cellars, all interconnected by tunnels and stairways. We have time to explore and navigate our way around this fascinating place before returning to Bakuriani.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 12 Drive to Gudauri via Stalin's museum in Gori

We continue our journey, stopping at the very Soviet style town of Gori, where Georgia's most famous son, Stalin, was born. Here we visit the museum and learn much about his life. Interestingly he initially began training as a priest in the Georgian Seminary, before abandoning religion to become a brigand and join the new Bolshevik movement. It has been suggested too that Georgia escaped the worst horrors of Stalin's regime because he was afraid of his conservative Christian mother! En route we'll pay a visit to the Ananuri Fortress overlooking a reservoir on the Aragvi River. We continue to head north into the mountains. The scenery becomes more dramatic as we ascend along the Georgian Military Highway. We drive through the spectacular and breathtaking mountain scenery of the Greater Caucasus as we make our way to Gudauri (2196 m), a winter ski resort overlooking an epic gorge, for a two-night stay.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 13 From Gudauri; walk in Kazbegi Mountains

North of Gudauri, the Kazbegi region is a picturesque area, with alpine meadows and towering snow-capped mountains. We spend the day in the mountains and plan to walk from Kazbegi town through Gergeti village and up to the Church of the Holy Trinity, stunningly located on a hilltop overlooking the snowy peaks of the Caucasus Mountains. The walk is a round trip of 3-4 hours. The area is a treasure trove of mythology - it was to the majestic Mount Kazbegi (5047 m), the highest peak in this region, that Prometheus was chained. This part of the Caucasus is a protected area, and is home to a variety of flora and fauna. Georgia has over 100 different mammals, and although the European bison and Caucasian leopard have become extinct, there are still wolves and bears in the mountains. En route back to Gudauri we stop at a local place where we will be shown the manufacture process of iconographic painting, which uses natural dyes, and of traditional felt artifacts.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 14 Drive to Telavi via Tbilisi and Kakheti wine region

We descend from the mountains today and find ourselves again on the plains as we drive back to Tbilisi where we stop for lunch and have some free time. In the afternoon we continue west to the Kakheti region where we first make a stop at the lovely 18th century town of Sighnaghi, referred to locally and tongue-in-cheek as the Paris of Georgia! The Kakheti region is famous for its wine production we visit to a local winery that has been operating for over 300 years. Here we can see a 16th century wine cellar and have the chance to sample both red and white wines before continuing to the charming town of Telavi where we overnight in a guesthouse with shared facilities.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 15 Visit market and wine factory, then drive to Sheki

This morning we visit the farmers market in Telavi. After seeing all of the produce we travel to a wine factory for a fascinating insight into how the local tipple is created. We will see both European style production and traditional Georgian production methods. We will also we able to sample the wines and perhaps buy a bottle of Hilary Clinton's favourite. Our al fresco lunch is hosted by a local family at their home. We have the unique opportunity to experience delicious traditional Georgian cooking and hospitality. In the afternoon passengers returning to Tbilisi will be picked up and taken back to the city for their final night. Those heading on to Azerbaijan will cross the border at Lagodekhi and drive on to Sheki.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 16 In Sheki, walking tour; visit Kish village church

Lost in the folds of the forested slopes of the Caucasus foothills, Sheki has for centuries been an important market town on the east west trading route running across the Caucasus from the Caspian Sea in the east to the Black Sea in the west. A further trade route across the mountains to Dagestan in the north turned Sheki into a thriving commercial centre - especially during the 18th and 19th centuries, when there were no fewer than five working caravanserais providing safe lodging to merchants and traders. We visit the Palace complex including the museum. In the afternoon we visit the nearby village of Kish, where we can visit the village church.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 17 Drive to Baku via Samaxi and mud volcanoes

We travel the historic trade route from Sheki to Baku, on the Caspian Sea, a scenic if winding journey in the shadow of the mighty Caucasus stopping en route at Samaxi where we visit the second oldest mosque in the trans-Caucasus. We also stop at some fascinating mud volcanoes. The land is incredibly varied: from lifeless deserts at one extreme to dense green forests at the other.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 18 In Baku, walking tour; visit Absheron peninsula

The history of Baku is long and fascinating, not least its recent past since the 'oil boom' of the early 20th century, when Azerbaijan produced more than half the world's supply of oil and the capital Baku grew uncontrollably. On our first morning however we walk through the delightful winding alleys of the Old City, whose old mosques, caravanserais and overhanging wooden balconies tell of a quieter era in Baku's history. We see the Maiden's Tower, a powerful, eight-storey fortress, and the Shirvanshah's Palace complex, parts of which date back to the 15th century. In the afternoon we make a trip by bus to the Absheron peninsula, to visit its remarkable Zoroastrian Atesgah (fire temple).

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 19 Tour ends in Baku

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast. Passengers returning to London on the group flight to London depart in the very early morning before breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 18 breakfasts, 5 lunches,8 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Armenia

Lunch £: 5.00

Dinner £: 7.00

Georgia

Lunch £: 5.00

Dinner £: 7.00

Azerbaijan

Lunch £: 5.00

Dinner £: 7.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Armenia

Bottle of Beer £: 0.7

Water £: 0.30

Georgia

Bottle of Beer £: 0.90

Water £: 0.30

Azerbaijan

Bottle of Beer £: 0.90

Water £: 0.30

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Mtskheta - Visit pagan ruins at Bagineti archaeological site: US$ 5pp
Tbilisi - Rustaveli Theatre (Day 7) minimum pax 5: US$ 5 pp

Batumi - Full day excursion to the Black Sea coast (Day 9) minimum pax 15: US$ 30pp [If this takes place we will rearrange Days 9 and 10]

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow US$ 30. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Foreign Exchange

Armenia

ATM Availability: Only in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very limited.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are difficult to change.

Local Currency: Dram.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: We recommend you take your money in undamaged mixed denomination US$ notes issued post 1993.

Where to Exchange: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

Georgia

ATM Availability: Only in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very limited.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are difficult to change

Local Currency: Lari.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: We recommend you take your money in undamaged mixed denomination US$ notes issued post 1993.

Where to Exchange: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

Azerbaijan

ATM Availability: Only in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very limited.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are difficult to change

Local Currency: Manat.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: We recommend you take your money in undamaged mixed denomination US$ notes issued post 1993.

Where to Exchange: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable. You will also need to ensure your travel policy covers you for all activities you intend to do whilst on tour.

We are delighted to include FREE travel insurance **for all qualifying customers** who book an Explore trip from 01 January 2015.

For more information about Travel insurance and to check whether you are eligible to receive free cover, please visit www.explore.co.uk/insurance. Explore Worldwide Ltd are an Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Limited. who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. The registration number can be checked by visiting the the FCA's website www.fca.gov.uk or by contacting them on 0800 111 6768.

Visa Information

Armenia: Visas are not required for EU nationals, US & UK citizens.

Georgia: Visas are not required for EU nationals, UK, Canadian or US citizens.

Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

Azerbaijan: All nationalities will require a visa prior to departure. Please note that the cost of the Azerbaijan visa increased significantly in May 2015.

Please check with your nearest Azerbaijan Embassy or visit www.visaforazerbaijan.org.uk for up to date information regarding the visa. This will allow you to familiarize yourself with the visa process prior to booking.

In order to submit your visa application to your nearest Azerbaijan Embassy you will be required to supply a letter of invite or tourist voucher. Explore will obtain this on your behalf through our local Azerbaijan representative. This is normally processed within 6 weeks prior to your tour departure date and takes a minimum of 5 working days to process; however should you require the documentation earlier than this, please contact Explore directly to discuss this further.

Visas can be obtained through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK. Please contact: Visaswift, at http://www.visaswift.com/explore.aspx
Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office

For those nationalities that do not have a Azerbaijan Embassy in their country of residence, please contact us directly prior to booking to discuss this further.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Armenia

Nothing compulsory but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Special Note: Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Georgia

Nothing compulsory but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Special Note: Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Azerbaijan

Nothing compulsory but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Special Note: Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour

Climate

Armenia

Due to the fact that Armenia is on a high landlocked plateau the temperature extremes are pronounced: winters are cold and summers can be very hot, spring and autumn are widely regarded as the best times to visit.

Georgia

Georgia has a temperate climate with warm dry periods from June to September. Early and late in the season, temperatures can drop to sub-zero at higher altitude.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan experiences extremes of climate: while Baku and the Caspian coastal areas are hot and humid in mid-summer, May to September are the best months to visit the mountainous north-west.

Clothing

Weather is changeable in the north and mountains; it can be cool especially at night, bring a warmer jacket. Raingear is essential at all times. In remote parts of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan you should avoid shorts and vest tops; long trousers or skirts are ideal. A headscarf is essential for visiting churches and mosques.

Equipment

A waterbottle, torch, swimsuit, sunhat, suncream and sunglasses.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes for visiting sites and hilly towns; sandals; lightweight walking/trail boots for optional day walks.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

If you are planning on taking any prescription medications with you on tour it is recommended that you also carry a prescription issued by your doctor.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Armenia

Population: 3,262,200

Size of Country: 29,743 sq km

Major Language: Armenian

Religion: Christian

Time Difference to GMT: +4

Georgia

Population: 4,636,400

Size of Country: 69,700 sq km

Major Language: Georgian

Religion: Christian

Time Difference to GMT: +4

Azerbaijan

Population: 9,165,000

Size of Country: 86,600 sq km

Major Language: Azerbaijani

Religion: Muslim

Time Difference to GMT: +4

Electric Supply & Plugs

Armenia

2 Pin Round

Georgia

2 Pin Round

Azerbaijan

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety andÂ security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. ForÂ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link atÂ http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is ‘Available’ or ‘Guaranteed’ we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2015 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2015. 2016/17 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2016.

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