PRIVATE TOUR TO AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA & ARMENIA

The Caucasus countries of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan hold unique enchantments for travelers to discover. Thousands of years of history beckon from this bridge between Europe and Asia, nestled between Russia, Turkey and the Black and Caspian Seas. Relatively untraveled, visitors will find adventure like it used to be with fabulous food, warm hospitality and amazing cultural diversity. Hike up to lone monasteries in Armenia, take a moonlight swim in the Black Sea, taste unforgettable Georgian wine and dance under the minarets of Azerbaijan. It's a land of forgotten wilderness, ancient cities, and traditions from the beginnings of Christianity and Islam, Circassia and the Ottoman Empire. Experience the most incredible adventure in your life in the Caucasus!

HIGHLIGHTS

Discover cultural treasures of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia: magnificent temples, monasteries, synagogues, churches and cathedrals.
Visit the ancient villages, exotic bazaars, traditional wineries, brandy factory and bakeries.
Discover local cuisine, participate in baking the traditional Armenian bread lavash, enjoy Georgian khachapuri, Azeri Pilaf and enjoy visiting the local families to explore local hospitality. Photography at Kasbek, the highest mountains in Caucasus, enjoy breathtaking view of rivers, lakes and the surrounding region! Explore Caucasus’ architectural wonders, listen to the legendary music and songs at the historical sites by local musicians.

**DAY 1. BAKU, AZERBAIJAN**

Evening arrival in Baku Heydar Aliyev Airport (in the morning of 5th September at 1:15 am). Welcome to the Land of Fire! You will be met by our guide and driver for transfer to your hotel. Hilton, located in the ancient part of Baku.

**DAY 2. BAKU, AZERBAIJAN**

This afternoon we will explore the ancient part of Baku. Visit the Icheri Sheher where you will see the Shirvanshah Palace, the Maiden Tower - Baku's landmark, the Friday Mosque, and a colorful caravansary – the wayside "hotel" of Silk Road merchants and their caravans. Later we shall learn the stories and legends of the region's Zoroastrian past at Atashgah "House of Fire" temple and museum, and Yanar Dag, the burning mountain.

**DAY 3. BAKU – GOBUSTAN – BAKU**

We'll drive to nearby Gobustan to admire 40,000 year old rock paintings at the open air UNESCO Heritage Site and visit the archaeological museum. Set in the Greater Caucasus Mountains this outstanding cultural heritage site includes the remains of inhabited caves and ancient settlements. On our return to Baku there will be time to enjoy the many boutiques, cafes and shops at Fountain Square and
learn more about local Azeris. This city by the sea mixes the ancient with the modern, its three Flame Tower skyscrapers rise above the old city and reflect in the waters of the bay.

**DAY 4. BAKU – SHEMAKHA – SHEKI, AZERBAIJAN**

Depart for the Caucasus Mountains in northwest Azerbaijan. The dry landscape gives way to a densely forested mountain area. En route we'll visit the distinctive lunar landscape of the mud volcanoes, the 15c. Diri Baba Shrine in Maraza, the Yeddi Gumbez Tomb and the Juma Mosque in Shemakha. Continue to Sheki where we overnight at Sheki Hotel located in the heart of ancient city. Marxal 5*

**DAY 5. SHEKI – AZERBAIJAN/GEORGIA BORDER – LAGODEKHI – SIGNAGI, GEORGIA**

Shekhi has always been a mercantile and crafts center. Visit the colorful bazaar and the summer palace of the royal Sheki Khans with its magnificent frescoes and stained glass. Tour the Sheki Museum and Fortress. Depart for the Georgia border and meet with your Georgian guide and driver.

Later we travel to the fortified town of Sighnaghi, with its quaint cobbled streets and wooden architecture, and lovely views down to the Alazani Valley. En route we stop at Bodbe Nunnery, which houses the tomb of St. Nino who converted Georgia to Christianity as early as 337 AD. After visiting the local history museum and another local wine cellar. Stay in Signagi. Kabadoni Boutique (4*). We will enjoy wine tasting and Khachapuri with locals
DAY 6. SIGNAGI- GEORGIA – SEDAKHLO, DZORAGET, ARMENIA

After completing a short tour in Signagi we will take a scenic drive to Georgia-Armenia border to change our guide and vehicle for Armenia. Explore the most ancient sites and monasteries on the way to your hotel. Accommodation and exploration in DZORAGET. Best Western. We may also explore Dilijan before Dzoraget on the way to our hotel if time allows.(if not we will visit there on the 12th Sept.)

DAY 7. DZORAGET - ECHIMIADZIN - YEREVAN, ARMENIA
Today we'll explore a variety of Armenian cultural heritage sites on our drive to the capital region. We'll first stop at the Alphabet Park where giant stone letters of the Armenian alphabet stand alongside a statue of Mkhitar Gosh, the Armenian scholar. On the southern slopes of Mount Aragats, the medieval fortress of Amberd features an 11th century church known for its splendid dome. Next we tour the 13th century Saghmosavank monastic complex perched atop a precipitous gorge above the Kasagh River. In the Armavir region, the heart of the Bronze age, we'll visit the Metsamor Historical-Archeological Site and Museum. We'll continue to Echmiadzin, the spiritual center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Conical spires rise here against the backdrop of the most fertile valley in Armenia and the crest of Mount Ararat. We'll visit the UNESCO World Heritage cathedral here. The main entrance is intricately carved, the interior walls and domes painted with geometric shapes and the treasury holds an incredible collection of Christian relics. On the grounds can be found beautiful khachkars, or carved stone crosses. We'll make our way to Yerevan for dinner and overnight at a Marriott/Radisson/Grand Yerevan. Don't forget to try the Ararat brandy!

**DAY 8. YEREVAN – GARNI – GEGHARD – YEREVAN, ARMENIA**

Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, is one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities dating back to the creation of the Erebuni Fortress on the site in 782 BC. Its chock full of parks, monuments, museums and cafe life! After a brief city tour we'll head to the Kotayk region to visit Geghard Monastery partially hewn from the mountainside and active during the 4th to 13th centuries. Legend has it that the lance which
pierced Christ's side was kept here until it was moved to Echmiadzin. This spectacular place, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, boasts history going back to pagan times. The acoustics of the rock-cut halls offer an excellent opportunity for church singers to try their voices. We proceed to Garni, a pagan temple from 77 AD, called the Temple of Sun, and dedicated to the heathen god Mithra. Reminiscent of the Parthenon in design, we will tour the ramparts, the ruins of the palace complex, a bathhouse and a fifth century round church.
DAY 9. YEREVAN- DILIJAN-TBILISI, GEORGIA

Sightseeing day drive to Tbilisi through the Sevan River, Monastery, Tsaghkadzor and charming Dilijan cities, cultural and spiritual centers of Armenia. Upon arrival in Tbilisi you will be accommodated at Marriott 5*

DAY 10. TBILISI, GEORGIA

Explore Tbilisi. Tbilisi is a lovely city along the steep banks of the Mtkvari River with the Narikala Fortress rising above the old city.

Today we will visit the State History Museum, the Sameba (Trinity) Cathedral and the extraordinary dry Bridge art and flea market. Then we'll walk Tbilisi's narrow streets in the old town with straddles the Kura River. We'll learn about the city's history through its mix of religious and secular architecture; a variety of churches, synagogues and mosques, picturesque 19th century houses with multi-colored wooden balconies and even a subtle hint of Persian design. Take a funicular to Mtatsminda Park for the spectacular views of the Tbilisi City. Visit legendary Narikala Fortress, Mother of Georgia and the Bridge of Peace, the architectural jewel of Caucasus.
DAY 11. Tbilisi –Ananuri-Kazbegi

We will travel up the famous Georgian Military Highway which leads to the Georgian-Russian border. On the way we visit the 17th century Ananuri architectural complex of churches and fortress overlooking the Zhinvali Water Reservoir. Enjoy lunch and local wine. The breathtaking drive through the high Caucasus Mountains and along the Tergi River brings us to Kazbegi (now named Stepandsminda), the main town in the region overlooked by snow-capped Mnt Kazbeg. (Hotel Rooms or Porta Caucasus) There we board a 4-wheel drive vehicle for the trip up through alpine landscapes of verdant valleys and snowy summits to the 14th c. Gergeti Trinity Church at 7,119 ft. Weather permitting you may see of one of the highest glaciers in The Caucasus which rests at 16,558ft. You will be able to hike in these spectacular gorges and mountains. Return to your hotel Rooms.
DAY 1. KAZBEGI - GORI- UPLISTSIKHE-KUTAISI

Sightseeing day drive to Gori, a historical town. Enjoy exploring the sites including the Fortress and Stalin’s Museum. Joseph Stalin began his life as Iosif Dzhugashvili on the mean streets of Gori and while he’s not exactly a Georgian hero, the town preserves memories of his life and displays them in the Stalin Museum. Continue driving to Kutaisi. Upon arrival we explore the historic part of Kutaisi and visit UNESCO World Heritage Site of Gelati Monastery. Stay In 4* Best Western Hotel

DAY 13. KUTAISI – BATUMI

Morning drive to the Black Sea coast and its jewel town of Batumi via Guria province. Upon arrival in Batumi we shall visit Botanical Gardens and explore the magnificent architecture and natural beauty of the city. In Guria province we enjoy short hiking, visit the charming closeby villages and monastery and sip a local tea. Hilton (Divon 5 Star)

DAY 14. BATUMI-TBILISI

This morning we will enjoy visiting the local bazaar, then Trinity church, and use the cable car to enjoy the panorama of the second biggest city of Georgia. Then we will take a sightseeing drive to Tbilisi. Upon arrival Farewell dinner and folk performance. Marriott 5*

DAY 15. TBILISI- MTSKHETA-TBILISI

This morning you can enjoy walking tour, shop or enjoy therapeutic sulfur baths which impressed such celebrity visitors as Pushkin, Lermontov, and Dumas. Sightseeing afternoon drive to the ancient capital and religious center of Georgia: charming, 3,000-year old Mtskheta. Among the historical gems we will explore are the 6th century Jvari Church complex on the top of a hill, and fabulous 11th century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral where the Robe of Christ is buried. Both are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. We also visit the Bagineti pagan archaeological site, which dates back to the 1st c. BCE. Return back to Tbilisi. Farewell dinner.
DAY 16. TBILISI

You will be transferred to the airport to take your flight to your next destination

What's Included

- Visa support/consulate visa fee
- Ground Transportation
- Experienced English-speaking guides in all countries
- Hotel accommodation (5 star hotels in capital cities, Boutique hotels and 4* hotels)
- Meals: 14 Breakfast, 8 dinners 9 lunches /snacks for long rides
- Entrance fees for the sights, museums, mountains and parks
- Wine Tastings in Armenia and Georgia
- Brandy Tasting
- Culinary experiences and making Kachapuri
- Folk Performance

What's Not Included

- International Flights /travel insurance
- Charges in hotels for additional services, some meals