

# THE CAUCASUS ARMENIA, GEORGIA & AZERBAIJAN

A VIP Tour of the most enthralling and emerging capitals of Europe



Ateshgah Temple, Baku

## Highlights

- Cognac tasting in Armenia
- Private khachapuri-making class
- VIP wine tasting at Georgia's leading vineyard
- Private Tour of Zaha Hadid's extraordinary new Aliyev Cultural Center in Baku
- Private Tour of the futuristic new Baku Carpet Museum
- Exclusive Tour of the Nobel Family Mansion, Villa Petrolea
- Private Tour of Ateshgah Temple, also known as the Temple of the Fire Worshippers



Day 1	Yerevan	Arrival
Day 2	Yerevan	City tour – History museum – Matenadaran – Cognac tasting
Day 3	Yerevan	Echmiatsin – Zvartnots – Garni – Geghard
Day 4	Yerevan - Dilijan	Yerevan – Khor Virap – Noravank – Selim Caravanserai
Day 5	Dilijan - Tbilisi via Lori	Dilijan – Goshavank – Haghartsin – Sanahin – Haghpas – Tbilisi
Day 6	Arrive Tbilisi	Transfer to Radisson Blu
Day 7	Tbilisi	City Tour & Old Town, khachapuri cooking class
Day 8	Mtskheta & Gori	Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, Stalin Museum, Chateau Mukhrani
Day 9	Travel to Baku	Transfer to the Four Seasons Hotel History Museum Old Town, Shirvanshah Palace Boat Tour
Day 10	Baku	Gobustan Petroglyphs Carpet Museum Nobel House
Day 11	Baku	Yanar Dag Fire Mountain Ateshgah Zoroastrian Fire Temple Zaha Hadid designed Aliyev Cultural Centre
Day 12	Baku	Azerbaijan Art Museum

## Why Go?

*'The South Caucasus is among the most culturally genuine, historically rich and religiously diverse --not to mention under the radar -- parts of the world. they share a timeless and deep-rooted tradition of hospitality, family and food.'*

**Patricia Schultz, 1001 Places to Go Before You Die.**

Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity, in the 4th Century AD. It is this heritage which gives Armenia its distinctive character. The country is a tapestry of churches and monasteries, with a kaleidoscope of frescoes and murals. You will enjoy local hospitality, delicious national cuisine and stunning scenery.

Tbilisi is not only the capital of Georgia, but the capital of food and wine in the entire region. With neoclassical and Art Nouveau architecture, stunning countryside and mountain ranges close by this city is a revelation. Baku is a city of huge contrasts, with minarets superseded by the iconic architectural landmark that is The Flame Towers. Flames, signifying the power of natural energy, have been a part of local history since Zoroastrian times. Incredible museums and a Mediterranean climate complete the picture. Once you have been, you will wonder why Tbilisi & Baku were not on the must do map before.

**The following is just a suggested daily tour schedule. You will have complete control over your daily schedule and may change your plans at any time by simply telling your guide.**





DAY 1



Saint Gregory Monastery, Yerevan

## YEREVAN

Upon arrival in Yerevan today, you will be met by your driver and guide and transferred to your hotel.

Yerevan, the capital, is one of the oldest cities in the world. The earliest recorded settlement dates back to 782 BC. The city today has a vibrant café society, and a host of arts and crafts markets selling woodcarving, fine lace, and the hand-knotted carpets and kilims that are a Caucasus specialty. Obsidian and gold jewellery is a centuries-old Armenian specialty.

### Exeter Services

Airport Transfer

### Hotel

Tufenkian Historic Yerevan

*“Yerevan was not what I expected. In contrast to predeparture research about historic massacres, a struggling economy and high unemployment rates, the impression awaiting travelers today is one of a modernizing capital and country of spectacular beauty, a helpful, friendly and fun-loving people and warm hospitality.”*

Patricia Schultz, 1001 Places to Go Before You Die.



## DAY 2

Mount Ararat, Armenia

## YEREVAN

This morning meet your guide to begin your exploration of Armenia's capital city, starting with an overview city tour to include the Republic Square, the Mashtots Avenue, the Opera House, and the Mother Armenia statue.

Next, you will visit the Museum of Armenian History for an overview of this country's complex history. An old Armenian proverb says that "The guest is God's messenger and he is welcome in our home." Hospitality is central to the Armenian character which has managed to maintain its own unique identity, its own alphabet and language, despite the country having been trampled over, for almost its entire history, by one empire after another: Parthian (Iranian), Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Mongol, Ottoman, Persian, Russian and Soviet.

After lunch you will visit The Matenadaran, boasting the world's largest collection of ancient manuscripts (over 16,000), including works by Aristotle and Eusebius.

Finally this afternoon you will have the opportunity to visit the famed Yerevan Cognac factory (now under French ownership) for a tasting of the national drink!

### Exeter Services

Vehicle, Driver & Guide for Full Day

### Hotel

Tufenkian Historic Yerevan



## DAY 3



Temple of Garni, Armenia

## YEREVAN

This morning, you will meet your guide and driver for the transfer southwest of the city and into the Armavir region.

Armavir is home to Echmiadzin – the holy city of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the country's spiritual center. It is believed that St. Gregory the Illuminator saw a beam of light fall on this spot and built the original church – a basilica which was later reconstructed and enlarged several times. Nowadays, the Echmiadzin Cathedral is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

On the outskirts of Echmiadzin, you may also visit the remains of the 7th Century Zvartnots Cathedral with its distinct circular architecture with fine pillars, carved column heads, and arches suggesting a Hellenistic style which was frequent in many early-Christian churches.

Later, you will continue to the Kotayk region and the Garni village where you will enjoy a late lunch at a local villager's house.

In Garni, you will visit the Temple of the Sun, set on a cliff above the River Azat. The famous peristyle temple was constructed in the 1st Century in the Greco-Roman style by the Armenian King Tiridates I and was probably funded by the Roman Emperor Nero. The temple was dedicated to the ancient god Mithras and its roof was supported by 24 Ionic columns. The bathhouse nearby has a well-preserved hypocaust system and some original floor mosaics.

Also today, you will tour the 4th Century cave monastery of the Holy Lance in Geghard – a UNESCO World Heritage site, which is considered by many to be superior to Petra.

You will transfer back to Yerevan and to your hotel for an evening at your leisure.

### Exeter Services

Vehicle, Driver & Guide for Full Day

### Hotel

Tufenkian Historic Yerevan



## DAY 4



Medieval Cemetery, Armenia

## YEREVAN – DILIJAN

This morning, you will leave Yerevan and travel through the Ararat plain to see the biblical Mount Ararat and the Khor Virap Monastery.

Khor Virap is a monastic complex and a pilgrimage site with a beautiful location at the foot of Mount Ararat. According to the legend, it is here that Armenia's patron saint, St. Gregory the Illuminator, was imprisoned for 12 years by the pagan king before curing him of a disease and converting him to Christianity.

Later today, you will continue to the Vayots Dzor province and will make a stop at a local winery in the Areni village to taste some local cheeses and fine wines. Winemaking is a centuries-old tradition in this region and archaeologists have discovered here ancient fermentation vats, a wine press, and storage jars believed to be over 6,000 years old.

Later, you will also visit the Noravank Monastery. This masterpiece of Armenian medieval architecture is located in a narrow gorge cut by the Gnishik River near the city of Yeghegnadzor.

You will then transfer north-west to the Selim Pass where the Silk Route from Persia once ran on its way to Europe. Here, you will visit the Selim Caravanserai, which was built in the 14th century to accommodate travelers crossing the mountains and later became a stop on one of the overland silk routes. Restored in the 1960s, it is now believed to be the oldest caravanserai in the country.

Lastly today, you will stop at the village of Noraduz famous for its old cemetery studded with hundreds of 'khachkar' cross-stones of different styles dating from the 9th – 17th centuries.

Arrive at your hotel for an evening at your leisure.

### Exeter Services

Vehicle, Driver & Guide for Full Day

### Hotel

Tufenkian Old Dilijan



DAY 5



Noravank Monastery, Armenia

## DILIJAN – TBILISI VIA LORI

This morning, after meeting with your guide, you will tour Dilijan, historically a spa town known as "Armenian Switzerland". Composers Shostakovich and Britten both spent summers here. You will visit the Goshavank Monastery and the Haghartsin monastic complex, hidden in the forest.

You will continue on to Lori and explore the UNESCO protected Sanahin and Haghpat monasteries before continuing on to the Georgian border where you will meet your Georgian driver and guide for the transfer to Tbilisi. Upon arrival in the Georgian capital, you will check-in at your hotel for an evening at your leisure.

### Exeter Services

Vehicle, Driver & Guide for Full Day

### Hotel

Radisson Blu Iveria

DAY 6



The Georgian capital of Tbilisi

## TBILISI

Upon arrival in Tbilisi, your Exeter International English-speaking guide will be waiting for you outside of customs and baggage claim. Your guide will take you to your private car and driver for the 30-minute transfer to the Radisson Blu Hotel in the center of historic Tbilisi. Your room for the next three nights will offer panoramic views through floor to ceiling windows, giving you a unique perspective of the city.

Although Tbilisi is a capital city, it is surrounded by mountains, has a river at its heart and is lush and verdant, giving it an air of leisure that is unusual in a major city.

Depending on your arrival time, your guide will be available this afternoon for a walk in the historic city center or you may use this time for rest. Evening at leisure in Tbilisi.

### Exeter Services

Car, Driver & Guide

### Hotel

Radisson Blu

*“Tbilisi still feels like a secret, but expect that to soon change”*

Patricia Schultz, 1001 Places to Go Before You Die.



## DAY 7



Khachapuri Making Class

## TBILISI

Your guide will meet you this morning for an overview tour of some of the city's highlights including elegant Rustaveli Avenue, the Governor's Palace and the Parliament Building. You will also see the Paliashvili Opera House, with its dramatic Moorish architecture, while you continue down towards Vera Park.

We recommend a tour the Museum Of Georgia, a modern and well curated museum covering all periods of Georgian history. Of particular interest is the moving museum of the Soviet occupation, located on the fourth floor.

Later, you may want to visit some of the city's many religious highlights, including the Anchiskhati Basilica, the oldest church in Tbilisi and Metekhi Temple, a major landmark that can be seen from many vantage points in the city.

Your guide will take you to visit the Narikala Fortress, dating back to the Persians of the 4th century. While exploring the fortress you may visit the Church of St. Nicholas and the Folk Art Museum.

Spend the remainder of the afternoon exploring the Maidan or the Old Town. Your guide will show you the Abanotubani, the sulfur baths, which were frequented by Pushkin and Dumas. One of the most prominent structures in the Maidan is the Armenian Cathedral of St. George. As you walk up Leselidzes Kucha, the main thoroughfare, you will see the Tbilisi's main synagogue, right next door to the 16th century Jvari Georgian Church and the Norashen Armenian Church. Ancient and fascinating Tbilisi is at its finest in this district.

Apart from the history and ancient sites, one of the most enjoyable things to do in Tbilisi is to experience Georgian café culture relaxing over a tea and soaking up the local atmosphere.

### *Exeter International Extraordinary Experience*

This afternoon you will be invited into one of the leading restaurants of the city for a khachapuri making class. Khachapuri is the national dish of Georgia and it is delicious- a hot, freshly baked bread filled with warm cheese. You can learn about the different style and traditions of making khachapuri while you watch your creation baking in the brick ovens. An afternoon feast that you will never forget will follow! If you don't know Georgian cuisine, you will forever crave it after this day- it's light, fresh and full of flavors that are unique to the region.

### *Exeter Services*

Car, Driver & Guide

### *Hotel*

Radisson Blu

## DAY 8



The Holy Trinity Cathedral, Tbilisi

## MTSKHETA & GORI

Today your guide will take you a little outside the main city limits to visit Mtskheta, the spiritual heart of Georgia. Mtskheta has an almost mythical significance to many Georgians as this was the first capital of the nation, and was also where Christianity was first introduced into the country.

Mtskheta's monuments date back to the 6th Century including the Jvari Monastery, the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and the Samtavro Church. While in this area, you will also have the opportunity to stop in and visit local craftsmen who are known in the region for their intricate basket-weaving and colorful pottery.

Later you will continue on through the Georgian countryside to the town of Gori, best known for being the birthplace of Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, better known as Stalin. Georgian people were understandably proud that one of their own rose to be the leader of the Politburo, but Stalin's success only brought misery to his homeland when he was Soviet leader.

His original modest home still stands and is set against the backdrop of the Stalin Museum's buildings and carriages from his private train. The Museum really is worth visiting, and details his life from his youth to the Yalta Conference after World War II.

### *Exeter International Extraordinary Experience*

Later, you will experience an introduction into Georgian wine at Chateau Mukhrani. We have selected this unique winery for its history, beautiful vineyards and restored castle. In 1875 Prince Mukhranbatoni visited Champagne and Bordeaux to learn about European winemaking. He returned to Georgia and combined traditional Georgian winemaking methods with European methods, creating a successful and internationally recognized quality wine, producing three million gallons per year in the 19th Century! Today, you will tour the vineyards, cellars and castle and enjoy a delicious Georgian lunch amongst the vines before returning to the city center.

### *Exeter Services*

Car, Driver & Guide

### *Hotel*

Radisson Blu



DAY 9



Baku Flame Towers

## TBILISI-BAKU

This morning, your driver will meet you at your hotel and transfer you to the airport in Tbilisi for your flight to Baku. The cost of your flight is not included in your program.

Upon arrival in Baku, your guide will be waiting for you just outside of baggage claim and customs to transfer you to your hotel. You will be staying in one of the most beautiful hotels in Europe, the stunning Four Seasons Hotel Baku, perfectly located at the edge of Old Town and directly on the Caspian Sea.

Baku is a city of huge contrasts; minarets have been superseded by the iconic architectural landmark that is The Flame Towers, which against all the odds work well in this city that has always been about old and new. While Old Baku had a reputation of a city blighted by oil extraction, it has recently been completely transformed into a 21st Century capital with seaside promenades and extraordinary architecture by such luminaries as Zaha Hadid and Sir Norman Foster. This is a city, indeed a country, reborn with the oil wealth that for the first time is being spent at home.

This afternoon, your guide will take you to the History Museum of Azerbaijan, one of Baku's most beautiful orientalist mansions: the Taghiyev Mansion. Taghiyev is considered the father of the nation and was an industrialist and one of Baku's wealthiest citizens until the Soviet occupation. Beyond the palace rooms is a wonderful museum that traces Azeri history from Neolithic times to the Russian Empire, the era of the Soviet Union through to today. The Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited parts in the region. Archaeological digs have revealed Bronze Age burial chambers, dating back 1,500 years. This is the most popular area of the city, a maze of alleys, winding streets and caravanserais sometimes called the 'Acropolis of Baku.' You'll see carpet shops and cafes and you shouldn't miss a stop into a tea house to sample hot lavash bread pulled straight from the clay oven.

Later, your guide will take you to the Walled City of Baku and the Shirvanshah's Palace. The walls are well preserved and date from the 12th century whilst the Palace was built in the 15th century. While many of the treasures that were once the pride of Baku were taken by the Ottomans to Istanbul, you can still feel the history of the palace when wandering from the residential areas to the baths, through the mosque and beyond. Here in Old Town, you'll also see the Maiden Tower, hear its sad history, and climb to the top for a wonderful panoramic view.

Early this evening, you may enjoy a boat tour in Baku's perfect harbor and take in the city from another perspective.

### Exeter Services

Transfer Only (Tbilisi); Car, Driver & Guide (Baku)

### Hotel

Four Seasons Hotel Baku



## DAY 10



Carpet Museum Baku

## BAKU

This morning, your guide and driver will take you outside of the city center to Gobustan, approximately 90 minutes away. Gobustan is an open-air museum overflowing with Neolithic rock drawings. This is one of the world's greatest petroglyph collections and it is almost unknown in the West. There are over 4,000 inscriptions that go back 12,000 years. New to Gobustan is a state of the art, interactive museum that brings to life the time that created these extraordinary drawings. On your way back to Baku, you can stop to see some 2,000-year-old Latin graffiti, left by Caesar's troops!

Later, your guide will take you to what is perhaps the greatest carpet collection and museum in the world. The collection of the Baku Carpet Museum is so vast that only 10% of the collection was able to be displayed in its former home. This unique museum was recently built in the center of the city by an Austrian architect who designed the building to resemble a rolled carpet! It's an enchanting museum that brings to life the history of carpet making in Azerbaijan and the famed regions of Persia which were once part of the kingdom.

### *Exeter International Extraordinary Experience*

Enjoy a private visit to the former house of the Nobel family. Ludwig, Robert and Emmanuel Nobel moved from St. Petersburg to Baku in the 1870s, originally to develop business in wood. The first industrial output of oil in the world was in Baku in 1848 - five years before Pennsylvania. The Nobel brothers ended up in the oil business and they became the catalyst for the Russian tsar to decree that the development of oil was no longer a monopoly, and so the first oil boom started.

For many years the villa was totally dilapidated, home to pigeons and cats. In 2002, an application was made to restore the mansion, and this became reality in 2005. Two years later the building was reopened, now a house museum devoted to the history of the brothers and the development of the world's oil business. It is now also home to the Baku Nobel Oil Club. In the last three years, 14 Nobel laureates have visited, together with many descendants of the Nobel family. A visit to the villa brings the vibrant history to fascinating life.

### *Exeter Services*

Car, Driver & Guide

### *Hotel*

Four Seasons Hotel Baku

*"Baku, the glamorous and cosmopolitan capital of oil-rich Azerbaijan on the shores of the Caspian Sea"*

Patricia Schultz, 1001 Places to Go Before You Die.



Zada Hadid Aliyev Cultural Center

## BAKU – YANAR DAG

To experience some local color and flavor, we suggest an early visit to the Bazaar (market) to see the famous Baku tomatoes, citrus and nuts, sold as they have been for centuries by local traders. This is best done earlier in the day to see the market at its best, but can equally be done in the afternoon.

Later, you will see the fascinating eternal burning hill - Yanar Dag is fueled by natural gas escaping from the rocks and earth. This area, 30 minutes from Baku, has been endlessly burning for five decades, flames sprouting straight from the earth. The Ateshgah Temple, a 15-minute drive away is a must see. Also known as the Temple of the Fire Worshippers, which has been a center of worship for thousands of years. This temple, built by Zoroastrian fire-worshippers traveling from India and Persia, is one of the finest preserved temples of its kind and is soon to become a UNESCO World Heritage site.

You are unlikely to see anything else like this majestic temple outside of India. The temple is built on the site of a natural gas vent believed to have been sacred to the Zoroastrians since the 6th century. To get a sense of how the worshippers lived you can visit the inside museum and discover the ritual required to have your wishes granted. The shapes of the temple might seem familiar to you after your visit to the Nobel Mansion; the brothers used it in their logo for the Nobel Oil Company.

The area is so saturated with natural gas and oil that flames spontaneously erupt from the ground - hence the country's other name, Odlar Yurdu, or "Land of Fires", and the name of the temple, which means "Home of Fire".

You will then return to the city center to visit a top Baku highlight. Zaha Hadid, the world famous architect and Pulitzer Architecture prize winner, saved one of her greatest triumphs for Baku in the Aliyev Cultural Center. Stunning inside and out, this building houses temporary exhibitions as well as a museum dedicated to Heydar Aliyev, the founder and first president of modern day Azerbaijan. The Aliyev exhibition is overtly propagandistic, but this is in itself fascinating. You'll likely see both his KGB identification card (an organization he led during Soviet times), as well as his last Mercedes limousine. The irony is not lost on visitors.

### Exeter Services

Car, Driver & Guide

### Hotel

Four Seasons Hotel Baku



DAY 12

Taghiyev Mansion, Baku

## BAKU – ONWARD

If time allows this morning, you will certainly not want to miss the Azerbaijan Art Museum, housed in the Rothschild family mansion in the city center. This fine collection is particularly strong in Russian paintings, including Aivazovsky, Repin, and Kandinsky, three of the greatest.

Transfer to the airport and flight onward.

Exeter Services

Car, Driver & Guide

*Please note that this is a suggested itinerary only.*

*All of our Ultimate programs can be fully customized to your individual requirements. For the best personal travel advice, please call one of our expert Travel Specialists at 800.633.1008 or 813.251.5355*





Zvartnots stone ruins cathedral, Yerevan

## HOTELS



James Tufenkian part of the large Armenian diaspora has created a boutique hotel group with four hotels in key locations throughout the country that showcase the best of Armenian crafts, and his own beautifully made carpets and rugs. Described as a 'stylish showcase of good service, Frette sheets and fresh, delicious breakfast buffets' by Patricia Schultz.

### Tufenkian Historic Yerevan

The Tufenkian Historic Yerevan Hotel opened in 2012 with 85 rooms and suites in a centrally located 19th Century building. The interiors include luxurious furnishings and rich stone accents, reflecting the Armenian theme.



### Tufenkian Old Dilijan

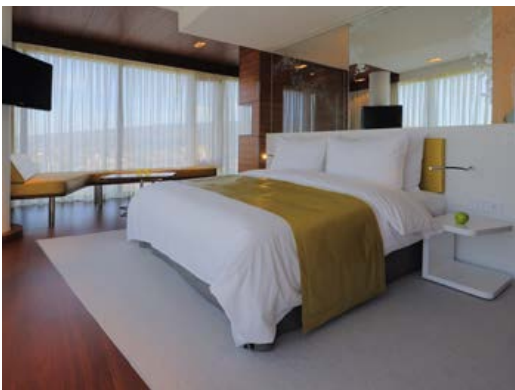
Your stay in the country will be at the Tufenkian Old Dilijan Hotel, intimate, with only 14 rooms, designed in a traditional country style.



Flame Tower and Old Town, Baku

## HOTELS

### Radisson Blu Tbilisi



The Radisson Blu Tbilisi was opened in 2009. From the outside, the hotel would suggest nothing particularly special as a tall, glass structure. However, inside, the rooms afford an incredible panoramic view of Tbilisi, giving a wonderful sense of place that is not easily found in other hotels in the city. Combined with an excellent location, stunning spa with views and a buzzing restaurant with a large outside space for breakfast, we believe this is the premier hotel choice in Tbilisi.

#### Business Class Room

All the rooms at the Radisson Blu Tbilisi are bright and spacious, however, the Business Class rooms are particularly large at over 365 feet. Located on the higher floors of this modern hotel, these rooms also have a panoramic view of the city, with three sides of the room being glass, immersing you right into the city!

Nespresso machines and smartphone docking stations are additional touches that complete your stay.

### The Four Seasons Baku



The Four Seasons Baku opened in September 2012 and is a newly constructed hotel, built in the fin de siècle style that is now Baku's signature architecture. Its nine stories are built in Azeri stone, topped off with a copper mansard roof and it benefits from the meticulous research of British architects Reardon Smith in creating a new landmark in the center of the city.

The location, facing the Caspian Sea and a moment's walk from the Old Town and Maiden Tower, could not be better. All 170 rooms have a view, either of the Old Town and now iconic Flames, or of the Caspian Sea. The Deluxe City View Rooms are large and inviting, with all the Four Seasons luxurious touches you would expect.

#### Deluxe City View Room

Our recommendation in Baku is a spacious (over 500 square feet) Deluxe room with a view of the City of Baku, to give you a true sense of place. Rooms are located on floors two to eight, and include the usual exceptional Four Seasons standards such as double vanities and high thread count linen.