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“If one had but a single glance to give the world,
one should gaze on Istanbul.”

Alfonse de Lamartine

We cannot help but agree with the expression of this 19 century French poet. Once again this city, so inviting and romantic, serves as a gathering place to launch another adventure. How many before us through the millennia have come here with the same purpose; with the same passions, uncertainty and anxieties in preparation for explorations and conquests. If it appears we have an overactive imagination, you are right. That is exactly why we are all here.

This is a pioneering event. Nothing is “off the shelf”. We expect to be tested in little ways but the anticipation of the rewards and to be once again traveling with so many familiar friends and supporters has given us something to greatly look forward to. You continue to inspire us to push the boundaries of adventure motorcycle travel and we cannot think of a more perfect gathering of men and women to share the road to the Caspian with.

So as we prepare to ride to the east, we again beg your flexibility, encourage you to continue with that same sense of “team” and willingness to engage the people and get to know the traditions, cultures and history that we know this journey will so abundantly have to offer.

Ride safe. It is fantastic to have you with us.

Kaz & Skip

Expectations

This is what Strabo, the famous historian/geographer from ancient Greece (born in Amasya, Turkey) writes:

"At this time (Homeric), the Sea was not navigable and was called 'Axenos' (inhospitable) because of its wintry storms and the ferocity of the tribes that lived around it, and particularly the Scythians in that they sacrificed strangers... but later it was called 'Euxeinos' (friendly to strangers) when the Ionian founded cities on the seaboard". Ionian cities and "barbaric" Scythians are long gone but the Sea is still a mixing place of civilization and barbarism.

Here we are going through countries that, after a long period of oppression and centralized (in and by Moscow) economy, are struggling to come to terms with a "more liberal" way to run a State. Most of them have a severe deficit in central budget and the communication infrastructure is suffering from years of neglect even though some progress has been made recently. We are likely to encounter these: Paved roads for sure, good paved roads... doubtful. We may expect potholes, works in permanent progress, some interruptions and all the elements that can add excitement to our days. A very old "park" of Soviet vehicles mixes with more modern ways of transportation. Diesel engines are in dominance with the possibility of diesel spills always present. Most of the drivers are just getting used to sharing the road and trust is not a currency to spend easy when following or crossing other vehicles. Domestic animals can suddenly appear in front of our wheels.

Signals (or absence of signals) may be confusing and the Cyrillic and the impossible Armenian and Georgian script will not add clarity. For riders used to travel in less developed countries all this will sound quite normal: for all of us it is a call for competent (read: constant scanning) riding.

Soviet bureaucracy was a masterful combination of Byzantine and Marxist mistrust for the citizens. With the dissolution of the "Empire", the people making a living from controlling the populace still had to keep themselves busy. Expect surprises in this area not only at the borders but also on the road with possible "on the spot" check points. The best attitude is to take "red tape" as part of the experience and explore the friendly side of it with patience and understanding.

Security is not, in our opinion, an issue. The normal rules of "intelligent tourist" apply: do not show "richness", keep your properties under control and do not leave the bike unguarded.

"Here people who had lived in one place for uncounted generations, planting crops and fishing the coastal sea, now met people who lived in wagons and tents and wandered about infinite horizons of grass prairie behind herds of cattle and horses" says Neal Ascherson in his splendid book "Black Sea".

Times have changed and the steppes have long disappeared but the coast of the sea suspended between water and endless prairie is still a place for discovery and adventure.

RIDE SAFE - BE PREPARED

Moto-touring in the Caucasus

This is a vacation adventure, not a race. Take the time to smell the roses. There is time to stop to take lots of photos. Ride cautiously! Please bring your map and roadbooks to breakfast each day for our safety and travel briefing.

Speed limits are clearly indicated in most countries and in general sticking to 90/100 km/h on major roads, 50 km/h in urban areas and 130/140 km/h on motorway, will keep you out of “blue light” attentions. There are speed traps of various kinds in different countries.

If you are caught, smile, be gentle, be humble and have full documentation for you and the bike. It is normally possible to get away with a low fine or a simple “do not do it again,” however the behavior totally depends on the policeman and his mood that day.

Use your indicators all the time, even when overtaking vehicles and changing lanes. It is a good habit that tells your fellow riders and oncoming traffic what your intentions are. Pass at speed so the riders behind you can pass safely, too. If necessary, use hand signaling as well. As soon as passing, make room for the riders behind you by pulling to the right side of the lane. Don't make any sudden changes in your riding.

Don't refrain from using your horn if/when necessary. You will notice that everybody uses it frequently to warn others in traffic, sometimes for reasons other than its real function. You will find it useful especially to warn pedestrians

who seem to be emerging from all directions almost like in a computer game.

You are 100% responsible for your motorcycle. Check your bike each day, especially your signal lights, brake lights and headlights – things that your riding group depends on for safe riding. If you drop your bike, you are responsible for its repair or replacement. It must be returned at the end of the trip in the same mechanical and cosmetic condition as when you picked it up, or you will be liable for some charges depending on your insurance coverage.

Ideally, riding groups should be limited to a maximum of 4 motorcycles at a time. This is the safest way to travel so that the last person is not driving over his/her head to follow-the-leader. Ride in staggered formation.

When riding in a group, remember that you are first responsible for yourself and then responsible for the rider behind you.

It is your individual ride and you can not delegate decision to the rider ahead. If the group is making a turn and you do not see the rider following you, ALWAYS wait at the intersection until that rider can see that you will be turning. This will avoid riders getting separated from the group.

When riding in groups, it is absolutely essential that you can see the driver's face of the bike in front of you, in his/her

rear view mirror. If you can see his/her eyes, he/she can see you.

Do not “straighten” the curves by driving over the solid white lines. It is an unsafe and sloppy way to ride. Stay in control; and stay in your lane. Many of the roads we will travel on are beautiful secondary coastal and mountain roads. These roads will be narrower, with limited traffic, and some will not have a center line to divide the road. ALWAYS draw an imaginary centerline and DO NOT cross that line.

Pace yourself and maintain “space cushions” between you and the riders in front of and behind you.

We encourage everyone to ride at his own pace. You have plenty of time to get to your destination. Our dinners are usually at 8:00 p.m. Better to be cautious and arrive unscathed. If you can't find your way in cities, have a taxi lead you to the hotel.

Please use the “buddy system” and ride in pairs at the very minimum. If you have a problem, the other person in your group can arrange for your rescue. Keep the cell phone number of Kaz and Juan handy.

A “chase vehicle” follows the group. If you have a problem, accident, mechanical breakdown or just get lost and “miss” the chase vehicle, call that night's hotel and advise the desk that you are with the Kazoom
- MotoDiscovery motorcycle group and tell them where you are and what the problem is. When feasible, we will try to send the van back for you and your motorcycle.

Keep a copy of the itinerary and your passport in a safe place. Do not go anywhere without both!! If you get “lost” or separated from the group, the itinerary will tell you where to go/be.

The major cities have a chaotic type of traffic where pedestrians, cars and busses all mix to make this driving experience unique. It may appear dangerous, but with patience and slow speed, city traffic can be easily negotiated.

It is a good idea to ride with your thumb on the horn and be ready to let others know you are coming. It is also a good idea to stay close inside the group: city traffic is where group bikers get separated and we have to enhance our “group consciousness”. Better not to burn that yellow traffic light to end up with a split in the group, better not to filter if the group can not filter, better not to overtake your partner to avoid confusion.

Always expect the unexpected. Here are some rules to keep in mind:

- Pay attention when other drivers use their horns.
- Check all mirrors and use directional signals for lane changes.
- Check right side mirror in particular.
- Confirm with direct visual check. Do not rely solely on mirrors.
- Never pass on the right and cut in front of other vehicles from the right side.

Watch for:

- Unexpected stops or turns without signaling, for no apparent reason.
- Vehicles (especially minibuses and buses) stopping in unexpected locations to pick up or let off passengers,

including main highway entrance ramps, intersections, and along major highways.

- Pedestrians seemingly completely oblivious to oncoming traffic who continue to walk or run in front of vehicles to cross streets and main highways.
- Trucks and tractors parked at night without lights on the highway rather than on the side of the road.
- Disabled vehicles parked without warning signs.
- Inattentive and unskilled drivers.
- Taxis and other vehicles with bad brakes.
- Tractors, horse carts and other farm vehicles traveling without lights at slow speed on highways.
- In the countryside, the use of stones rather than warning signs to mark accidents, breakdowns, and road work.
- Road surfaces that are smoother and provide less traction than normal.
- Gravel on the shoulders of the newly paved roads.
- Trucks spilling diesel as they leave gas stations.
- Vehicles backing up (in reverse) on exit ramps and on main highways.

- Farm animals on highways.

- In the countryside, herds of sheep, goats and other animals on roads.
- Drivers that drive in the middle of the road and yield to no one.
- Drivers that overtake on blind curves.
- At night, cars without lights or lights missing.
- Oncoming drivers who play light games, flashing and flashing whether you have your "brights" on or not. This could mean a couple of things.

- 1) I love motorcycles and you are so cool
- 2) It's a bright sunny day and your headlights are on.
- 3) There is a radar trap ahead in your direction (generally accompanied by a hand gesture.)

- Slick and oily road surfaces especially after the first drops of rain.

- Potholes.
- Tailgating drivers.
- Drivers that attempt to pass while you are passing another vehicle.
- Unmarked intersections (i.e. no stop signs), primary road has right of way, but proceed with caution.

Caspian Sea

The Caspian Sea is the largest enclosed inland body of water on Earth by area, variously classed as the world's largest lake or a full-fledged sea. The sea has a surface area of 371,000 km² (143,200 sq mi) and a volume of 78,200 km³ (18,800 cu mi).[4] It is in an endorheic basin (it has no outflows) and is bounded to the northwest by Russia, to the west by Azerbaijan, to the south by Iran, to the southeast by Turkmenistan, and to the northeast by Kazakhstan.

The ancient inhabitants of its coast perceived the Caspian Sea as an ocean, probably because of its saltiness and seeming boundlessness. It has a salinity of approximately 1.2%, about a third of the salinity of most seawater.

Etymology

The word Caspian is derived from the name of the Caspi, ancient people who lived to the south-west of the sea in Transcaucasia. Strabo wrote that "to the country of the Albanians belongs also the territory called Caspiane, which was named after the Caspian tribe, as was also the sea; but the tribe has now disappeared". Moreover, the Caspian Gates, which is the name of a region in Tehran province of Iran, possibly indicates that they migrated to the south of the sea. The Iranian city Qazvin shares the root of its name with that of the sea. In fact, the traditional Arabic name for the sea itself is, Bahr al-Qazwin (Sea of Qazvin).

In classical antiquity among Greeks and Persians it was called the Hyrcanian Ocean. In Persian antiquity, as well

as in modern Iran, it is known as the Mazandaran Sea. In Iran, it is also referred as Dary -i Hazar sometimes. Among Indians it was called Kashyap Sagar. In Turkic-speaking countries it is known as the Khazar Sea. Old Russian sources call it the Khvalyn or Khvalis Sea after the name of Khwarezmia. Ancient Arabic sources refer to it as Ba r G l n meaning "the Gilan Sea".

Turkic languages use a consistent nomenclature that is different from the Indo-European languages above. For instance, in Turkmen, the name is Hazar de izi, in Azeri, it is X z r d nizi, and in modern Turkish, it is Hazar denizi. In all these cases, the second word simply means "sea", and the first word refers to the historical Khazars who had a large empire based to the north of the Caspian Sea between the 7th and 10th centuries.

Formation

Caspian Sea in map of Iran provinces in Abbasid Caliphate written in Persian, in English: Bahr-e- Khazar.

The Caspian Sea, like the Aral Sea and Black Sea, is a remnant of the ancient Paratethys Sea. It became landlocked about 5.5 million years ago due to tectonic uplift and a fall in sea level. During warm and dry climatic periods, the landlocked sea almost dried up, depositing evaporitic sediments like halite that were covered by wind-blown deposits and were sealed off as an evaporite sink when cool, wet climates refilled the basin. Due to the current inflow of fresh water, the Caspian Sea is a freshwater lake in its northern portions.

It is more saline on the Iranian shore, where the catchment basin contributes little flow. Currently, the mean salinity of the Caspian is one third that of the Earth's oceans. The Garabogazköl embayment, which dried up when water flow from the main body of the Caspian was blocked in the 1980s but has since been restored, routinely exceeds oceanic salinity by a factor of 10.

Geography

The Caspian Sea is the largest inland body of water in the world and accounts for 40 to 44% of the total lacustrine waters of the world. The coastlines of the Caspian are shared by Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. The Caspian is divided into three distinct physical regions: the Northern, Middle, and Southern Caspian. The Northern–Middle boundary is the Mangyshlak Threshold, which runs through Chechen Island and Cape Tiub-Karagan. The Middle–Southern boundary is the Apsheron Threshold, a sill of tectonic origin between the Eurasian continent and an oceanic remnant, that runs through Zhiloi Island and Cape Kuuli. The Garabogazköl Bay is the saline eastern inlet of the Caspian, which is part of Turkmenistan and at times has been a lake in its own right due to the isthmus that cuts it off from the Caspian.

Differences between the three regions are dramatic. The Northern Caspian only includes the Caspian shelf, and is very shallow; it accounts for less than 1% of the total water volume with an average depth of only 5–6 meters (16–20 ft). The sea noticeably drops off towards the Middle Caspian, where the average depth is 190 meters (620 ft). The Southern Caspian is the deepest, with oceanic

depths of over 1,000 meters (3,300 ft). The Middle and Southern Caspian account for 33% and 66% of the total water volume, respectively. The northern portion of the Caspian Sea typically freezes in the winter, and in the coldest winters, ice forms in the south as well.

Over 130 rivers provide inflow to the Caspian, with the Volga River being the largest. A second affluent, the Ural River, flows in from the north, and the Kura River flows into the sea from the west. In the past, the Amu Darya (Oxus) of Central Asia in the east often changed course to empty into the Caspian through a now-desiccated riverbed called the Uzboy River, as did the Syr Darya farther north. The Caspian also has several small islands; they are primarily located in the north and have a collective land area of roughly 2,000 km² (770 sq mi). Adjacent to the North Caspian is the Caspian Depression, a low-lying region 27 meters (89 ft) below sea level. The Central Asian steppes stretch across the northeast coast, while the Caucasus mountains hug the western shore. The biomes to both the north and east are characterized by cold, continental deserts. Conversely, the climate to the southwest and south are generally warm with uneven elevation due to a mix of highlands and mountain ranges; the drastic changes in climate alongside the Caspian have led to a great deal of biodiversity in the region.

The Caspian Sea has numerous islands throughout, all of them near the coasts. There are none in the deeper parts of the sea. Ogurja Ada is the largest island. The island is 37 km (23 mi) long, with gazelles roaming freely on it. In the North Caspian, the majority of the islands are small and uninhabited, like

the Tyuleniy Archipelago, an Important Bird Area (IBA), although some of them have human settlements.

Hydrology

Caspian Sea near Aktau, Mangistau region, Kazakhstan.

The Caspian has characteristics common to both seas and lakes. It is often listed as the world's largest lake, although it is not a freshwater lake. It contains about 3.5 times more water, by volume, than all five of North America's Great Lakes combined. The Caspian was once part of the Tethys Ocean, but became landlocked about 5.5 million years ago due to plate tectonics. The Volga River (about 80% of the inflow) and the Ural River discharge into the Caspian Sea, but it has no natural outflow other than by evaporation. Thus the Caspian ecosystem is a closed basin, with its own sea level history that is independent of the eustatic level of the world's oceans. The level of the Caspian has fallen and risen, often rapidly, many times over the centuries. Some Russian historians[who?] claim that a medieval rising of the Caspian, perhaps caused by the Amu Darya changing its inflow to the Caspian from the 13th century to the 16th century, caused the coastal towns of Khazaria, such as Atil, to flood. In 2004, the water level was 28 m (92 ft) below sea level.

Over the centuries, Caspian Sea levels have changed in synchrony with the estimated discharge of the Volga, which in turn depends on rainfall levels in its vast catchment basin. Precipitation is related to variations in the amount of North Atlantic depressions that reach the interior, and they in turn are affected by

cycles of the North Atlantic Oscillation. Thus levels in the Caspian Sea relate to atmospheric conditions in the North Atlantic thousands of miles to the northwest.

The last short-term sea-level cycle started with a sea-level fall of 3 m (9.84 ft) from 1929 to 1977, followed by a rise of 3 m (9.84 ft) from 1977 until 1995. Since then smaller oscillations have taken place.

Environmental degradation

The Volga River, the largest in Europe, drains 20% of the European land area and is the source of 80% of the Caspian's inflow. Its lower reaches are heavily developed with numerous unregulated releases of chemical and biological pollutants. Although existing data are sparse and of questionable quality, there is ample evidence to suggest that the Volga is one of the principal sources of transboundary contaminants into the Caspian. The magnitude of fossil fuel extraction and transport activity constitute risks to water quality. Underwater oil and gas pipelines have been constructed or proposed, increasing potential environmental threats.

Various islands in the Caspian have suffered extensive environmental damage due to oil production. Vulf, Azerbaijan has been affected by ecological damage because of the petrochemical industry. This has significantly decreased species of marine birds in the area.

Fauna

Iran's northern Caspian Hyrcanian mixed forests are maintained by moisture captured from the Caspian Sea by the Alborz mountain range of Gilan, Iran.

Sturgeon inhabit the Caspian Sea in great numbers, and yield roe (eggs) that are processed into caviar. Overfishing has depleted a number of the historic fisheries including the economic exhaustion of the tuna fishery.[22] In recent years overfishing has threatened the sturgeon population to the point that environmentalists advocate banning sturgeon fishing completely until the population recovers. However, the high price of sturgeon caviar allows fisherman to afford bribes to ensure the authorities look the other way, making regulations in many locations ineffective. Caviar harvesting further endangers the fish stocks, since it targets reproductive females.

The zebra mussel and the common carp are native to the Caspian and Black Seas, but have become invasive species elsewhere, when introduced.

The area has given its name to several species, including the Caspian gull and the Caspian tern. The Caspian seal (*Pusa caspica*) is endemic to the Caspian Sea, and is one of very few seal species that live in inland waters. There are several species and subspecies of fish endemic to the Caspian Sea, including the kutum (also known as the Caspian white fish), Caspian marine shad, Caspian roach, Caspian bream (some report that the bream occurring in the Aral Sea is the same subspecies), and a Caspian "salmon" (a subspecies of trout, *Salmo trutta caspiensis*), which is critically endangered.

Flora

Many rare and endemic plant species of Russia are associated with the tidal areas of the Volga delta and riparian forests of

the Samur River delta. The shoreline is also a unique refuge for plants adapted to the loose sands of the Central Asian Deserts. The principal limiting factors to successful establishment of plant species are hydrological imbalances within the surrounding deltas, water pollution, and various land reclamation activities. The water level change within the Caspian Sea is an indirect reason for which plants may not get established. This affects aquatic plants of the Volga delta, such as *Aldrovanda vesiculosa* and the native *Nelumbo caspica*. About 11 plant species are found in the Samur River delta, including the unique liana forests that date back to the Tertiary period.

The rising level of the Caspian Sea between 1994–96 reduced the number of habitats for rare species of aquatic vegetation. This has been attributed to a general lack of seeding material in newly formed coastal lagoons and water bodies.

History

The earliest hominid remains found around the Caspian Sea are from Dmanisi dating back to around 1.8 Ma and yielded a number of skeletal remains of *Homo erectus* or *Homo ergaster*. More later evidence for human occupation of the region come from a number of caves in Georgia and Azerbaijan such as Kudaro and Azykh Caves. There is evidence for Lower Palaeolithic human occupation south of the Caspian from western Alburz. These are Ganj Par and Darband Cave sites. Neanderthal remains also have been discovered at a cave site in Georgia. Discoveries in the Huto cave and the adjacent Kamarband cave, near the town of Behshahr, Mazandaran south of the Caspian in Iran, suggest human

habitation of the area as early as 11,000 years ago.

The Caspian area is rich in energy resources. Wells were being dug in the region as early as the 10th century. By the 16th century, Europeans were aware of the rich oil and gas deposits around the area. English traders Thomas Bannister and Jeffrey Duckett described the area around Baku as "a strange thing to behold, for there issueth out of the ground a marvelous quantity of oil, which serveth all the country to burn in their houses. This oil is black and is called nefte. There is also by the town of

Baku, another kind of oil which is white and very precious (i.e., petroleum)."

In 1950, the construction of Main Turkmen Canal was started under the orders of Joseph Stalin. The waterway, which would be used for shipping, not irrigation, was to run from Nukus on the Amu-Darya to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea thus connecting the Amu-Darya and the Aral Sea to the Caspian. However the project was abandoned soon after the death of Stalin. The project was dropped in favor of the Qaraqum Canal, which runs on a more southerly route but does not reach the Caspian.

From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 01 / June 18, 2014, Wednesday / USA > Istanbul

Today is the official starting day of the tour. You will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel. Welcome Dinner at a restaurant near the hotel.



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From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 02 / June 19, 2014, Thursday / Istanbul > Trabzon

Welcome meeting and briefing at the hotel at 09:00AM. We will then transfer to the Istanbul Airport to catch the 1:50 PM flight to Trabzon. Unload motorcycles from the truck and go for an orientation ride to Sumela Monastery.

Trabzon is a city on the Black Sea coast of north-eastern Turkey and the capital of Trabzon Province. Trabzon, located on the historical Silk Road, became a melting pot of religions, languages and culture for centuries and a trade gateway to Iran in the southeast and the Caucasus to the northeast.

Trabzon is said to be founded in the 7th century BC by Miletian colonists and then Alexis Comnenes founded the Comnenos Empire, which lasted until 1461 when the Ottomans took over the area.

The Venetian and Genoese merchants paid visits to Trebizond during the medieval period and sold silk, linen and woolen fabric; with the Republic of Genoa having an important merchant colony within the city called Leonkastron that was similar to Galata near Constantinople (north across the Golden Horn) in present-day Istanbul.

Trabzon formed the basis of several states in its long history and was the capital city of the Empire of Trebizond between 1204 and 1461. During the Ottoman period, Trabzon, because of the importance of its port, became a focal point of trade to Iran and the Caucasus. The population of the urban center is about 1,500,000.

The city is now an important port of trade, continuing its role throughout the history. Trabzon, located on the historical Silk Road became a melting pot of religions, languages and culture for centuries and a trade gateway to Iran in the east, Russia and the Caucasus to the North.

Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent was born here and Yavuz Sultan Selim, another Ottoman Sultan, was the regional governor of Trabzon when he was a prince. The city is mostly situated on a table like promontory above the harbor. The citadel is one of the oldest remains, and the first thing you will notice when entering Trabzon, is a well-preserved 13th century Byzantine Church, now restored as the Ayasofya Museum. Trabzon is very richly adorned with sightseeing areas and precious remains from the Byzantine period, including the famous Sumela Monastery.

The Sumela Monastery is a Greek Orthodox monastery dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Panagia, meaning "All Holy" in Greek) at Melá Mountain within the Pontic Mountains range.

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The monastery was founded in 386 AD during the reign of the Emperor Theodosius I (375 - 395). Legend has it that two priests undertook its creation after discovering a miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary in a cave on the mountain.

During its long history, the monastery fell into ruin several times and was restored by various emperors. During the 6th century, it was restored and enlarged by General Belisarius at the behest of Justinian.

It reached its present form in the 13th century after gaining prominence during the reign of Alexios III (1349 - 1390) of the Komnenian Empire of Trebizond, established in 1204. At that time, the monastery was granted an amount annually from imperial funds. During the time of Manuel III, son of Alexius III, and during the reigns of subsequent princes, Sumela gained further wealth from imperial grants. Following the conquest by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in 1461, it was granted the sultan's protection and given rights and privileges that were renewed by following sultans. The monastery remained a popular destination for monks and travelers through the years.

In 1682 and for a few decades, the monastery housed the Phrontisterion of Trapezous, a well-known Greek educational institution of the region.

The monastery was seized by the Russian Empire during the 1916-18 occupation of Trabzon.

The site was abandoned in 1923, following forced population exchanges between Greece and Turkey. The departing monks were not allowed to take any property with them, so they buried Sumela's famous icon under the floor of the monastery's St. Barbara chapel. In 1930, a monk secretly returned to Sumela and retrieved the icon, transferring it to the new Panagia Soumela Monastery, on the slopes of Mount Vermion, near the town of Naousa, in Macedonia, Greece.

Today the monastery's primary function is as a tourist attraction. It overlooks forests and streams, making it extremely popular for its aesthetic attraction as well as for its cultural and religious significance.

As of 2012, the Turkish government is funding restoration work, and the monastery is enjoying a revival in pilgrimage from Greece and Russia.

On 15 August 2010, Orthodox divine liturgy was allowed to take place in the monastery compound. A special pass issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is now required to visit on August 15, the day of the Dormition of the Theotokos or Feast of the Assumption, when a divine liturgy is held. Only 450 to 500 visitors are allowed inside the monastery, although widescreen televisions are available to observe the

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event at a cafe some hundred meters away from the monastery.

The principal elements of the Monastery complex are the Rock Church, several chapels, kitchens, student rooms, a guesthouse, a library, and a sacred spring revered by Eastern Orthodox Christians.

The large aqueduct at the entrance, which supplied water to the Monastery, is constructed against the side of the cliff. The aqueduct has many arches which have mostly been restored. The entrance to the Monastery leads up a long and narrow stairway. There is a guard-room next to the entrance. The stairs lead down from there to the inner courtyard. On the left, in front of a cave, there are several monastery buildings. The cave, which was converted into a church, constitutes the center of the monastery. The library is to the right.

The large building with a balcony on the front part of the cliff was used for the monks' cells and for housing guests. It dates from 1840.

The influence of Turkish art can be observed in the design of the cupboards, niches and fireplace in the rooms of the buildings surrounding the courtyard.

The inner and outer walls of the Rock Church and the walls of the adjacent chapel are decorated with frescoes. Frescoes dating from the era of Alexios III of Trebizond line the inner wall of the Rock Church facing the courtyard. The frescoes of the chapel which were painted on three levels in three different periods are dated to the beginning of the 18th century. The frescoes of the bottom band are of superior quality.

The frescoes of the monastery are seriously damaged. The main subject of the frescoes are biblical scenes telling the story of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Novotel Trabzon

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From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 03 / June 20, 2014, Friday / Trabzon > Batumi (195 km ~ 125 miles)

Depart from Trabzon and head east along the Black Sea, following the coastal road. Cross the border to Georgia at Sarp/Sarpi border crossing and arrive in Batumi.

Batumi is a seaside city on the Black Sea coast and capital of Adjara, an autonomous republic in southwest Georgia. With a population of 190,000 (2013 census), Batumi serves as an important port and a commercial center. It is situated in a subtropical zone, rich in agricultural produce such as citrus fruit and tea. While industries of the city include shipbuilding, food processing, and light manufacturing, most of its economy revolves around tourism. Since 2010, the face of the city has been transformed by the construction of new high-rise landmark buildings and the renovation of the Old Town.

Batumi is located on the site of the ancient Greek colony in Colchis called Bathus or Bathys – derived from the Greek phrase bathus limen or bathys limin meaning “deep harbor”.

Under Hadrian (r. 117–138 AD), it was converted into a fortified Roman port later deserted for the fortress of Petra founded in the times of Justinian I (r. 527–565). Garrisoned by the Roman-Byzantine forces, it was formally a possession of the kingdom of Lazica until being occupied briefly by the Arabs who did not hold it; in the 9th century it formed part of the Bagratid monarchy of Tao-Klarjeti and at the close of the 10th century of the unified kingdom of Georgia which succeeded it.

From 1010, it was governed by the eristavi (viceroy) of the king of Georgia. In the late 15th century, after the disintegration of the Georgian kingdom, Batumi passed to the princes of Guria, a western Georgian principality under the sovereignty of the kings of Imereti. A curious incident occurred in 1444 when the Burgundian flotilla, after a failed crusade against the Ottoman Empire, penetrated the Black Sea and engaged in piracy along its eastern coastline until the Burgundians under the knight Geoffroy de Thoisy were ambushed during their landing raid at the port of Vaty, as Europeans then knew Batumi. De Thoisy was taken captive and released through the mediation of the emperor John IV of Trebizond.

In the 15th century in the reign of the prince Kakhaber Gurieli, the Ottoman Turks conquered the town and its district but did not hold them. They returned to it in force a century later and inflicted a decisive defeat on the Georgian armies at Sokhoista. Batumi was recaptured by the Georgians several times, first in 1564 by prince Rostom Gurieli, who lost it soon afterwards, and again in 1609 by Mamia Gurieli. In 1723 Batumi again became part of the Ottoman Empire. With the Turkish conquest the Islamization of the hitherto Christian region began, but was terminated and to a great

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degree reversed, after the area was re-annexed to Russian Imperial Georgia in the mid-19th century.

Imperial Russian rule

In 1878, Batumi was annexed by the Russian Empire in accordance with Treaty of San Stefano between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (ratified on March 23). Occupied by the Russians on August 28, 1878, the town was declared a free port until 1886. It functioned as a center of a special military district until being incorporated in the Government of Kutaisi on June 12, 1883. Finally, on June 1, 1903, with the Okrug of Artvin, it was established as the region of Batumi placed under the direct control of the General Government of Georgia.

The expansion of Batumi began in 1883 with the construction of the Batumi-Tiflis-Baku railway completed in 1900 and by the finishing of the Baku-Batumi pipe-line. Henceforth Batumi became the chief Russian oil port in the Black Sea. The town expanded to an extraordinary extent and the population increased very rapidly: 8,671 inhabitants in 1882, and 12,000 in 1889. By 1902 there were 16000 in the port, 1000 worked in the refinery for Baron Rothschild's Caspian and Black Sea oil-company.

War, Communism and independence

During 1901, 16 years prior to the October Revolution, Joseph Stalin, the future leader of the Soviet Union, lived in the city organizing strikes. On 3 March 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk gave the city back to the Ottoman Empire; unrest led to Turkish forces' re-entry in April 1918, followed by British forces in December, who stayed until July 1920. Kemal Atatürk then ceded it to the Bolsheviks, on the condition that it be granted autonomy, for the sake of the Muslims among Batumi's mixed population.

When the USSR collapsed, Aslan Abashidze was appointed head of Adjara's governing council and subsequently held onto power throughout the unrest of the 1990s. Whilst other regions, such as Abkhazia, attempted to break away from the Georgian state, Adjara maintained an integral part of the Republic's territory. However, due to fragile security, Abashidze was able to exploit the central government's weaknesses and rule the area as a personal fiefdom. In May 2004, he fled to Russia because of mass protests sparked by the Rose Revolution in Tbilisi.

Present day

Batumi today is one of the main port cities of Georgia. It has the capacity for 80,000-ton tankers to take materials such as oil which is shipped through Georgia from Central Asia. Additionally the city exports regional agricultural products. Since 1995 the freight conversion of the port has constantly risen, with an approximate 8 million tons in 2001. The annual revenue from the port is estimated at between \$200 million and \$300 million.

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Since the change of power in Ajara, Batumi has attracted several international investors with real estate prices in the city trebling since 2001. Several new hotels opened after 2009, first the Sheraton in 2010 and the Radisson Blu in 2011. The Trump-tower and the Kempinski will open 2013.

Batumi was also host to the Russian 12th Military Base. Following the Rose Revolution, the central government pushed for the removal of these forces, and in 2005 an agreement with Moscow was reached. According to the agreement, the process of withdrawal was planned to be completed in the course of 2008, but the Batumi base was officially handed over to Georgia on November 13, 2007, ahead of planned schedule.

In July 2007, the seat of the Constitutional Court of Georgia was moved from Tbilisi to Batumi in an attempt to further facilitate the regional development.

In 2013, TAM GEO LLC announced investing \$70 million to starting of construction 170 meters height, 45 storey mix-used complex Babillon Tower, which will be highest residential building in Georgia.

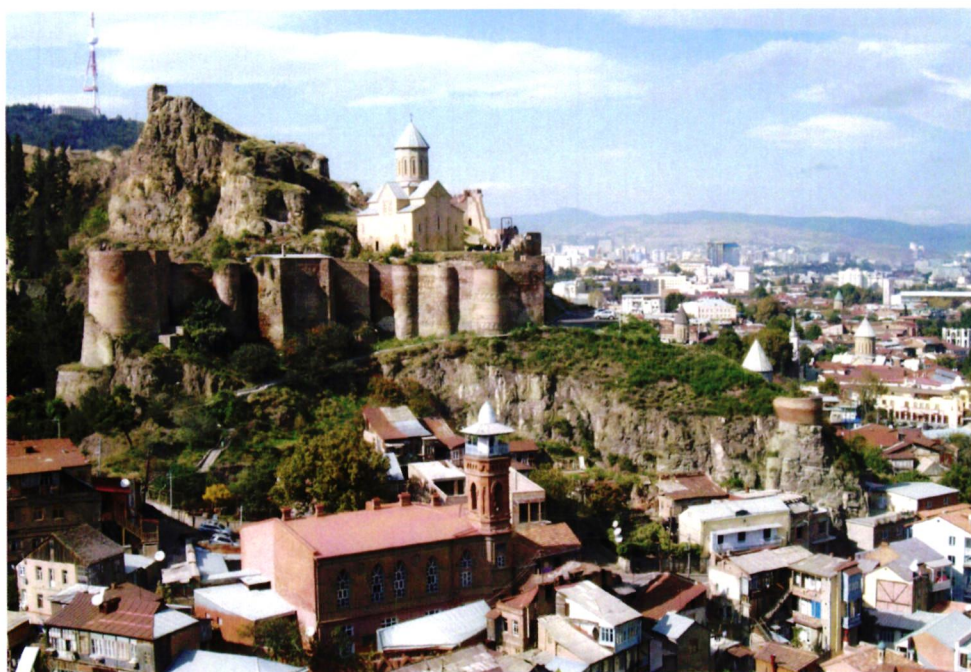
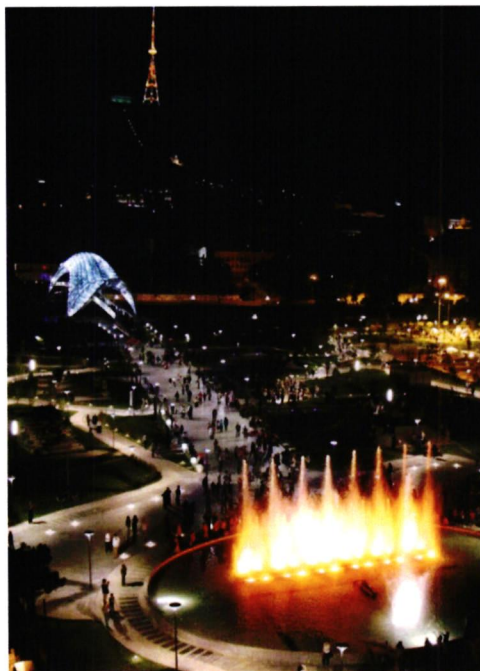


Sheraton Batumi

Church of St Barbara,
Rustaveli Ave
Batumi 6000, Georgia

T +995 (422) 22 90 00

41°39'054"N
41°37'824"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 04 / June 21, 2014, Saturday / Batumi > Bakuriani (245 km ~ 155 miles)

Say goodbye to the Black Sea and head inland into the lush countryside of Georgia. Arrive in Bakuriani.

Bakuriani is a skiing resort in the Borjomi district of Georgia. It is located on the northern slope of the Trialeti Range, at an elevation of 1,700 meters (5,576 feet) above sea level.

The region around Bakuriani is covered by coniferous forests (mainly made up of spruce). The resort lies 30 km (19 mi) from Borjomi and is located within the so-called Bakuriani Depression/caldera. The resort is connected with Borjomi by an electrified narrow-gauge railway. The present-day area of the town was built up by the lava flows from the Mukheri volcano. The highest mountain of the resort used for skiing is called Mount Kohta at around 2,200 meters (7,216 feet) above sea level.

The climate of Bakuriani is transitional from humid maritime to relatively humid continental. The winters are cold and experience significant snowfall while the summers are long and warm. The depth of snow from December to March is 64 cm (25.2 in). Bakuriani is also home to the Botanical Garden of the Georgian Academy of Sciences.

It was the home town of luger Nodar Kumaritashvili, who died during event training on the first day of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada. He lived in Bakuriani for much his life, and the street he lived on was named in his honor after his death. Georgia's flag-bearing athlete at the opening ceremony, alpine skier Iason Abramashvili, also resides there; he has decided to compete to honor Kumaritashvili's memory.

The 37 km Borjomi - Bakuriani rail line uses 912 mm track gauge. A few km south of Bakuriani lies the trajectory of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.



Hotel Villa Palace

Tsereteli St, Bakuriani

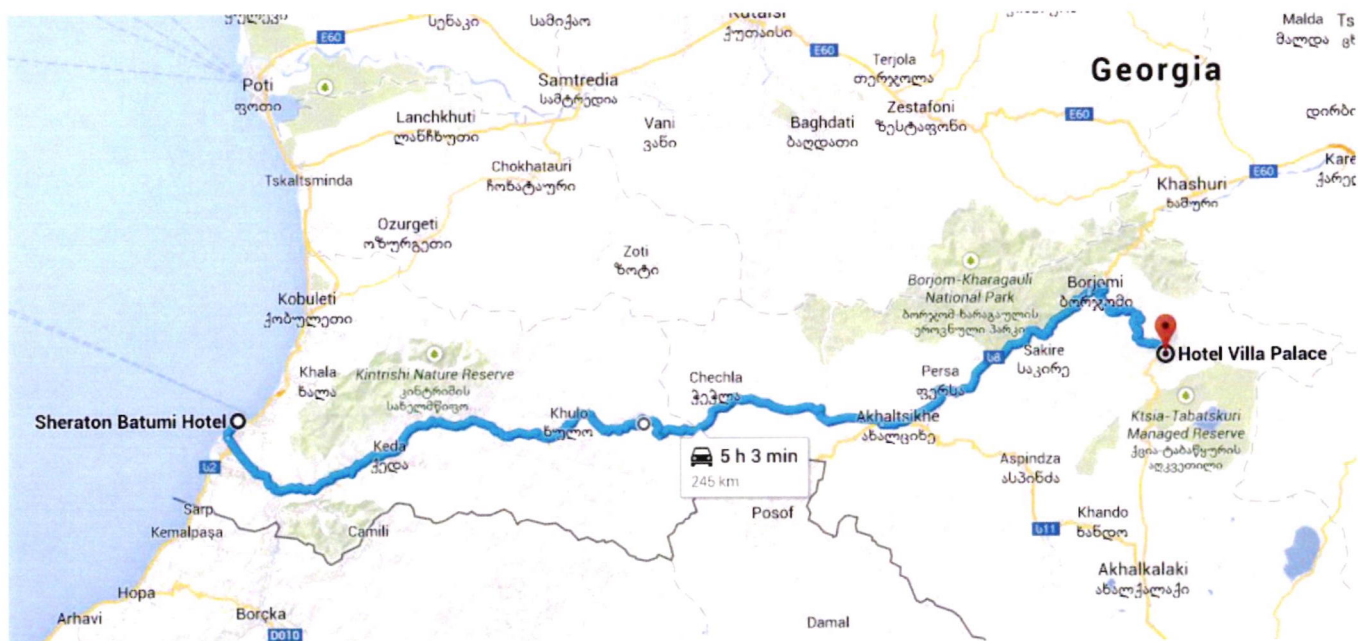
1204, Georgia

T +995 (597) 90 11 44

41°44'467"N

43°31'566"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 05 / June 22, 2014, Sunday / Bakuriani > Gyumri (145 kms ~ 90 miles)

Leave Bakuriani and head south through the green mountainous regions of Georgia and arrive at the Armenian border. After crossing into Armenia, ride further south to Gyumri.

Gyumri is the 2nd-largest city in Armenia and the capital of the Shirak Province in the northwestern part of the country. It is around 126 km north of the capital Yerevan. As of the 2011 official estimate, the city had a population of 146,100, down from 150,917 reported at the 2001 official census.

Its name has been changed several times. It was first known as Kumayri and later Gyumri, then Alexandropol between 1837 and 1924, then Leninakan between 1924 and 1990, then again as Gyumri.

The region of Gyumri is mentioned as Kumayri in the historic Urartian inscriptions dating back to the 8th century BC. The first settlement at the location of modern-day Gyumri is believed to have been founded during the 5th century BC, ca. 401 BC, by Greek colonists. An alternative theory suggests that the city was founded by the Cimmerians, based on the fact that Cimmerians conquered the region in 720 BC and that the original name of the city was Kumayri, which bears phonetic resemblance to the word used by ancient Armenian in reference to Cimmerians. Historians believe that Xenophon passed through Gyumri during his return to the Black Sea, a journey immortalized in his *Anabasis*.

During the Middle Ages, Kumayri was known as a large and important settlement. According to the Armenian scholar Ghevond the Historian, the town was a center of Armenian rebellion led by Artavazd Mamikonian against the Islamic Arab Caliphate, between 733 and 755.

Being controlled by several Turkic tribes and Persian dynasties, the town had lost its significance during the following centuries, until the beginning of the 19th century.

19th century

Gyumri and the surrounding territories became part of the Russian Empire after the Russo-Persian War (1804-1813). The Russians controlled over the town on 12 June 1804, around 25 years earlier than the rest of Eastern Armenia. During the period of the Russian rule, Gyumri became one of the developing cities in the Transcaucasus. In 1829, in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War, there was a big influx of Armenian population, as around 3,000 families who had migrated from territories in the Ottoman Empire -in particular from the towns of Kars, Erzurum, and Doğubeyazıt- settled in and around Gyumri. The Russian poet Alexander Pushkin visited Gyumri

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during his journey to Erzurum in 1829.

In 1837 Russian Tsar Nicholas I arrived in Gyumri and changed the name into Alexandropol. The name was chosen in honor of Tsar Nicholas I's wife, Princess Charlotte of Prussia, who had changed her name to Alexandra Fyodorovna after converting to Orthodox Christianity.

A major Russian fortress was built on the site in 1837. Alexandropol was finally formed as a town in 1840 to become the center of the newly established Alexandropol Uyezd, experiencing rapid growth during its first decade. In 1849, the Alexandropol Uyezd became part of the Erivan Governorate. The town was an important outpost for the Imperial Russian armed forces in the Transcaucasus where their military barracks were established (e.g., at Poligons, Severski, Kazachi Post).

Alexandropol became one of the major centers of the Russian troops during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. After the establishment of the railway station in Alexandropol in 1899, the town witnessed a significant growth, becoming the largest city in Eastern Armenia. By the end of the 19th century, Alexandropol was home to 430 shopping stores as well as several workshops and cultural institutions. The city was famous with its churches and gusans.

20th century and beyond

In 1902, the first bank in the city was opened. Until the sovietization of Armenia in 1920, Alexandropol had 31 manufacturing centers including beer, soap, textile, etc. After the October Revolution of 1917 and the Russian withdrawal from the South Caucasus, the Ottoman forces launched a new offensive capturing the city of Alexandropol on 11 May 1918, during the Caucasus Campaign in World War I. However, the Ottomans withdrew from the city on 24 December 1918, as a result of the Armistice of Mudros. On 10 May 1920, the local Bolshevik Armenians aided by the Muslim population, attempted a coup d'état in Alexandropol against the Dashnak government of Armenia. The uprising was suppressed by the Armenian government on May 14 and its leaders were executed. However, during the Turkish-Armenian War, Turkey attacked Alexandropol and occupied the city on 7 November 1920, as a result of the Battle of Alexandropol. After the battle, the Turkish forces were headquartered in Alexandropol. Turks presented the Republic of Armenia with an ultimatum that Armenians were forced to accept, otherwise Turkey would have invaded the capital Yerevan from their headquarters in Alexandropol. Armenia was forced to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol to stop the Turkish advance towards Yerevan, to put an end to the Turkish-Armenian War. However, the Turkish forces withdrew from Alexandropol after the Treaty of Kars in October 1921.

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Being under the Soviet rule, the name of the city was changed in 1924 to Leninakan after the deceased Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. The city suffered an earthquake in 1926, when many of its significant buildings were destroyed including the Greek church of Saint George. Leninakan became a major industrial center in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and its second-largest city, after the capital Yerevan. The city suffered major damage during the 1988 Spitak earthquake, which devastated many parts of the country. The earthquake occurred along a known thrust fault with a length of 60 kilometers (37 mi). Its strike was parallel to the Caucasus range and dipped to the north-northeast. Bruce Bolt, a seismologist and a professor of earth and planetary science at the University of California, Berkeley, walked the fault scarp in 1992 and found that the vertical displacement measured 1 m (3 ft 3 in) along most of the length with the southwest end reaching 1.6 m (5 ft 3 in).

The earthquake had a disastrous impact on the city, as many buildings are still not recovered. According to Armenian government sources, around 3,500 residents of Gyumri remain homeless.

At the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the city was renamed Kumayri between in 1990 until 1992 when it was finally given the name Gyumri. The Russian 102nd Military Base is located in the city.

Gyumri was celebrated as the Capital of Culture of the Commonwealth of Independent States for 2013. Major events took place in the city on 30 June 2013.

Araks Hotel

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Armenia, 377501

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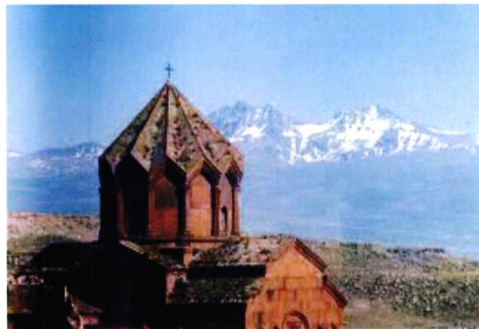
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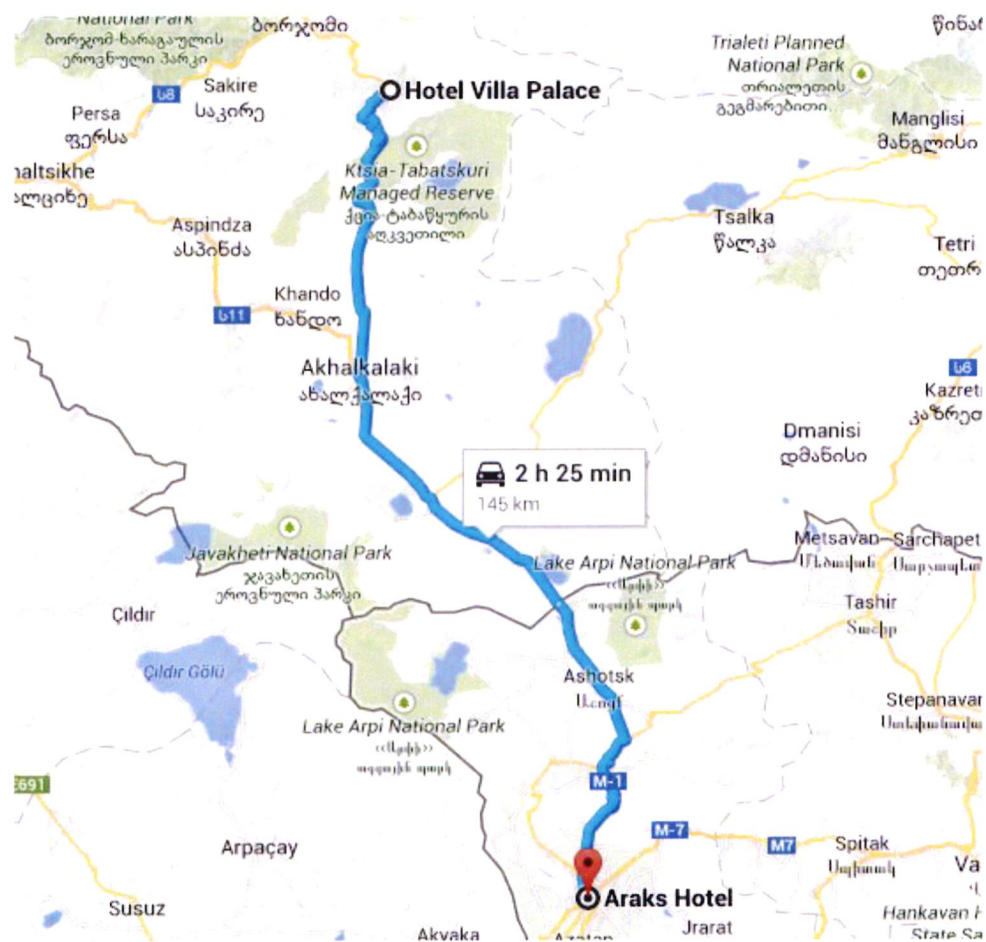
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E kartyom@mail.ru

40°47'253"N

43°50'433"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 06 / June 23, 2014, Monday / Gyumri > Yerevan (123 km)

Head south from Gyumri along the Turkish border, with vistas of the majestic Mt Ararat and arrive in Yerevan.

Yerevan is the capital and largest city of Armenia and one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Situated along the Hrazdan River, Yerevan is the administrative, cultural, and industrial center of the country. It has been the capital since 1918, the thirteenth in the history of Armenia.

The history of Yerevan dates back to the 8th century BC, with the founding of the fortress of Erebuni in 782 BC by king Argishti I at the western extreme of the Ararat plain. Erebuni was "designed as a great administrative and religious center, a fully royal capital." After World War I, Yerevan became the capital of the First Republic of Armenia as thousands of survivors of the Armenian Genocide settled in the area. The city expanded rapidly during the 20th century as Armenia became part of the Soviet Union. In a few decades, Yerevan was transformed from a provincial town within the Russian Empire, to Armenia's principal cultural, artistic, and industrial center, as well as becoming the seat of national government.

With the growth of the economy of the country, Yerevan has been undergoing major transformation as many parts of the city have been the recipient of new construction since the early 2000s, and retail outlets such as restaurants, shops, and street cafes, which were rare during Soviet times, have multiplied.

As of the 2011 census, the population of Yerevan is 1,060,138 people, making up to 35.1% of the total population of Armenia.

Yerevan was named the 2012 World Book Capital by UNESCO.

One theory regarding the origin of Yerevan's name is the city was named after the Armenian king, Yervand IV (the Last), the last leader of the Orontid Dynasty, and founder of the city of Yervandashat. However, it is likely that the city's name is derived from the Urartian military fortress of Erebuni, which was founded on the territory of modern-day Yerevan in 782 BC by Argishti I. As elements of the Urartian language blended with that of the Armenian one, the name eventually evolved into Yerevan (Erebuni = Erevani = Erevan = Yerevan).

Early Christian Armenian chroniclers attributed the origin of the name, "Yerevan," to a derivation from an expression exclaimed by [HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah) Noah, in [HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_language"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_language) Armenian. While looking in the

From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

direction of Yerevan, after the Mount Ararat and the flood waters had receded, Noah is believed to have exclaimed, "Yerevats!" ("it appeared!").

The principal symbol of Yerevan is Mount Ararat, which is visible from any area in the capital. The seal of the city is a crowned lion on a pedestal with the inscription "Yerevan." The lion's head is turned backwards while it holds a scepter using the right front leg, the attribute of power and royalty. The symbol of eternity is on the breast of the lion with a picture of Ararat in the upper part. The emblem is a rectangular shield with a blue border.



**Tufenkian Historic
Yerevan Hotel**

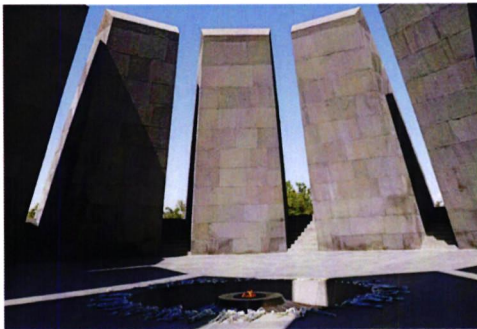
48 Hanrapetutyan St
Yerevan 0001, Armenia

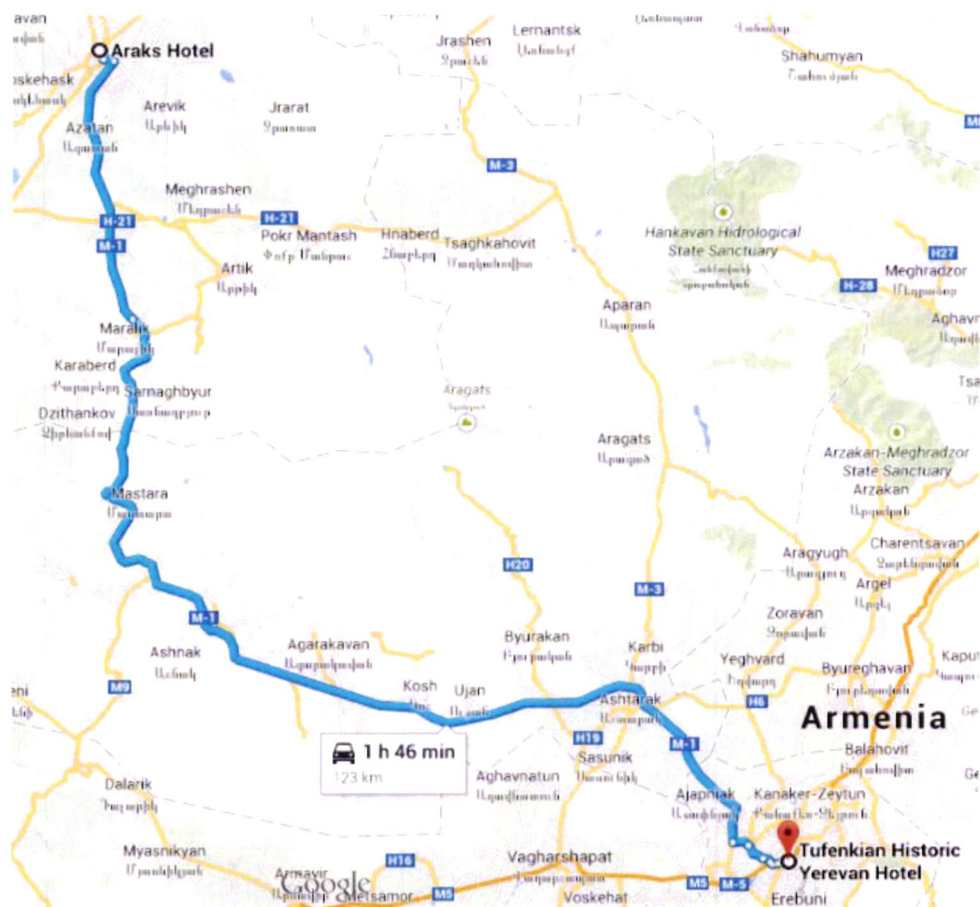
T +374 60 501030

E hotels@tufenkian.am

40°10'604"N

44°30'981"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 07 / June 24, 2014, Tuesday / Yerevan

After breakfast this morning, get to know Yerevan with an excursion around town followed by a visit to a cognac factory.

While it's the undeniable cultural, economic and political heart of the nation, Yerevan can at times feel like a city on permanent holiday. All summer long Yerevanites saunter up and down the main boulevards, preening in high fashion and fast cars while occasionally popping into a parkside café to schmooze over a drink or two. It's the most laid-back capital in the Caucasus and it's easy to slide into a torpor for a day or two. The city has some lovely 19th-century Russian edifices in its central core plus rings of parkland and handsome brick squares. Outer areas maintain an air of Soviet sprawl but these are limited by steep hills and gorges. Yerevan's museums and monuments could keep you busy for a few days but the best thing about the place is the people. Expressive black eyebrows, proud noses and classical Greek and Persian profiles appear everywhere, in a street culture somewhere between Marseilles, village Armenia and old Beirut. Yerevan is a relaxed and safe place where people live at one pace while the traffic goes at another. The cultural life is intense for a city of its size, including dozens of theatres, concert halls, galleries and live music clubs.



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DAY 08 / June 25, 2014, Wednesday / Yerevan > Dzoraget (160 km ~ 100 miles)

Depart Yerevan and head north east towards Lake Sevan.

Lake Sevan is the largest lake in Armenia and the Caucasus region. It is one of the largest fresh-water high-altitude lakes in the world.

Lake Sevan is situated in the central part of the Republic of Armenia, inside the Gegharkunik Province, at the altitude of 1,900 m (6,200 ft) above sea level. The total surface area of its basin is about 5,000 km² (1,900 sq mi), the lake itself is 940 km², and the volume is 34.0 billion cubic metres. It is fed by 28 rivers and streams. Only 10% of the outgoing water is drained by the Hrazdan (Razdan) river, while the remaining 90% evaporates.

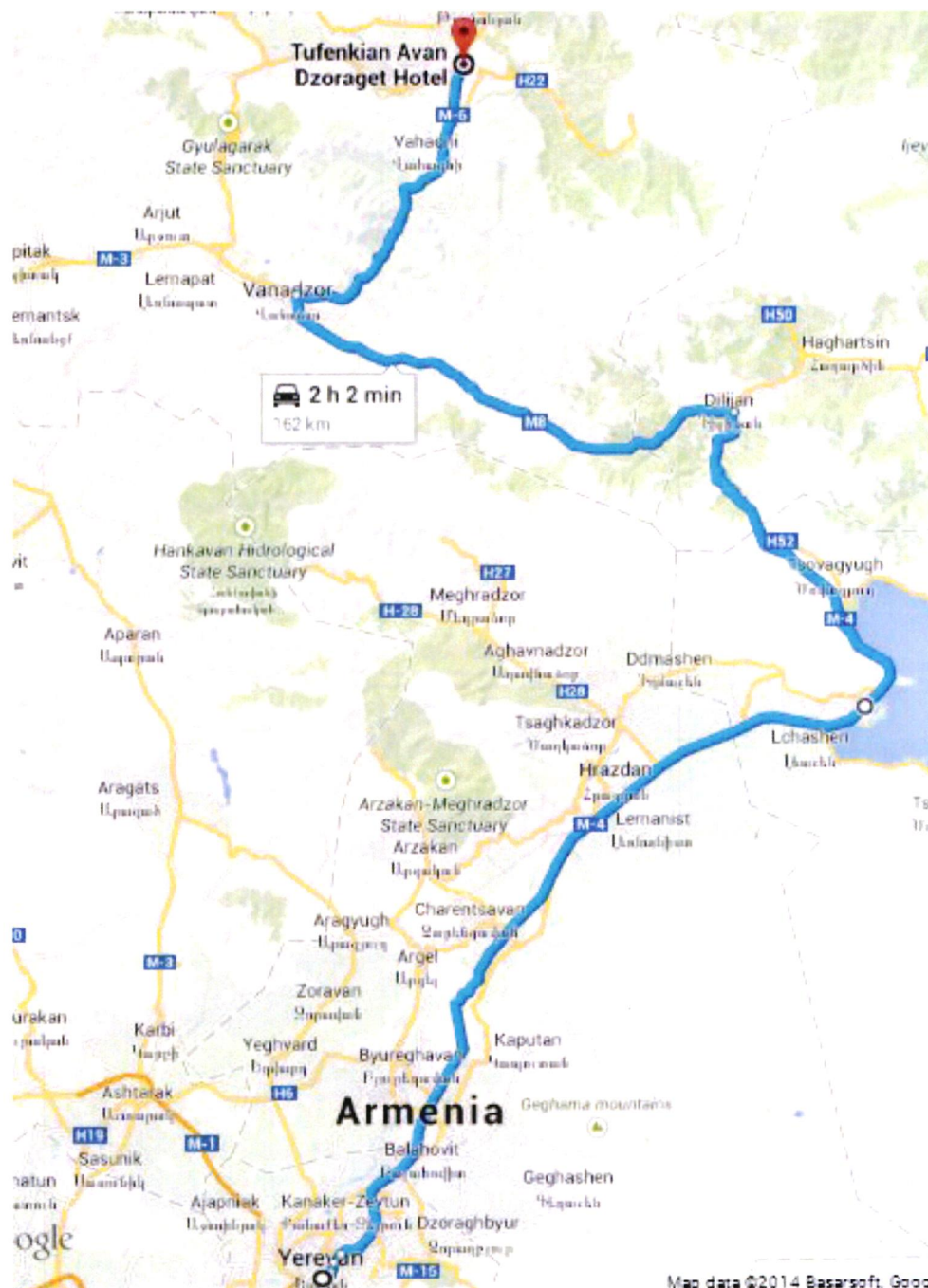
Before human intervention dramatically changed the Lake Sevan ecosystem, the lake was 95 metres (312 ft) deep, covered an area of 1,360 km² (5% of Armenia's entire area), had a volume of 58 km³ and had a perimeter of 260 km. The lake surface was at an altitude of 1,916 m above sea level.

Along with Lake Van and Lake Urmia, Sevan was considered one of the three great lakes of the historical Armenian Kingdom, collectively referred to as the Seas of Armenia; it is the only one within the boundaries of today's Republic of Armenia. The Sevanavank peninsula (formerly an island) is the historic area of the lake at its northern shores.

Hotel Tufenkian
Avan Dzoraget Hotel
Dzoraget, Armenia

40°57'56.7"N
44°38'11.6"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 09 / June 26, 2014, Thursday / Dzoraget > Naftalan (320 km ~ 200 miles)

Head north to the Georgian border along the Debed River and briefly cross back into Georgia to enter Azerbaijan at the Red Bridge border crossing. Continue to Naftalan via Ganja and arrive at Chinar Sanatorium.

Ganja is Azerbaijan's second-largest city with a population of around 313,300. It was named Elisabethpol in the Russian Empire period. The city regained its original name—Ganja—in 1920 during the first part of its incorporation into the Soviet Union. However, its name was changed again in 1935 to Kirovabad and retained it throughout the later Soviet period from 1935. Finally in 1989, during Perestroika, the city regained the original name.

Even though some sources from medieval Islamic time attribute the building of the town to Muslim Arab ruler, modern historians believe that the fact that the name Ganja derives from the New Persian *ganj* (treasure, treasury) and in Arabic source the name is recorded as *Janza* (Middle Persian: *ganza*: treasure, treasury) suggests that the city existed in pre-Islamic times and was likely founded in the 5th century. The area in which Ganja is located was known as Arran from the 9th to 12th century; its urban population spoke mainly in the Persian language.

According to medieval Arabic sources, the city of Ganja was founded in 859-60 by Mohammad b. Khaled b. Yazid b. Mazyad, the Arab governor of the region in the reign of the caliph Al-Mutawakkil, and so-called because of a treasure unearthed there. According to the legend, the Arab governor had a dream where a voice told him that there was a treasure hidden under one of the three hills around the area where he camped. The voice told him to unearth it and use the money to found a city. He did so and informed the caliph about the money and the city. Caliph made Mohammad the hereditary governor of the city on a condition that he would give the money he found to the caliph.

Foundation of the city by Arabs is confirmed by the medieval Armenian historian Movses Kagankatvatsi, who mentions that the city of Ganja was founded in 846-47 in the canton of Arshakashen by the son of Khazr Patgos, "a furious and merciless man".

Historically an important city of the South Caucasus, Ganja has been part of Sassanid empire, Great Seljuk Empire, Atabegs of Azerbaijan, Khwarezmid Empire, Il-Khans, Timurids, Jalayirids, Qara Qoyunlu, Ak Koyunlu, the Safavid, the Afsharid, the Zand and the Qajar empires of Persia/Iran, but often ruled locally by the khans/dukes of the Ganja Khanate. Ganja is also the birthplace of the famous poet Nizami Ganjavi.

The people of Ganja experienced a temporary cultural decline after an earthquake

From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

in 1139, when the city was taken by king Demetrius I of Georgia and its gates taken as trophies, and again after the Mongol invasion in 1231. The city was revived after the Safavids came to power. City came under temporary occupation by the Ottomans between 1578–1606 and 1723-1735.

16th-19th centuries

For a short period, Ganja was renamed Abbasabad by Shah Abbas after war against the Ottomans. He built a new city 8 kilometres (5 miles) to the southwest of the old one, but the name changed back to Ganja during the time. During the Safavid rule, it was the capital of the Karabakh (Ganja) beylerbey, one of the four such administrative units and principalities. In 1747, Ganja became the center of the Ganja Khanate.

Russian expansion into the South Caucasus met strong opposition in Ganja. In contrast with spreading suzerainty over Christian Georgia and Sunni Daghestan, military attack on the khanate in 1804 led by Pavel Tsitsianov was seen as a direct challenge to Iran being an incursion into a mainly Shia-populated territory. Some western sources assert that “the capture of the city was followed by a massacre of up to 3,000 inhabitants of Ganja by the Russians”. They also claim that “500 of them were slaughtered in a mosque where they had taken refuge, after an Armenian told the Russian soldiers that there might have been “Daghestani robbers” among them”. Thousands of Azeris left Ganja and fled to Iran following the capture.

According to the October 1813 Gulistan Treaty, the Ganja Khanate, together with most of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Dagestan, were recognized as part of the Russian Empire after Persia's defeat in the Persia-Russia wars except Persian occupation between 1826-1827. It was renamed Elisabethpol, after the wife of Alexander I of Russia, Elisabeth, and in 1868 became the capital of Elisabethpol Governorate. Elizavetpol was an uyezd of Tiflis Governorate before 1868. The Russian name was not accepted by Azerbaijanis who continued to call the city Ganja.

20th century

In 1918, Ganja became the temporary capital of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, at which point it was renamed Ganja again, until Baku was recaptured from the British backed Centrocaspian Dictatorship. In April 1920, the Red Army occupied Azerbaijan. In May 1920, Ganja was the scene of an abortive anti-Soviet rebellion, during which the city was heavily damaged by fighting between the insurgents and the Red Army. In 1935, Joseph Stalin renamed the city Kirovabad after Sergei Kirov. In 1991, Azerbaijan re-established its independence, and the ancient name of the city was given back. For many years the 104th Guards Airborne Division of the Soviet Airborne Troops was based in the town.

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21st century

A construction boom is dramatically transforming the urban face of Ganja as city has seen a boom in the construction sector in recent years. This boom has inevitably led to dramatic changes in the city's urban development, transforming the old Soviet city into a hub of high-rise, mixed-use buildings.

Naftalan is a city in Azerbaijan, surrounded by the rayon of Goranboy. It is on an agricultural plain near the Lesser Caucasus Mountains. The word naftalan also means a petroleum product which can be obtained there.

The word Naftalan, can be traced to the Greek word “naphtha”, meaning pertaining to oil, and the Azerbaijani suffix “-alan”, which is of the verb “to take” (and literally meaning “oil buyer”). It is the center of a unique petroleum industry, with a grade of oil referred to as “Naftalan”. While Naftalan crude oil is too heavy for normal export uses (unlike Azerbaijan's plentiful Caspian Sea oil), it contains about 50 percent naphthalene, a hydrocarbon that is the active ingredient in coal tar soaps, which are used to treat psoriasis. As such, it is only used for medicinal purposes. People using the oil generally sit in a bath and are covered in oil up to their necks (

Archaeological findings in the region date to the 12th century AD. The qualities of Naftalan oil has been known since early times; Marco Polo noted them. The oil in the area was known to people as far as China and India, and was traded by caravans throughout countries of the Near East. Modern use of the oil has dated to the 1870s under Czarist Russia. By 1912, a German joint-stock company was founded to export and trade the oil, which was used as a treatment in the Russo-Japanese War. Research on the properties of the oil continues to be done at Azerbaijan Medical University and the Scientific Arthritis Center of Azerbaijan.

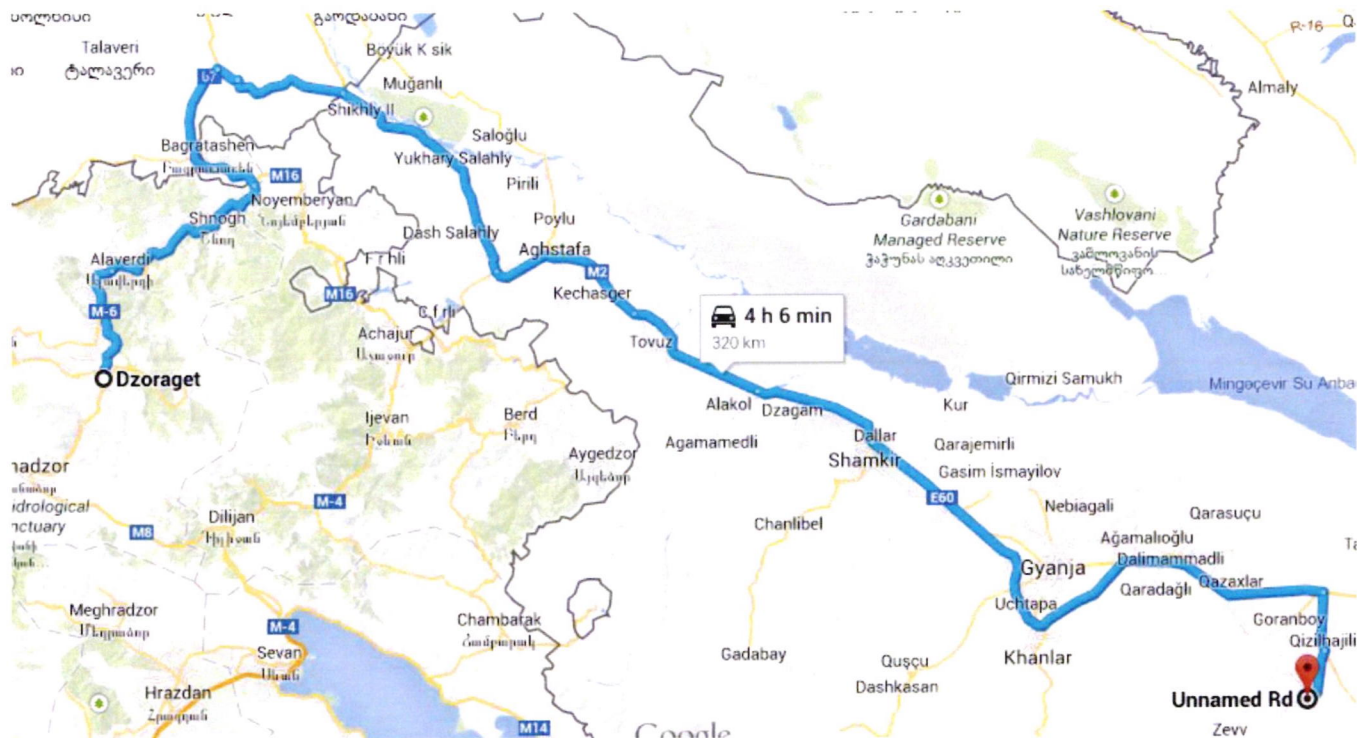
Petroleum spas

The area is home to petroleum spas (or “oil spas”), once popular vacation spots of the Soviet Union that are making a return in popularity. Oil from these spas is claimed to be an effective treatment against psoriasis, arthritis and rheumatism. At the height of their Soviet-era popularity, the spas in Naftalan had 75,000 visitors a year. The combination of violent ethnic conflict in nearby Nagorno-Karabakh and the end of Soviet-sponsored free trips brought the industry to its knees in the late-1980s. All but one of the older spas were converted into refugee housing. The naphthalene in the oil gives it therapeutic properties, however it is not clear whether it may also be a carcinogen. The remaining spa, the Naftalan Therapeutic Center, had 1,000-beds. New spas are planned to attract tourists.

Chinar Sanatorium
Naftalan

40°30'07.8"N
46°49'19.7"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 10 / June 27, 2014, Friday / Naftalan > Baku (320 km ~ 200 miles)

Depart Naftalan and head east to the capital city Baku.

Baku is the capital and largest city of Azerbaijan, as well as the largest city on the Caspian Sea and of the Caucasus region. Baku is located 28 meters (92 ft) below sea level, which makes it the lowest lying national capital in the world. Baku is also the largest city in the world located below sea level. It is located on the southern shore of the Absheron Peninsula, which projects into the Caspian Sea. The city consists of two principal parts: the downtown area and the old Inner City (21.5 ha). At the beginning of 2009, Baku's urban population was estimated at just over two million people. Officially, about 25 percent of all inhabitants of the country live in Baku's metropolitan area.

Baku is divided into eleven administrative districts (raions) and 48 townships. Among these are the townships on islands in the Baku Bay and the town of Oil Rocks built on stilts in the Caspian Sea, 60 km (37 mi) away from Baku. The Inner City of Baku along with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. According to the Lonely Planet's ranking, Baku is also among the world's top ten destinations for urban nightlife.

The city is the scientific, cultural and industrial center of Azerbaijan. Many sizeable Azerbaijani institutions have their headquarters there, including SOCAR, one of the world's top 100 companies and others. The Baku International Sea Trade Port, sheltered by the islands of the Baku Archipelago to the east and the Absheron Peninsula to the north, is capable of handling two million tons of general and dry bulk cargoes per year. Baku hosted the 57th Eurovision Song Contest in 2012 and will host the 2015 European Games.

Park Inn by Radisson

Azadlig Avenue 1
AZ 1000 Baku

T +994 (12) 490 6000

40°22'285"N
49°50'908"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 11 / June 28, 2014, Saturday / Baku

Half day guided Baku city tour with bus.



From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 12 / June 29, 2014, Sunday / Baku > Derbent

Ride north along the shores of the Caspian Sea and cross the border into Russia.

We will be met by our guide/translator on the Azerbaijan side of the border and we ride to Derbent. In Derbent we will have a meal check in to your hotel and have a guided trip around the UNESCO world heritage town. Derbent means “shut gate” in Persian and for 2500 years it was a fortified town with the sole purpose of defending the Persian Empire from the barbarian hordes north of the Caucasus mountains. The world’s only surviving Sassanid era fort was the end point of a 40 kilometer wall that stretched from the Caspian Sea to the mountains. We will have plenty of time to explore the fort, the walls, the old city and the atmospheric Islamic mausoleums and tombstones that litter the hills around the city.

Derbent: Its etymology derives from the Persian Darband (“locked gate”); known to the Arabs as Bab al Abwab (“Gate of Gates”) and to the Turks as Demirkapı (“Iron Gate”) is a city in the Republic of Dagestan, Russia, located on the Caspian Sea, north of the Azerbaijani border. It is the southernmost city in Russia, and it is the second most important city of Dagestan.

Derbent occupies the narrow gateway between the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains connecting the Eurasian steppes to the north and the Middle East to the south. Often identified with the legendary Gates of Alexander, Derbent claims to be the oldest city in Russia (8th century BCE). Since antiquity, the value of the area as the gate to the Caucasus has been understood, and Derbent has archaeological structures over 5,000 years old. As a result of this geographic particularity, the city developed between two walls, stretching from the mountains to the sea. These fortifications were continuously employed for a millennium and a half, longer than any other extant fortress in the world.

Dvor Hotel

Ulitsa H. Tagieva,
54 Derbent

T (87240) 4-09-05
(928) 059-05-13
(928) 546-50-66

$42^{\circ}04'547''\text{N}$
 $48^{\circ}17'400''\text{E}$





DAY 13 / June 30, 2014, Monday / Derbent > Tsovkra > Haihi

A drive into the mountains of Dagestan. Some of the roads will be paved and some not. We'll pass the village of Tsovkra, famous for its tighrope walkers. You will be able to stop for a demonstration before continuing to Haihi. Overnight in Haihi.

ROPE WALKERS

Rope walker are blessed:

They walk not only on the ground.

Seven miracles of the world are well known in the world, We would like to meet you with the eighth one, May be with the ninth or with the 20th, - Miracle is the miracle. There is a small Lak village in The Daghestan Mountain, That is Tsovkra-1, where you can find a miracle - ropewalkers. That's why Tsovkra-1 is called "Pehlivan Tsovkra" what means "Village of rope walkers".

Tsovkra-1 is a mountain place, where the free wind attracts you, where on the naked mountains there are many pyramids of stones. The sticked to each houses, the mystery of stars nights, drunk aroma - the virgin nature here is not touched with the aggression of industry. There is nothing of strange that this village is famous all over the world for its rope walking. Now nobody remember when it began, who first arrived at the idea of rope walking, but it was without a word, a man from Tsovkra, a Lak. Laks are long considered as quick thinking people, as capable to many trades.

What is rope walking? Is it a trade? If it is so, why it is a miracle, too. This simple trade in Tsovkra was brought till the perfection, behind which begins a real distinctive skill, a miracle by means of which a tiny aul became famous. So why do the Tsovkra people walk on rope? Many people looking at them envy them: romantics! But there are some that say: they are eccentrics - to risk. What for? Nobody captives them. You may earn your money in another way: working as a tinner or a shoemaker. To try themselves, to give a good example for others - is a reason that moves ropewalkers, gives them success. The experience of rope walking stops to be an experience of a small group of people from Tsovkra. It becomes a point of calculation of human possibilities.

Not in other faraway countries, but at their home, in remote mountain aul appeared the best qualities of Tsovkra people: patience, self-control, the will to win. This is courage of people, too, who showed to the world that the human abilities are endless. So Tsovkra people are always in seeking. That is why appeared a record trick of Tsovkra men - "flamingo" - the column of four persons on the rope, standing on the shoulders of each other's. That is why appeared an effective trick - the back salto with tied eyes.

Daghestan people are especially admired with fearlessness & skills of popular artist of Russia & Daghestan Y.I.Gadjikurbanov. Apart from the famous group "Tsovkra", "born on the rope" Yarahbi Isayevich grew seven daughters under the cupola of the circus. In the age of 14 his elder

daughter Djariat was conferred an honorable title of renowned artist of Daghestan. Isn't it an achievement?

Another man who surprised the world was a son of tinner, an "air rope walker", twice Hero of the Soviet Union, a fighting pilot - Ahmet-Khan Sultan.

But at last times a miracle became to go out - the youth's eyes don't become bright while seeing the rope. Another interests appeared, that's right: the time is going, something becomes boring, appears another things. The trouble is that the native becomes boring, the native, coming from generation to generation through the blood, through the life, as a part of your village, your nation, & appears something another - not ours, but more East or West.

That's a pity, it is very painful that somewhere in Tsovkra there will be a generation that won't be able to put-on the rope. Now in Daghestan live the generation, which can't put the horse, to ride the horse. Disinclination or inability of the youth to follow the ancient national traditions is a problem of problems. It is not a secret that the Daghestan population, following the life of modern world, is loosing their distinctiveness. Along with the "Tsovkra miracle" on the edge of disappearing, for example, the skill of Kubatchi gold masters. And many others. And if we won't understand in time that the keeping of our national, traditional is the task of 1st grade importance, in ten years the Daghestan people will not be resemble to the Daghestan people, Tsovkra people to the Tsovkra people.

Tsovkra has not its skill, but its face, its dialect, its traditions. No one wedding party, no one fist goes without original acrobats & beautiful ropewalkers, dancing lezginka-dance on the rope.

The place of simply beauty - Tsovkra in summer gathers its sons & daughters from all countries of the world, from many circuses. Brave pehlivans, "dancers on the rope" gather in the center of our soul - Tsovkra to breath the freshness of the mountains, to wash the soul in the bluish color of our sky, to get the healthy charge from the world of green. And on the big "godekan" Tsovkra boys with balances climb the standards, master the rope & try to make admire their elder brothers with original & astonishing tricks.

Patimat Ramazanova

Poetess,

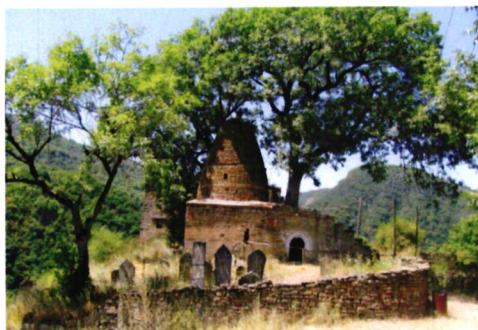
Correspondent of Republican

Lak's newspaper "Ichi",

"Echo of Caucasus" #1(7), 1995.

Haihi Hotel
(there is only one)

42°07'11.2"N
47°11'06.7"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 14 / July 01, 2014, Tuesday / Haihi > Grozny (300 km~ 200 miles)

Cross out of Dagestan into Chechnya. Leaving the mountains through the beech forests to the new capital Grozny. In Grozny our guide will show us around this glitzy city. Overnight in Grozny City Hotel - Grozny.

Grozny is the capital city of the Chechen Republic, Russia. The city lies on the Sunzha River. According to the 2010 Census, the city had a population of 271,573; up from 210,720 recorded in the 2002 Census, but still only about two-thirds of 399,688 recorded in the 1989 Census.

In Russian, "Grozny" means "fearsome", "awesome" or "redoubtable". During the existence of the separatist republic, the city was renamed Dzokhar-Ghala in 1996, and Chechen separatists sometimes continue to refer to the city as Dzhokhar or Djohar; it was named so after Dzhokhar Dudaev, the first president of the separatist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. As of December 2005, the Chechen parliament voted to rename the city Akhmadkala after Akhmad Kadyrov, a proposition which was rejected by his son Ramzan Kadyrov, the prime minister and later president of the republic.

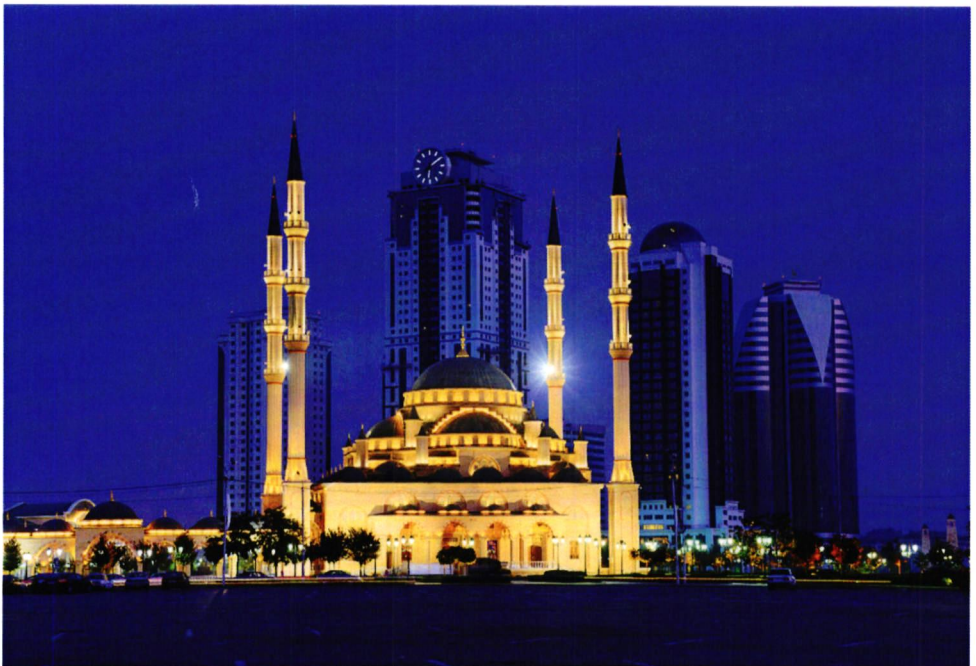


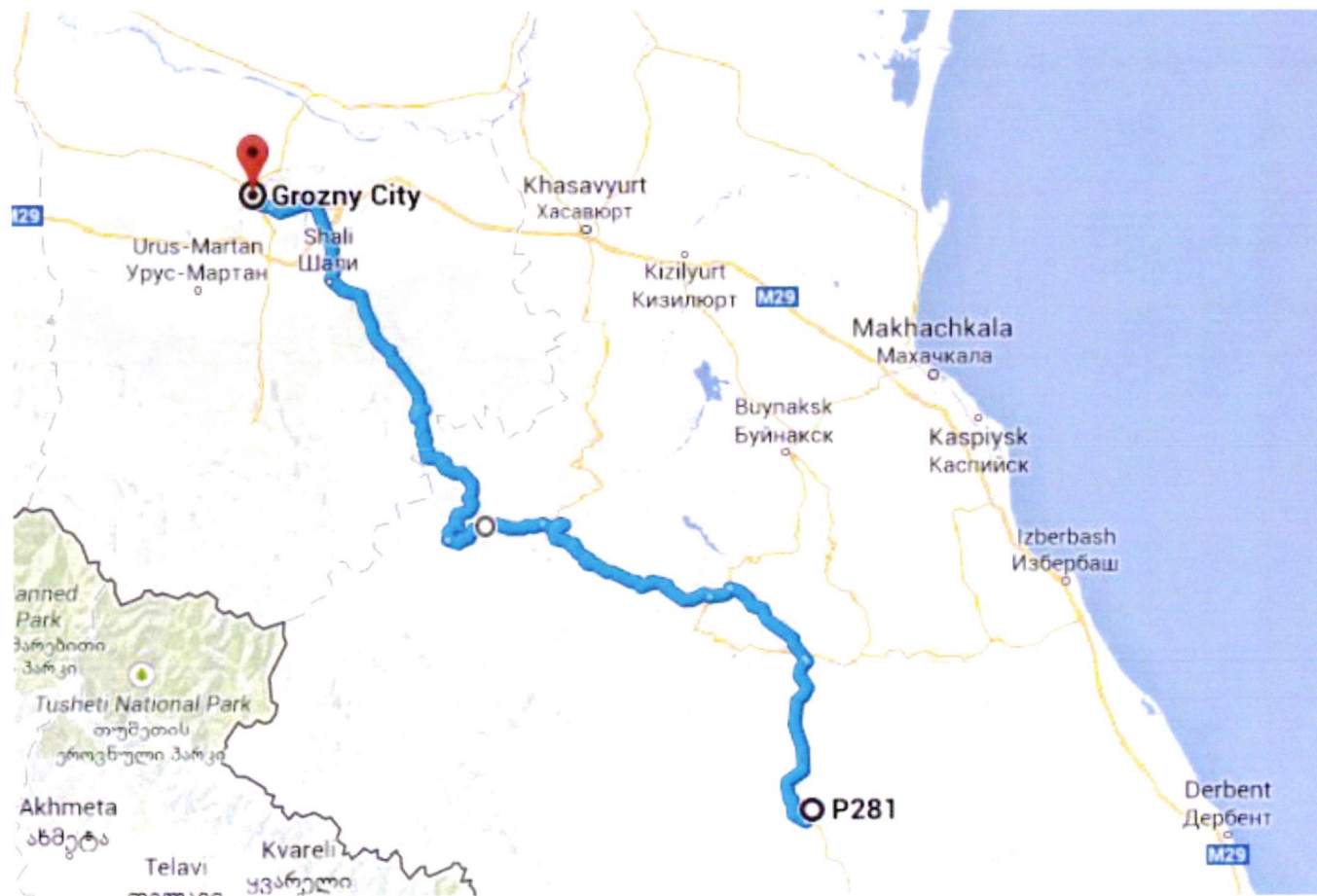
Grozny City Hotel

Prospekt Akhmed Kadyrov 16/1
(This is also sometimes called by
its old name Prospekt Lenin)
Grozny

T +7(8712) 29-60-00
+7(8712)29-60-01

43°18'932"N
45°41'764"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 15 / July 02, 2014, Wednesday / Grozny > Vladikavkaz

Today we drive from Grozny through Ingushetia to Vladikavkaz, the last stop on the Russian segment of the route, stopping off at the striking memorial to Stalin's repression of minority people Located in the foothills of the North Caucasus.

Vladikavkaz is the capital of North Ossetia. A city of approximately 300,000, it is an industrial center and the terminus of the Georgian Military Highway. This region of the North Caucasus is watered with many mineral and freshwater springs.

The city was founded in 1784 as a fortress during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and was for many years the main Russian military base in the region. The Georgian Military Highway, crossing the mountains, was constructed in 1799 to link the city with Georgia to the south, and in 1875 a railway was built to connect it to Rostov-on-Don and Baku in Azerbaijan. Vladikavkaz has become an important industrial center for the region, with smelting, refining, chemicals and manufacturing industries

Vladikavkaz was fought over in both the Russian Civil War and World War II. In February 1919, the anti-Communist Volunteer Army under General Anton Denikin seized the city, before being expelled by the Red Army in March 1920. In November 1942, the forces of Nazi Germany tried unsuccessfully to seize the city but were repelled. In 1999, 2008, and 2010, Vladikavkaz was a target of bombings. On November 26, 2008, Vitaly Karayev, the mayor of Vladikavkaz was killed by an unknown gunman. On December 31, 2008, his successor, Kazbek Pagiye, was also killed by unknown gunmen.

Hotel Vladikavkaz

75 Kotsoeva Street
Vladikavkaz, Alania
362003, Russia

T +7 (8672) 649-494

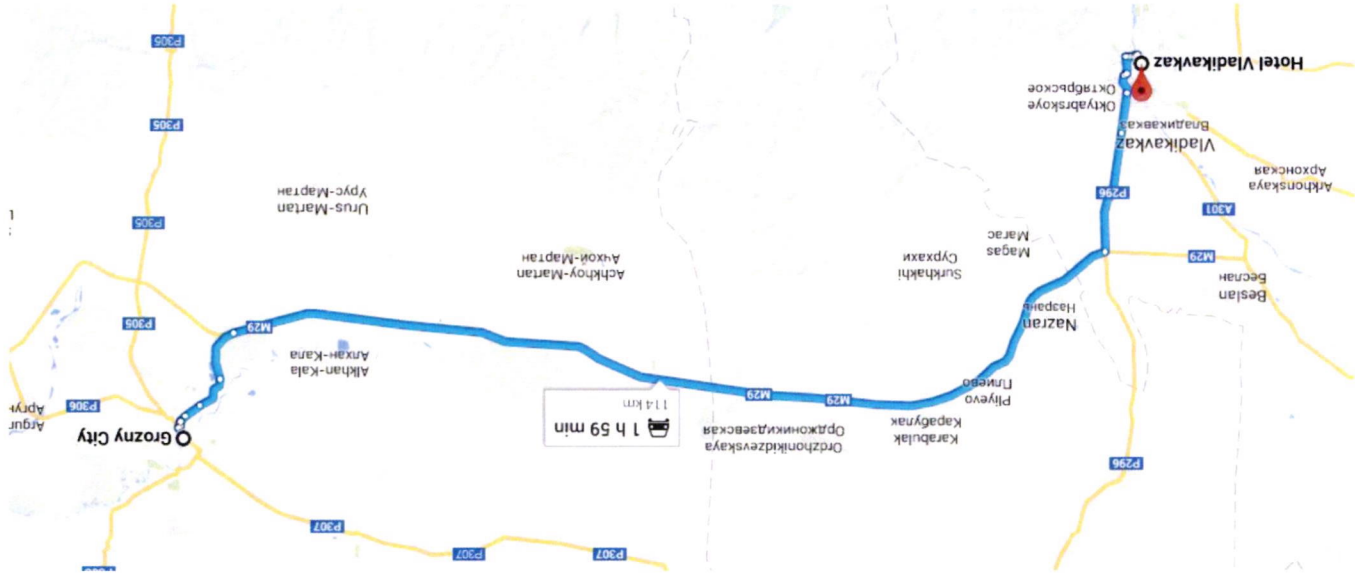
+7 (8672) 550-383

F +7 (8672) 648-866

N43° 01.622'

E44° 40.464'





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 16 / July 03, 2014, Thursday / Vladikavkaz > Tbilisi (205 kms ~ 130 miles)

Depart Vladikavkaz and head south, crossing into Georgia over the mountainous Larsi border. Once in Georgia, travel via Kazbegi, at over 6,000 feet, a small alpine village set in a monumental bowl of mountain peaks, including the Caucasus' highest, Mt Kazbek, and Gudauri, a popular ski resort, along the Georgian Military Highway to the capital Tbilisi.

Georgia's strip of central lowlands has long been an important link between East and West. Tbilisi is set at the mouth of this passageway, in the Mtkvari River valley, and has changed hands many times. Most notably, the city was ruled by the Arabs for 400 years before King David the Builder defeated them in 1121 and moved his capital here from Kutaisi. The Georgian king fostered tolerance for Tbilisi's Arab population, and the city still has a multiethnic atmosphere. The red-roofed old town, its houses sporting carved wooden balconies, sits beneath the Narikala Fortress on the hill above. Tbilisi was last razed in 1795 by Aga Khan, and most of the current buildings date from that time. The domed sulfur baths and the stone Anchiskhati Church were all that survived.

High over Tbilisi stands enormous statue - the Mother of Georgia with a sword for her enemies in one hand and a cup of wine for her friends and guests in the other, she symbolizes the love of freedom and the hospitality of Georgian people. Tbilisi today is a major economic and cultural centre of Georgia, a beautiful city of approximately 2 million people.

Hotel Marriott Courtyard

4 Freedom Square
Tbilisi 0105, Georgia

T +995 (322) 779-100

F +995 (322) 779-110

N41° 41.603'

E44° 48.063'



Hotel Vladikavkaz



2 h 43 min

198 km

Leningori
აზალგორი

Akhmeta
ახმეტა

Gori
გორი

Kaspi
კასპი

Dusheti
დუშეთი

Tsalka
წალკა

Courtyard Tbilis

From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 17 / July 04, 2014, Friday / Tbilisi

This morning after breakfast, the guide will give an overview walking tour of the central part of the city. Admire the Narikala Fortress, the 4th century citadel built to keep watch over the narrowest point on the Kura River. Observe Mother Georgia, a soaring monument above the city bearing a sword for her enemies and a bowl of wine for her guests and the 6th century stone Anchiskhati Basilica, the city's oldest church. Pause at Sioni Cathedral, sheltering the Cross of St. Nino, the woman who brought Christianity to Georgia, and the 19th century caravansarai built to house traveling merchants. Tour the 13th century Metekhi Church of the Virgin, constructed on an outcropping above the river on the site of David the Builder's former palace. Wander Rustaveli Avenue, the main street of Tbilisi. Notice the numerous elaborately carved wooden balconies attached to the houses in the Old Town, a feature of the city's architectural landscape that often appears in paintings.

Enjoy a free afternoon and evening to explore on your own.



From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 18 / July 05, 2014, Saturday / Tbilisi > Akhaltsikhe (205 km ~ 135 miles)

Today depart Tbilisi and head southeast towards Turkey. Stop at Gori. Gori serves as the regional capital of Shida Kartli and the centre of the homonymous administrative district. The name is from Georgian gora, that is, “heap”, or “hill”. Gori was an important military stronghold in the Middle Ages and maintains a strategic importance due to its location on the principal highway connecting eastern and western parts of Georgia. In the course of its history, Gori has been invaded by the armies of regional powers several times. The city was occupied by Russian troops during the 2008 South Ossetian War. Gori is also known as the birthplace of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and ballistic missile designer Alexander Nadiradze.

Later on pass through Borjomi. Borjomi is a resort town in the beautiful Borjomi Gorge. Nearby is the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, a protected area that began as the hunting reserve of Czar Alexander II's nephew, Mikhail. Borjomi is celebrated for its mineral water, which is still bottled and sold throughout the region. Believed by Georgians to have enormous health benefits, Borjomi's mineral springs were popular both for drinking and for bathing. After the revolution, Soviet vacationers replaced 19th century royalty at the spas and sanatoria.

Akhalsikhe literally means new castle (also known as Lomsia) is a small city in Georgia's southwestern region. It is situated on the both banks of a small river Potskhovi, which separates the city to the old city in the north and new in the south.

Hotel Lomsia

Akhaltsikhe

0800, Georgia

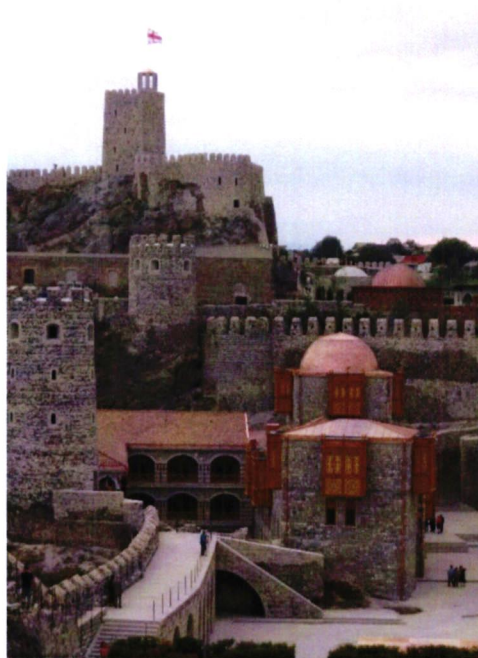
T +995 (365) 222 001

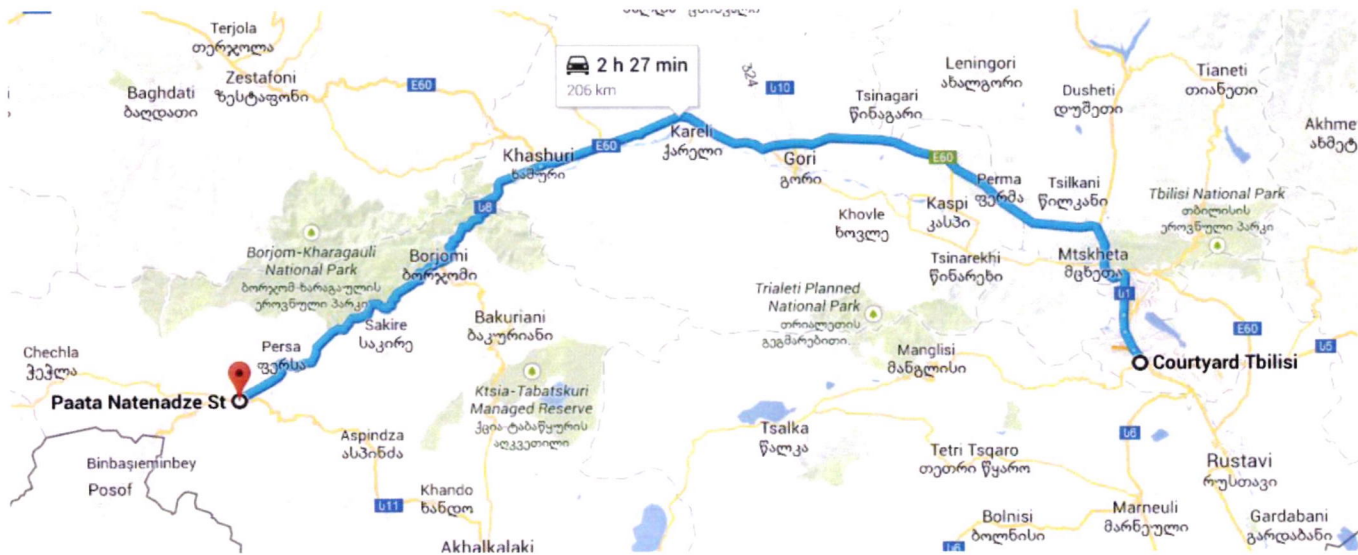
M +995 (577) 327 825

F +995 (322) 240 424

41°38'345"N

42°59'271"E





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 19 / July 06, 2014, Sunday / Akhaltsikhe > Kars

Cross the border into the Turkish town of Posof. During the First World War and the Turkish War of Independence in the 1920s Posof was the scene of fighting between Turkey and Russia. Today this is an impoverished rural area that has seen many of its residents migrate to jobs abroad. One source of income is beekeeping. This area is renowned for its hard yellow cheese “Kaşar” kaşar and its geese. The construction of the Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline gave the local economy a brief boost from 2000 onwards.



Hotel Cheltikov

Şehit Hulusi Aytekin Caddesi
No. 63 Kars

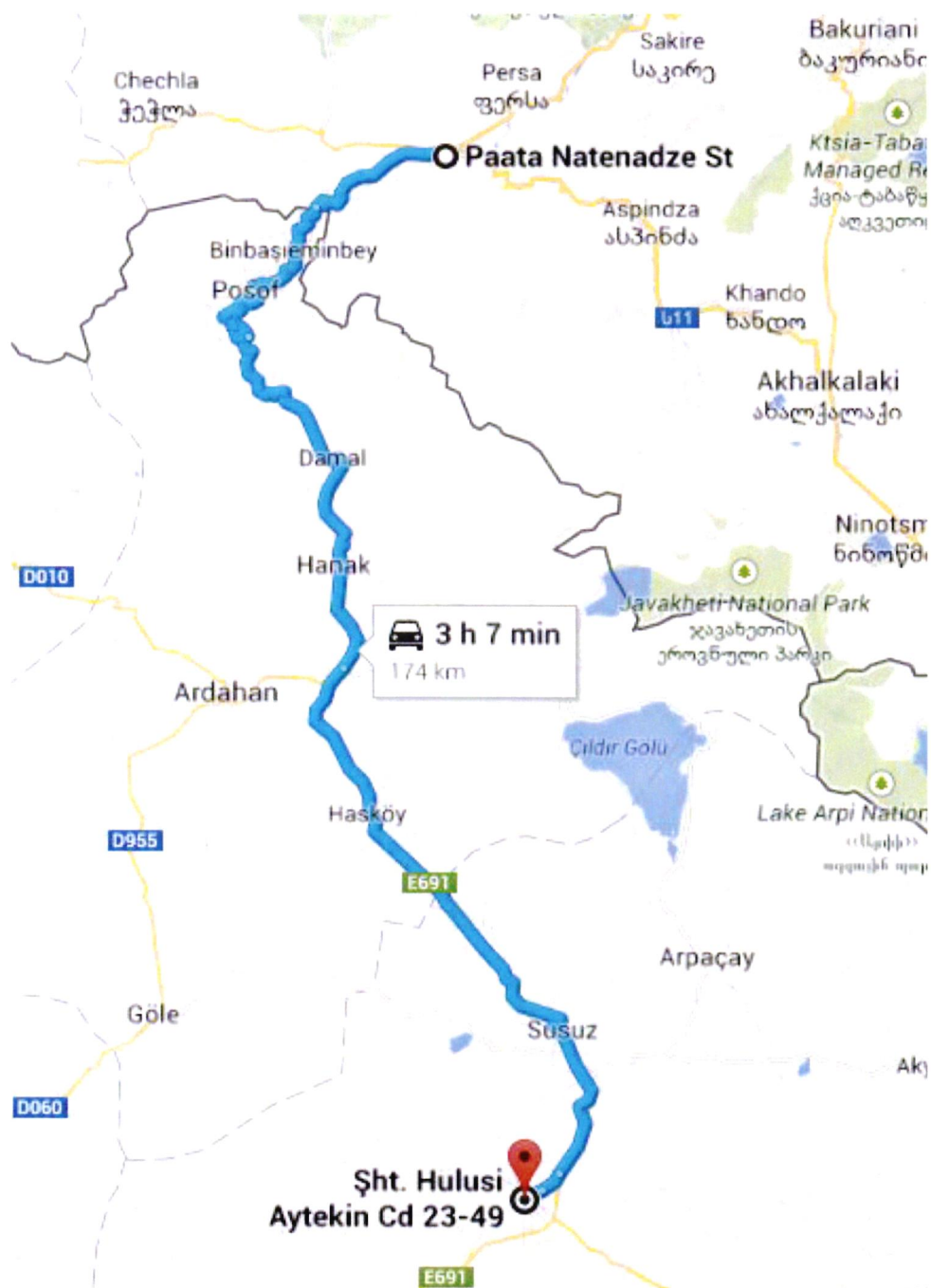
T +90 (474) 212 00 36

F +90 (474) 212 22 36

40°36'456"N

43°05'358"W





From the Black Sea to the Caspian Tour | June 18 - July 8, 2014

DAY 20 / July 07, 2014, Monday / Kars > Istanbul

Transfer to Kars Airport to catch the 11:00 AM flight to Ankara and then in Ankara the 2:00 PM flight to Istanbul. Farewell dinner in Istanbul.



Armada Hotel

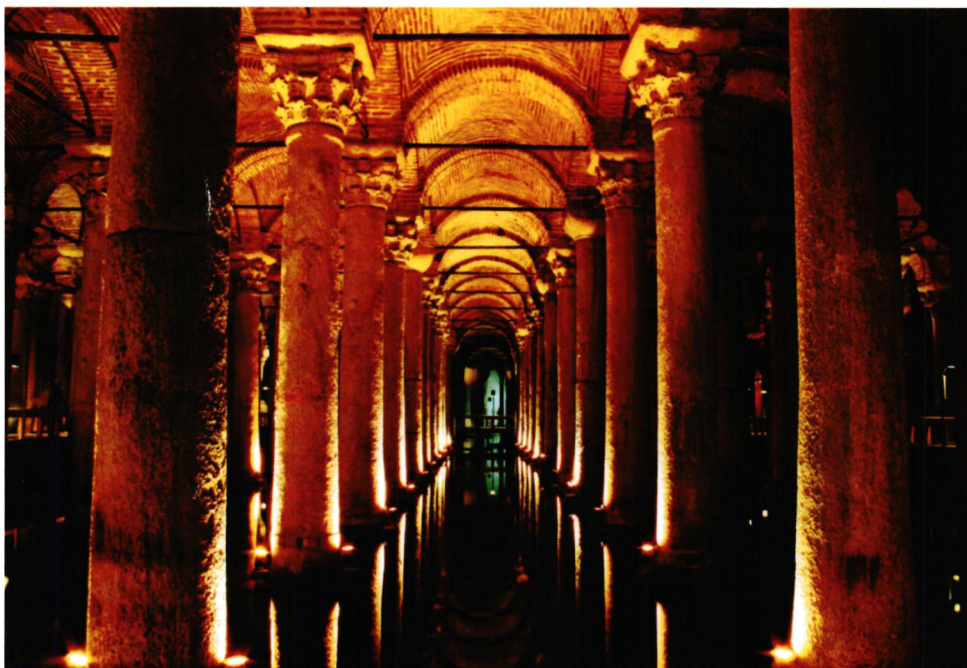
Sultanahmet, Ahırkapı Caddesi
No. 24 Fatih 34122 Istanbul

T +90 (212) 455-4455

F +90 (212) 455-4460

N41°0.242'

E28°58.910'



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F 379 45 15

After-hours emergencies

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from the U.S. 011 7 912 24 16653

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After-hours emergencies: (7) (4232) 71 00 67

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