
Trip Preparation for The Caucasus: Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan

VISA NOTES:

Armenia visa not required for US citizens. US Dept of State:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/armenia.html>

Armenia Consulate <http://www.armeniaemb.org/> 202-319-1976

Georgia does not require visas for US, Canadian, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, Israel nationals, most South American countries and EU members.

Georgia Travel Info http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1122.html
Embassy of Georgia Visa Information http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=96

Azerbaijan DOES require a visa.

AZERBAIJAN ELECTRONIC VISA

In February 2017, Azerbaijan began offering the E-visa. It is issued within three business days. Single entry is valid for 30 days. Be careful to write the dates of entry and exit correctly.

If you have any questions, click “contact us” on the below website. You can email them.

- Complete the visa application online: <https://evisa.gov.az/en/>
- Upload a scanned color copy of front page of your passport (passport must be valid for a min of 6 months after the return date from Azerbaijan and have at least 2 blank pages)
- Payment for visa \$20 + service fee \$3. Total cost \$23
- Your visa will be sent to your email address. You need to print it to show on arrival.

OPTION: OUR PARTNER WILL FACILITATE THE VISA APPLICATION FOR YOU

- Submit to us the following:
- Passport Copy, high resolution (color); jpg or pdf much appreciated. The copy must be the full page that includes the signature. *If you are unable to scan, please mail to us a very sharp, clear color copy.
- Passport photo jpg or pdf. *If you are unable to scan, please mail to us one passport photo.
- Your Occupation; if retired say retired + what it was previous to retirement.
- Price of the assisted e-visa is \$60; includes the service fee charged by the Azerbaijan agent, not by Original World. We will include this charge on your invoice and we will pay for the visa on your behalf.

Visa will be ready in 10-15 working days.

Application questions:

#20: The question about vehicle license if arriving by car: leave blank. Not applicable

#32: Status of inviting party: business

#33: The inviting party is:

Azerbaijan Luxury Travel
145 Nizami Street
Baku, Azerbaijan, AZ1000
+994 (12) 5116284

#34: Address in Azerbaijan:

Shah Palace Hotel, Baku
Boyuk Qala str. 47, Icheri - Sheher
Baku AZ 1000, Azerbaijan

General Information All Countries

Electricity: 220V 50Hz

Electric plug details: 2 parallel prongs with 2 round pin plugs. Typical Europe outlets.

Currency: Each country has its own currency and does not accept the others. You can use only national currency. You can easily exchange Euro or USD at exchange offices, banks, and airports. Each time just before getting to the border, the driver can stop so you can change any remaining currency back to dollars or euros and then swap that into the currency of the country you just entered.

Credit Cards: Credit cards are accepted in certain hotels, restaurants and shops in Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan. But in the countryside you need to have cash.

Tipping Suggestions: For people traveling in a small group, guide and driver \$10-15 per person per day. For two people traveling on a private tour, approximately \$100-150 total per country (\$20-25 for the guide per day & \$15-20 for the driver per day). Guides will accept both US dollars & local currency.

Average Cost of Meals: All meals are included on the group tours. For private tours: approximately \$15 – 20 for lunch per person per day and \$25-30 for dinner per person per day. Estimate includes soft drinks/water/coffee & tea. The most expensive country is Azerbaijan, followed by Georgia, then Armenia.

Lunches in family homes: Though gifts are not expected, if you wish to offer a small gift suggestions include: anything for children, pens/pencils; for the wife: simple jewelry ie bracelets, necklaces; for the house: kitchen accessories, refrigerator magnets, sweets.

Armenia

Time Zone: UTC/GMT +4 hours

Country Code: +374

Currency: The Armenian currency is known as the ‘‘dram’’, and the currency is abbreviated as AMD (Armenian Dram). The dram is accepted everywhere, and often the dollar will be accepted for larger purchases - though the dram is the only legal currency for commerce. Dollars, Euros and Rubles can be exchanged almost anywhere in the country, with other major currencies also easy to exchange. Exchange booths do not charge a commission and rates are almost always quite competitive.

ATMs (Bankomats) are widely available in larger towns. Credit cards are not widely accepted yet.

Exchange rates (as of November 2018): US\$1 = 487 dram

Mobile phone providers

There are three GSM service providers operating in Armenia. It is recommended to acquire a temporary prepaid SIM card, allowing both local and international calls, no charge for incoming calls. Mobile internet and UTMS are also offered from all companies, as well as the normal full range of wireless services. **Viva Cell and Orange have booths offering free SIM-Cards to incoming visitors at the airport.** They are also easiest to add minutes to (at pretty much any store or kiosk in the country) and have better English services, rates and coverage. Majority of foreign visitors find their unlocked mobile phones compatible with Armenian SIM cards (GSM 900/1800). GSM coverage maps of Armenia.

Shop hours: Most shops/restaurants are open every day and offices and schools are open Monday to Saturday. Mornings are usually slow, and places don't tend to open early, or even on time. Tax Included in prices (except sometimes hotels).

Purchasing customs: Bargaining is uncommon in Armenian stores, though when purchasing expensive items or bulk, they may be amenable to it. In markets, however, bargaining is a must!

Tipping is increasingly common in Armenia, especially at cafes and restaurants. Many Armenians will simply round up their checks, or leave ten percent. Many restaurants have begun to charge a ten percent "service fee" which they usually do not share with the waiters, and it is not clear for what it is used. This fee is often not clearly stated on the menu, so you should ask if you want to know. Tipping is usually not expected in taxis, but again, rounding up is not uncommon.

Markets: Vernissage - every Saturday near Republic Square, there is an open market with great shopping for tourists and locals alike. You can buy everything from a 300-year-old carpet to a 1970s Soviet phone to Russian nesting dolls.

The "covered market" on Mashtots Street has fresh fruits and vegetables along with great dried fruits. For Armenian- and Russian-speaking visitors, a visit to the underground book market can be quite interesting. Located in an underground passageway under Abovyan Street, close to the medical school and the Yeritasardakan Metro Station, vendors sell thousands upon thousands of books. Bargaining is a must!

Food: Khorovats (BBQ) can be pork, lamb, chicken or beef. Usually, it is flavored with onions and other Armenian spices. Tomatoes, eggplant and bell peppers are also part of the khorovats meal. Borscht is a vegetable soup. It is traditionally made with beetroot as a main ingredient, which gives it a strong red color. It is usually served warm with fresh sour cream.

Khash is a traditional dish, originating in the Shirak region. Formerly a nutritious winter food for the rural poor, it is now considered a delicacy, and is enjoyed as a festive winter meal. Dolma (stuffed grape leaves; a variety with stuffed cabbage leaves, bell peppers and eggplants) also exists. Armenian fruits and vegetables are special. One should definitely try them and will never forget the taste of Armenian apricot, peach, grapes, pomegranate, etc.

Armenian bread is very tasty as well. There is a wide range of different types of bread, starting from black and white till lavash (a soft, thin flatbread) and matnaqash.

Don't miss trying milk products! Along with ordinary milk products, there are some traditional and really tasty and refreshing ones. Matsun (yogurt) is a traditional Armenian dairy product that has centuries of history. It contains a number of natural microelements, which have high biochemical activity. It's really refreshing, especially when you try it cold during hot summers. Okroshka - cold soup with kefir and cucumber and dill; it is a healthy and refreshing dairy product. Spas is a really tasty hot kefir soup with grains in it.

Café culture rules in Armenia, and the best places to have a cup of coffee and people-watch are sidewalk cafés. Any place near the Opera is certain to be jumping late into the summer nights. A popular chain is "Jazzve" (several locations throughout the city, including near the Opera and off Mesrop Mashtots Avenue), which offers many varieties of tea and coffee as well as great desserts.

Drinks-Alcoholic: Vodka, tutti oghi (mulberry vodka), honi oghi (cornelian cherry vodka), Tsirani oghi (apricot vodka), local beer (Kilikia, Kotayk, Gumri), wine (can also be made of pomegranate), and brandy. Other: Tan (yogurt combined with water and salt), Jermuk (mineral water), masuri hyut (rose hip juice), chichkhani hyut (sea buckthorne juice), bali hyut (sour cherry juice), Armenian coffee, and herbal teas.

Social Etiquette: Armenians are much like any other Europeans in their manners and lifestyle. Avoid discussing Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, because due to the frozen but still ongoing very bitter conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, it is an extremely sensitive subject.

The issue of the Armenian Genocide, in which the Armenian people and a majority of Western scholars believe up to one and a half million Armenians were killed by the Young Turk government during World War One, is a sensitive one, and respect should be shown when discussing the subject. Although widely taught at school for years, the Soviet Union officially recognized the genocide of the people of one of its republics in 1965. One can find out more about the Armenian Genocide by visiting the Genocide Memorial Tzitzernakabert. There is also a museum near the memorial.

Having been liberated by the then-Russian Empire in 1916, Armenians are partly Slavophiles; ask as many questions as you like about soccer and Soviet TV programs. Respect is generally shown for Slavs, including Russians. People often have no problem talking about the Soviet Union. Most Armenians do not mind if you speak to them in Russian even if it is their second language.

It is very common to give up your seat for an elderly passenger on the public transport. Usually, men will give up their seat to woman too. It is also considered polite to let women enter the bus or train or a room first. The "ladies first" rule is considered important.

When visiting churches, both men and women are expected to dress modestly (i.e. no shorts, miniskirts, sleeveless shirts/tops etc.). Lighting a candle is always a nice gesture, but it is optional. You should always talk quietly when you are visiting a church.

Georgia

Time Zone: UTC/GMT +4 hours

Country Code: +995

Climate: In West Georgia the dominant subtropical climate features high humidity and heavy precipitation, while East Georgia has a more continental and drier climate. The alpine zone begins at about 2,100 metres; above 3,600 metres snow and ice are present year-round. The average summer temperatures range from 20°C to 24°C, average winter temperatures range from 2°C to 4°C.

Weather: Spring and Fall bring pleasant, mild temperatures, approximately 68-72 F, mostly sunny.

Currency: the Lari, with an exchange rate of approximately 2.68 to the US\$1 (as of November 2018) Exchange either at the airport or there are many exchange shops in Tbilisi.

ATMs (Bankomats) are widely available in larger towns.

Mobile Phones: SIM card and roaming are available.

Internet: WI FI is available in most of hotels and in some restaurants.

Language: Georgian (state), most people also speak Russian

Religion: Georgian Orthodox (main), Catholic, Muslim, Armenian Gregorian, Jewish

Museums: Opening hours 11:00 – 16:00 (closed on Monday)

Banks: Opening hours 10:00 – 16:30 (10:00 – 14:00 on Saturday)

Shops: Open daily 10:00 – 18:00

Restaurants: Open daily 11:00 – till midnight

Laundry: The hotels in Georgia charge a fortune for just a few pieces of laundry (\$60-70).

People: the Georgians are an extremely friendly and hospitable people.

Azerbaijan

Time Zone: UTC/GMT +5 hours

Country Code: +994

Geography: Azerbaijan is bordered by the Russian Federation, Georgia, Iran and Armenia. Much of Southwestern Azerbaijan in the ethnically Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh is occupied by Armenian forces following the Armenia-Azerbaijan war (1988-1994). Azerbaijan also includes the exclave of Nakhchivan, which is located between Turkey, Iran and Armenia.

Climate: Generally very warm, but low temperatures can occur, particularly in the mountains and valleys. Most of the rainfall is in the west.

Currency: Azeri New Manat (AZN)= 100 gopik. Notes are in denominations of 100, 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 AZN. Coins are in denominations of 50, 20, 10, 5, 3 and 1 gopik.

Exchange rate as of December 2016: US\$1 = AZN \$1.75

Currency restriction: The import and export of local currency for non-residents is prohibited. The import of foreign currency is unlimited but must be declared upon arrival. The export of foreign currency is limited to US\$10,000 or equivalent.

Currency exchange: US Dollars, Pounds Sterling and Euros are the preferred currencies and can be exchanged at the airport, bureaux de change, all hotels, some restaurants and major banks. However, many local hotels, bureaux de change and restaurants will not accept dollar bills dated before 1992 or those that are torn or in any way disfigured. Travelers are advised to take banknotes in small denominations and change small amounts of money as required. Rates offered by banks and bureaux de change are unlikely to vary significantly. **Banking hours:** Mon-Fri 0930-1730.

ATMs (Bankomats) are widely available in larger towns.

Telephone: International calls from Azerbaijan may be dialed directly from Baku and some other towns throughout the country.

Mobile phone: Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies. Coverage is mostly limited to the capital and main towns and is non-existent in many mountain areas.

Internet: Available in all cities and towns.

Food: Azerbaijani food combines Turkish and Central Asian elements. Baku has an excellent selection of Western style restaurants. In the *chaikhanas* (tea houses), men linger for hours drinking sweet black tea out of tiny glasses and playing *nard* (backgammon). A special place in the cuisine belongs to lamb kebabs of which there are many different varieties. Salads are served together with main course. Although the majority of Azeris are Shia Muslims, alcohol is widely available.

Specialities:

- *Lyulya kebab* (spiced, minced lamb pressed onto skewers).
- *Dogramama* (a milky potato, cucumber and onion soup served cold).
- *Piti* is (a mutton and chickpea soup).
- *Kutab* (pancakes stuffed with spinach, herbs or pumpkin).
- *Badimjan Dolmasi* (mutton served with aubergine, tomatoes, basil and sour cream).

Regional drinks:

Wines and brandies are produced locally.

Sherbets are popular soft drinks made of sugar, lemon, saffron, seeds of mint and basil.

Tea served accompanied by various jams such as quince, fig, apricot, white cherry and plum. Sometimes dried leaves or flowers of savory, clove, cardamom and other spices are added to tea.

Tea with *darchin* (cinnamon), ginger and, occasionally, rosewater

Religion: Mostly Shia Muslim although there are Russian Orthodox and Jewish communities.

Language: Azeri. Russian is widely spoken; English may be spoken in Baku and other main centres.

Social Etiquette: Foreign women should dress modestly. Both men and women should avoid wearing shorts, as this will attract unwelcome attention. While historically Azerbaijan is Muslim in population, currently, it is mostly a secular society that views religion as a private matter. Handshaking is the normal form of greeting.