Caucasus Adventure: Caspian to the Black Sea | Caucasus

Overview

Embark on a captivating 15-day journey through the **South Caucasus**, exploring the rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and Soviet-era history of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.

Beginning in the dynamic capital of **Baku**, capital of **Azerbaijan**, we'll discover modern architectural wonders, ancient fortresses, and **Zoroastrian Fire Temples** before journeying through the scenic countryside to **Sheki** and **Qakh**.

Cross into **Georgia** to sample Kakheti wine country, marvel at historic churches and cathedrals, and delve into **Tbilisi**'s vibrant streets and Soviet landmarks. Continue west to the lush forests and mineral springs of **Borjomi**, the seaside charm of **Batumi**, and the spiritual calm of **Gelati Monastery**.

In **Armenia**, visit ancient monasteries perched above dramatic gorges, enjoy warm hospitality at local homes, and walk in the footsteps of history in **Yerevan**, from the pagan **Garni Temple** to Soviet observatories and bustling bazaars.

With comfortable accommodation, daily cultural highlights, and a mix of guided exploration and free time, this tour offers an unforgettable insight into the heart of the Caucasus.

ABSOLUTENOMADS
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Itinerary Overview

A brief overview of our **two-week** adventure into the **Caucasus**. For more details, continue reading below for a day-by-day breakdown of the itinerary.

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Day 1 | Arrival in Baku

Today we begin our adventure, meeting before lunch, we'll have a **Pre-Tour Briefing** before trying some local cuisine in the heart of the Azerbaijani capital, **Baku**.

Baku has an amazing history. Situated on the banks of the Caspian, this city is instrumental in the global oil industry, producing, at one time, nearly half the world's oil. For this reason, during the Soviet era, Baku took the moniker '**The Black City'**

Due to its oil wealth, Baku was able to grow beyond its ancient heritage and today is a city of two halves, the old and the new. Each side sits at a real juxtaposition to the other.

After a hearty local lunch we will head out into **Baku's contemporary district** in search of the extravagant and modern side of this historical capital.

Our first stop will be the **3-Pointed Skyscrapers (a.k.a the Flame Towers of Baku)** built by Azerbaijan's ruling Aliyev Family. The buildings represent flames, linked to Azerbaijan's nickname **'The Land of Fire'** due to the natural gas that has traditionally flared from the ground.

We will also take in the contemporary landmark **Heydar Aliyev Centre**, designed by Zaha Hadid and famed for its distinctive architecture incorporating a flowing, curved style that abstains from sharp angles.

This evening is free to allow for further exploration of the modern heart of Azerbaijan, or join your tour leader for a first meal in one of the delicious restaurants located throughout the city.

Accommodation: Hotel in Baku

Included Meals: Lunch

Day 2 | Old Baku & Zoroastrian Fire Temples

Today we'll begin our journey with a trip back in time to **Baku's Old City (Icherisheher).** We'll enter through the famed **Paired Fortress Gates** known by some as the **'Shamaxi Gate'.**

Our trip into the old city will begin with a visit to the imposing **Maiden Tower**, one of the most distinctive landmarks in the city dating back to the 12th century and stands at 28-metres tall; interestingly, standing at the top of the tower you'll find yourself at sea-level! The tower is home to a museum dedicated to the ever-changing history of Baku.

From towers to palaces, we'll head to the **Palace of the Shirvanshahs**. This 15th century marvel is considered the **Pearl of Azerbaijan's Architecture**. Inside the complex, we'll visit the residence, the burial-vaults, the Shah's mosque with a minaret and the Seyid Yahya Bakuvi Mausoleum (the so-called "mausoleum of the dervish").

After we've finished our palace exploration, we'll head to the **Juhud Zeynallilar (Jewish Quarter)**. This district was built early in the 19th century with the Mountain Jewish, Kurdish, Georgian, Ashkenazi, and even Chassidic communities adding their own touches to the area.

We'll visit the **Rashid Behbudov State Song Theatre** which housed the **first synagogue in Baku**. Today it is home to a theatre staging a variety of national musical concerts and performances.

After some free time for lunch, we'll regroup for the drive out to the **Ateshgah Fire Temple**. This ancient fire temple was once a significant site for **Zoroastrian and Hindu Fire Worshippers**, attracting both local and foreign believers.

As the afternoon darkens and makes way for evening, we'll make our final stop at the **Fire Mountain Yanar Dag**. Azerbaijan's history is greatly related to fire, and Yanar Dag is a symbol of this ancient union. In centuries past, the natural gas vents that caused these fires were seen as sacred by the followers of Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions and understandably one that evolved from this region.

Accommodation: Hotel in Baku

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 3 | Samaxi & Sheki

This morning we'll bid farewell to Baku and head in to the Caucasus region.

Making our drive inland, our first place to stop today is **Samaxi**, home to the **Juma Mosque of Shamakhi** and the second biggest in the transcaspian region.

The Juma Mosque has been through many reconstructions and repairs over the centuries as its been damaged by successive earthquakes and battles. We'll also enjoy a local lunch in this city before heading out on the road again to the **City of Sheki** located in the northwestern reaches of Azerbaijan this beautiful settlement is home to the stunning **Palace of the Sheki Khans**.

Along the way, we will pass through lush forests, charming villages, and historic caravan routes once part of the **Great Silk Road**.

The **Palace of Shaki Khans**, as the name suggests, was the residence of the Shaki Khanate, a Khanate that existed from 1743 -1822 and ruled the town of Shakia and the surrounding area.

The palace is a **UNESCO-listed Heritage Site** built without the use of a single nail. It's home to some exquisite wooden and stained-glass windows, captivating painted ceilings, and a fascinating roof built in the design of a Persian carpet. It's said by many the lavish blend of **Azerbaijani, Persian, and Ottoman styles** is some of the best in the world.

Following our visit, we'll head to the hotel for some well-deserved rest and a delicious evening meal.

Accommodation: Hotel in Sheki

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4 | Sheki Fortress & Local Villages

After another hearty breakfast we'll leave the hotel and begin our day with a visit to the **Sheki Fortress**, an 18th-century stronghold that once protected the city from invaders. We will walk along its ancient stone walls, which offer stunning views of the surrounding area.

After our historic morning, we'll visit a local artisan whose family have been working to produce **Azerbaijani Shebeke (stained glass)** for generations. Not only will you have the chance to see how these stunning stain glassed decorations are produced but everyone will have the chance to make their own.

After stopping at a **local family to experience true Azerbaijani hospitality** over a traditional lunch, it's time to say goodbye to another city as we make our way onwards into the surrounding countryside.

We'll drive to the small village of **Qakh** stopping to visit the **Kurmukhi Church** located on the outskirts of the village. This Georgian-style church offers beautiful views over the surrounding rolling green hills.

Later we'll head to the village of **Gakh**, a hidden gem in Azerbaijan complete with breathtaking forests, waterfalls, and historic churches.

Our accommodation tonight offers us the chance for some optional pampering with an **en-suite spa, swimming pool and sauna**.

Accommodation: Hotel in Gakh

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5 | Cross into Georgia

Today we set off early as we bid farewell to Azerbaijan and cross the border into **Georgia**—our second country on this South Caucasus journey. Often described as the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia offers dramatic landscapes, ancient monasteries, and a proud cultural heritage.

Crossing the **Balakan River** via the **Lagodekhi** customs post, we'll officially enter the **Kakheti Region**, known as the heart of Georgian wine country. Our destination is the charming town of **Telavi**, first mentioned as early as the 2nd century AD and famous today for its historic landmarks and the warmth of its people.

Before reaching Telavi, we'll stop at the peaceful hilltop **Nekresi Monastery**.

Surrounded by dense woodlands and overlooking the Alazani Valley, this complex is one of the most significant examples of early and medieval Georgian ecclesiastical architecture. Once a thriving religious and cultural centre, the monastery played a major role in the spread of Christianity throughout the region.

Continuing on, we'll visit the impressive **Gremi Church of the Archangels and Royal Tower Complex**. Sitting high above the village of Gremi, this hilltop fortress served as the capital of the **Kingdom of Kakheti in the 16th century**. With its well-preserved battlements, medieval church, and hidden passageways, it offers visitors a glimpse into the grandeur of Georgia's royal past.

This evening, we'll enjoy a **traditional Georgian dinner** hosted by a local family in Telavi—our first taste of Georgia's legendary hospitality!

Accommodation: Hotel in Telavi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6 | Tbilisi: Capital of Georgia

This morning, we'll begin with a stroll through the **lively farmer's market** in Telavi. This is a great chance to take in the everyday life of the region and perhaps sample some of the local produce. Before leaving, we'll also stop by the town's **iconic farmer's statue**, dedicated to the local agricultural industry.

We'll then head west, through the scenic Georgian countryside, as we make our way to the nation's capital, **Tbilisi**.

On arrival, we'll begin an in-depth city tour of the **Old Town**, winding through cobbled streets, leafy courtyards, and atmospheric alleyways.

Our first stop is the magnificent **Holy Trinity Cathedral** one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world. From there, we'll make our way to the **Narikala Fortress**, a 4th-century citadel that offers panoramic views over the old town and Mtkvari River.

Continuing our city tour, we'll visit the **Anchiskhati Basilica**—the oldest surviving church in Tbilisi—followed by the charming **Sharden Street** area, a bustling cultural hub filled with cafés, galleries, and shops; a chance to mix with local people going about their day. From here, we'll hop on the **Tbilisi Funicular** for a scenic ride up **Mtatsminda Park**, offering some of the best views of the capital.

Our final visit is to the **Tbilisi Museum of Modern Art**, showcasing an intriguing mix of local and international contemporary works.

This evening is free to enjoy dinner at one of Tbilisi's many restaurants or to explore the city at your own pace.

Accommodation: Hotel in Tbilisi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 7 | Discover the Ananuri Fortress

Today we leave the Georgian capital behind and head north into the mountains as we begin our journey along the **Georgian Military Highway**—one of the most scenic routes in the entire Caucasus.

Our first stop is the magnificent **Ananuri Fortress**, an impressive 17th-century complex perched on the banks of the **Aragvi River**. Once home to the powerful Aragvi feudal dynasty, the fortress is a blend of medieval military architecture and more traditional religious design. We'll explore its towers, churches, and fortified walls, all while taking in sweeping views of the **Zhinvali Reservoir** below.

From Ananuri, we'll continue our drive through the Caucasus Mountains to the iconic **Georgia-Russia Friendship Monument**. Built in 1983, this enormous semi-circular structure was constructed to celebrate the bicentennial of the **Treaty of Georgievsk**.

Covered in colorful Soviet-era mosaics and set against a dramatic mountain backdrop, it's both a historical monument and an outstanding photo opportunity.

After taking time to soak in the views, we return to Tbilisi in the late afternoon for a relaxing evening in the city.

Accommodation: Hotel in Tbilisi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 8 | Soviet City Tour of Tbilisi

This morning we'll dive into a different side of **Tbilisi** as we explore the city's **Soviet-era legacy.** Georgia played a central role in the USSR, as the **Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic** and remains one of the best places to see striking examples of Soviet modernism.

We'll begin at the **Archaeological Museum** before heading to some of Tbilisi's most iconic Soviet buildings—including the gravity-defying former **Ministry of Highways** building, the dramatic **Auditorium of the Industrial Technology College**, and the **Palace of Ceremonies and Rituals**.

These unique structures offer an insight into the Soviet period in Georgia, along with a glimpse at the architectural style which made the USSR so distinctive.

We'll also visit the **Tbilisi Housing Complex**, a bold example of socialist-era urban planning, and finish our tour at **Stalin's underground printing museum**—a secretive site once used to produce revolutionary materials, set up by Stalin himself!

This afternoon, we'll hit the road for a 90-minute drive to **Gori**, the birthplace of **Joseph Stalin**. We'll visit the **Gori Fortress** and the **Stalin Museum Complex**, including his preserved childhood home and the personal railway carriage he used during his time as Soviet leader.

After exploring Gori, we continue on to the spa town of **Borjomi**, nestled in the forested hills of central Georgia.

We'll arrive in time for a late dinner and a well-earned rest.

Accommodation: Hotel in Borjomi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9 | Monasteries & the Black Sea

This morning begins with a walk through **Borjomi Central Park**, the heart of Georgia's famous spa town.

Known for its mineral-rich waters, **Borjomi** has been a destination for healing and relaxation since Tsarist times. We'll visit the original spring to sample the naturally carbonated water straight from the source, believed by many to hold many great health benefits.

From here, we'll continue west through the **Lesser Caucasus**, arriving in the historic city of **Kutaisi**, one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in Europe. Our main stop is the **Gelati Monastery**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and once one of Georgia's great spiritual and intellectual centres.

Founded in the 12th century by **King David the Builder,** the monastery's architecture is also remarkable, featuring intricate stone carvings, frescoes, and mosaics that showcase the artistic achievements of the **Georgian Golden Age**.

After lunch, we press on toward the Black Sea coast, arriving in the port city of Batumi by early evening. A striking contrast to the rest of the Caucasus, Batumi blends modern high-rises with old-world charm and offers a subtropical setting unlike anywhere else on the trip.

We'll enjoy a seaside dinner and settle into our hotel overlooking the sea—ready to explore more of Batumi tomorrow.

Accommodation: Hotel in Batumi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10 | Explore Batumi

This morning, we'll take our time to explore **Batumi**—Georgia's vibrant Black Sea resort city.

Known for its unique mix of old and new, Batumi blends **Belle Époque Architecture** with bold modern design, giving it a distinct coastal charm unlike anywhere else in the region.

We'll begin with a walk along **Batumi Boulevard**, a palm-lined promenade stretching beside the sea. Along the way, we'll see striking landmarks such as the **Alphabet Tower**, symbolising the Georgian script, and the **Statue of Medea**, a nod to the region's ancient mythological connections. We'll also wander through **Old Batumi**, where narrow cobbled streets are flanked by colourful 19th-century buildings, cafes, and small shops that reflect the city's multicultural past.

After lunch, the afternoon is yours to enjoy at your leisure. You may choose to relax by the beach, explore the local markets, or visit one of Batumi's museums or botanical gardens.

In the late afternoon, we'll transfer to the train station for our return journey to **Tbilisi**.

The scenic rail route takes us through the mountains and valleys of western Georgia, arriving back in the capital in time for a free evening to find dinner at one of the capital's many wonderful restaurants.

Accommodation: Hotel in Tbilisi

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 11 | Cross into Armenia

Today we bid farewell to Georgia and continue our adventure as we cross into the third and final country of our journey—**Armenia**.

After breakfast, we'll drive south toward the **Sadakhlo Border Crossing**, where we'll meet our Armenian guide and complete formalities before entering this ancient land of highland monasteries and rugged beauty.

Our first destination is **Haghpat Monastery**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** dating back to the 10th century.

This medieval monastic complex is one of Armenia's architectural masterpieces, built during the height of the **Bagratid Kingdom**. Set atop a verdant hill overlooking the **Debed Gorge**, Haghpat combines serene spiritual ambiance with intricate stone carvings and centuries of history. Uniquely, its floor contains holes that were once used to cool and store wine—an echo of Armenia's ancient viniculture.

Following a local lunch, we continue through the **Tavush region** to **Lake Sevan**, known as the "**Jewel of Armenia**." Sitting at an altitude of nearly 2,000 metres, it's one of the world's largest high-altitude freshwater lakes. We'll visit **Sevanavank Monastery**, perched on a rocky peninsula with panoramic views across the lake's vivid blue waters and the surrounding mountains.

Tonight, we'll settle into our lakeside hotel for a peaceful evening on the shores of Lake Sevan.

Accommodation: Hotel in Sevan

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 12 | The Geghard Monastery

This morning we'll depart **Lake Sevan** and make our way toward some of Armenia's most iconic historic sites.

Our first stop is the awe-inspiring **Geghard Monastery**, another **UNESCO World Heritage Site** partially carved into the rock face of the Azat River Gorge. Also known as **Ayrivank ("Monastery of the Cave")**, this sacred site dates back to the 4th century and is famed for its acoustics, stunning rock-hewn chapels, and the healing spring said to cure ailments. With its mystical atmosphere and mountain backdrop, Geghard is one of Armenia's true spiritual treasures.

On the way to our next site, we'll pause to see the **Symphony of Stones**—a striking natural formation of vertical basalt columns lining the gorge, resembling a giant pipe organ carved by nature.

From there, we continue to **Garni Temple**, the only standing **Greco-Roman colonnaded building** in the former Soviet Union. Built in the 1st century AD and dedicated to the sun god Mihr, Garni is a rare example of Armenia's pre-Christian heritage. With its classical design and stunning mountain views, it remains one of the country's most photographed landmarks – so we'll be sure to stop for photos!

In the afternoon, we'll arrive into **Yerevan**, Armenia's vibrant capital.

Before our day is over, we'll pay a visit to the Ararat Brandy Factory to learn how traditional Armenian Brandy is made (and maybe even try some ourselves!).

Accommodation: Hotel in Yerevan

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13 | Yerevan City Tour

Today we'll set out to explore **Yerevan**, one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world and Armenia's bustling, cultural heart.

Our day begins with a city tour, taking in the highlights of this vibrant capital. We'll start at **Republic Square**, the city's central hub, known for its pink tuff stone buildings and musical fountains.

From there, we ascend the **Cascade Monument**, a massive stairway adorned with contemporary sculptures and fountains. At the summit, you'll be rewarded with sweeping views of the city and, on a clear day, the majestic silhouette of **Mount Ararat** rising in the distance.

After soaking in the cityscape, we continue to **Ejmiatsin**—the spiritual centre of the **Armenian Apostolic Church** and often referred to as the "**Vatican of Armenia**."

We'll visit the **Ejmiatsin Cathedral**, believed to be the world's oldest cathedral, built in the early 4th century. According to legend, the site was divinely revealed to **Saint Gregory the Illuminator** in a vision.

On our return to Yerevan, we'll stop at the **Zvartnots Cathedral** ruins, a magnificent 7th-century structure once considered one of the finest examples of Armenian ecclesiastical architecture. Today, the UNESCO-listed site offers striking views and fascinating archaeological insight.

This evening, relax back in Yerevan or explore the city's cafés, galleries, or local markets, or enjoy an optional visit to the **Mordechai Navi Synagogue**.

Accommodation: Hotel in Yerevan

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 14 | Soviet History of Armenia

Today we'll shift focus away from the medieval cathedrals to Armenia's more recent past with a deep dive into its **Soviet-era heritage**—a fascinating and often overlooked chapter in the country's history.

We begin with a visit to **Lernamerdz**, home to one of the few remaining **Lenin statues** still standing in Armenia. Once commonplace throughout the Soviet Union, most Lenin monuments were removed following independence, making this a rare and striking remnant of the USSR.

From there, we'll continue into the mountains to explore the **Orgov Radio-Optical Telescope**, a Cold War-era scientific installation hidden in the mountains. Built in the 1980s, this enormous and futuristic observatory once served cutting-edge research purposes and remains one of the largest of its kind.

We have special permission to head inside this marvel of Soviet ambition and explore what remains of the scientific legacy of the USSR.

Returning to Yerevan in the afternoon, we'll explore two of the city's most atmospheric markets. First, the **GUM Shuka**, a Soviet-style covered market where stalls are piled high with dried fruits, spices, cheeses, and cured meats—perfect for those looking to soak up a taste of local life. Then, we'll browse the **Vernissage Market**, Yerevan's famous open-air bazaar, where you'll find everything from Soviet memorabilia to handcrafted Armenian souvenirs.

Tonight, we gather for our final group dinner in Armenia—reflecting on our journey through the Caucasus, recounting stories and memories from our two-week adventure and sharing photos of our exploits!

Accommodation: Hotel in Yerevan

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 15 | Departure Day

We hope you'll leave the region with a head filled with happy memories and a phone full of amazing photos!

Airport transfers are available for your connecting flight out of Armenia. Alternatively, we can arrange additional hotel bookings for those looking to stay a bit longer, and even organise extensions for those intrepid travellers keen to venture further into the region.

Included Meals: Breakfast

END OF TOUR