

LORI marz
Լոռի մարզ

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[INTRODUCTION](#) (p. 1)

[NATURE](#) (p. 1)

[DO](#) (p. 2)

[WHEN?](#) (p. 2)

[HISTORY](#) (p. 2)

[Prehistoric Age](#)

[Copper and Bronze Ages](#)

[Mythology](#)

[Uratian, Roman eras](#)

[Early Christian Era – Middle Ages](#)

[The Georgian Kingdom](#)

[19th Century](#)

[First Republic](#)

[The Soviet Period](#)

[Earthquake and Second Republic](#)

[Lori Now](#)

[IN AND OUT](#) (p. 5)

[OVERNIGHT / EAT](#) (p. 6)

[DESTINATIONS](#) (p. 6)

[NATURE TOURING](#) (p. 6)

[Nature/Adventure Tour Operators](#)

[Archeological Tour Operators](#)

[VANADZOR](#) (p. 8)

[MAP](#)

[NEAR VANADZOR](#) (p. 17)

[EXPLORING THE REGION](#)

[TRIP 1: NORTHEAST: ODZUN](#) (p. 18)

- [Alaverdi](#) (p. 27)

[TRIP 2: SANAHIN - HAGHPAT](#) (p. 30)

[TRIP 3: WEST: LORI BERD](#) (p. 40)

- [Stepanavan](#) (p. 43)

[TRIP 4: NORTHWEST](#) (p. 49)

- [Tashir](#) (p. 51)

[TRIP 5: SOUTHWEST](#) (p. 53)

- [Spitak](#) (p. 53)

[TRIP 6: SOUTHEAST: FIOLETOVO](#) (p. 57)

[TRIP 7: FROM GEORGIA](#) (p. 59)

[RESOURCES](#) (p. 61)

[MAPS](#)

[Lori Map](#) (p. 63)

[Vanadzor Map](#) (p. 13)

[Alaverdi Map](#) (p. 27)

[Stepanavan Map](#) (p. 46)

[Spitak Map](#) (p. 54)

Note about pronunciation: I transcribe words using the local dialect and my tin ears, and substitute "i" for "y" as in Dzoragiugh for Dzoragyugh. "p." stands for poghots (street), 'pts.' For poghotsner (streets), 'pta.' For poghota (avenue).

Note: GPS coordinates are in decimal degrees (DD) Latitude x Longitude. Elevation (elev.) is in meters. Population counts (pop.) are estimates for 7 km radius from place and due to ongoing migrations the numbers are not exact.

INTRODUCTION

Lori is one of Armenia's most enchanting regions, second perhaps (*perhaps*) only to Siunik for its stunning landscapes and rugged forests. Lori is also home to some of Armenia's most beautiful locations, set into the country's remaining old-growth forests and wilderness areas. The region is host to two World Heritage Sites: the Monasteries of Haghpata and Sanahin, plus numerous other monasteries and churches along the Dzoraget, Pambak and Debed River gorges, forest complexes unlike any other in the country.

The region is first and foremost a place of forests, in the North and East covering mountains of Lejan, Lalvar, Shogiol and Chatin, with their plunging valleys and sheer cliffs on the Debed, Pambak and Dzoraget Rivers. In the west the mountains are a contrast of rock and tree, its meadows hosting wild flowers, farms and the only known habitat for the Armenian water lily. In the south, the mountains are a little higher, nearer to Mt. Aragats, the winters harsher. In the North the forests and valleys cradle a unique environment that, while higher in altitude than Yerevan, is milder and more pleasant.

The ancient history of Lori may be as old as Ararat, the forests and rivers supporting humans from the stone Age. Settlements have been dated to around 7000 BCE, though the dating is from the

Highlights

- *Visit Lori's World Heritage Sites, the monasteries at Sanahin (on page 23) and Haghpata (on page 25)*
- *Visit the amazing Dendro Park at Giulagarak, Armenia's only European tree preserve (on page 30)*
- *Explore the 10th-14th cc Tashir-Dzoraget Kingdom at Lori Berd (on page 35) and the triple vanks at Hobardzi, Vardablur & Kurtan (on page 31)*
- *Hike the Dzoraget River to Hnevank (on page 14)*
- *Hike to the gorgeous Kobaiyr monastery, with rare frescoes and gorgeous views of The Debed valley (on page 18)*
- *See the pagan monument at Odzun's Katoghike, then stay at a guest house and sample Odzun's famous thyme khashlama (on page 19)*
- *Stop by the Stone Age workshops at Chakhmakhar (on page 39), Bronze Age sites at Vanadzor (on page 8), Lori Berd (on page 35), Vardablur (on page 31) and Margahovit (on page 43)*
- *Cross the Gaili Dur Pass via Georgia to the remote forests and magnificent monasteries at Jiliza (on page 37)*
- *Hike the mountain plains of Mts. Achkasar, Ampasar and Gogasar, and the forests of Mts. Chatin, Arji Glukh, Airisar and Bovakar (on page 5)*
- *Stop at the Greek village of Yaghdan (on page 36) and Jiliza (on page 37), sample their dolma, lavash and incredible matsun (yogurt)*
- *Visit the Russian villages of Blagodarnoye (on page 40), Lermontovo (on page 43) and Fioletevo (on page 43), homes to Armenia's dwindling Molokon population (on page 42)*
- *Explore the forested frontier at Gogovan (on page 39)*

Soviet period when nothing could be older than Russia. The forests and rivers supported a type of culture and design unlike others in the country, and traditional wooden homes are as ubiquitous as stone structures, esp. in the north. The Bronze Age was especially evolved, the findings especially rich at places like Lori Berd and Vanadzor.

The medieval history of the region was shaped by the changing fortunes of the Bagratuni, Zakarian and Orbelian ruling families, as well as that of the Seljuk empire and the resurgent kingdom of Georgia. Part of the Bagratuni Gugark region, the area revolved around its capital Lori (Berd), founded in 989 by David Anhoghin. The region developed its cities and monasteries into cultural centers rivaling all others, including some of the first universities in Europe and two of the world's great architectural treasures, Haghpata and Sanahin.

The capital of the region is Vanadzor, Armenia's third city and a good stopping point for exploring the region. Other towns with stay over possibilities are Stepanavan and Alaverdi. Lying on the major trade route to Georgia and the Black Sea, Lori is also dotted with a number of roadside food stands, cafes and guest venues.

NATURE ▲

Lori is considered Armenia's greenest area, with more native forest land than any other region of the country.



As lush as it is, Lori's flora and fauna were even richer in its early history. Large parts of the area were covered with forests so dense that later Akkadian sources (8th century BCE) describe Sargon's troops having to literally hack their way

in. Quite a lot of animals and plants made their way from or through here to the West and South. In addition, region remains blessed with great mineral wealth.

For birders and flower watchers, Lori is one of the richest places to visit, home to many of the 3000 species of flowers and 350 species of birds that inhabit Armenia.

Flora Lori is home to the only known natural habitat for the Armenian Water Lily, a rare and beautiful pond in the most unlikely of places. The region is also habitat for an astonishing variety of flowers:

In season Flowers: Terrain to 2100 m alt. *Gladiolus tenuis*, *G. kotschyanus*, *Zingiber trichopoda*, *Papaver paucifoliatum*, *Papaver orientale*, *Caltha polypetala*

Subalpine meadow, con. Forest, hornbeam forest, 1300-2100 m alt. *Gentiana gelida*, *Geranium sanguineum*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* (orchid), *Dictamnus albus*, *Lilium szovitsianum*, *Psephellus somcheticus*, *Campanula alliarifolia* (white), *Delphinium freynii* (endemic to transcaucasus)

Subalpine meadow, lakes, 1300-1800 m. alt. *Gladiolus caucasicus*, *Gladiolus dzhavakheticus*, *Cephalaria gigantea*, *Nymphaea alba*, *Aconitum nasutum*, *Delphinium freynii*, *Nymphoides peltata*, *Utricularia intermedia* (pale yellow), *U. vulgaris* (bright yellow)

Lakes near Stepanavan *Water Lily*

Mountain steppe terrain *Centaurea polypodiifolia*, *C. glehnii*, *C. carduiformis*, *Asphodeline taurica*, *Convolvulus calvertii*, *Convolvulus lineatus*, *Hedysarum formosum*, *Linaria grandiflora*, *Scabiosa caucasica*, *Galium verum*, *Tomanthea aucheri*

Wild relatives of crop plants: Fruit trees include the Mahaleb Cherry (*Cerasus mahaleb* L. Mill) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)

Wild Berries include the woodland strawberry (*Fragaria vesca* L.), *Rheum (ribes armenium pojark)* and *Bilberry (vaccinium myrtillus)*.

Melons include the wild lentil (*Beta macrorrhiza stev*)

For complete information and list of species see [TourArmenia Flora pages](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/flora) (www.tacentral.com/nature/flora.asp)

Birds Lori has a startling number of topographies hosting bird species, within two main locales, the mountain plateaus and craggy mountains of the West (Stepanavan, Tashir) and the woodlands and mountain forests in the east (D'segh, Tumanian, Alaverdi). To this add river valleys, semi-desert steppes and a variety of other micro-regions supporting a number of birds.

Lori's mountain plateaus and sweeping alpine country are habitats for the Greater Spotted Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Northern Harrier, Buntings, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, White Tailed Eagle, Cranes, Storks, Crakes, Flacons, Pheasants, Bustards, European Bee-eater, Rollers, Larks, Wigtails, Warblers, Buntings, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Alpine Swift, swallows, Dunnock, Black Redstart, White-winged Redstart, Golden Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Booted Eagle, Lammergeier, Eurasian Black Vulture, Eurasian Griffon

Woodland birds include the Sparrow hawk, Northern Goshawk, Black Francolin, Eurasian Woodcock, European Turtle-Dove, Common Cuckoo, Eurasian Scops-Owl, Tawny Owl, Wood Lark, Red-throated Pipit, warblers, Thrush, Tits, Buntings, Finch, Starlings, Eurasian Jay, Rook, Long-eared Owl, Eurasian Wryneck, Eurasian Green Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Great Spotted Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Flycatchers, Warblers, Eurasian Tree-Creeper, Finches, Boreal Owl, etc.

For a complete list of all birds by species and habitat see [TourArmenia Birding pages](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/birding) (www.tacentral.com/nature/birding.asp)

Thermal and Mineral Springs

Lori is covered with mineral springs, most of them naturally carbonated Calcium and Sodium calcium cold springs. Other springs are naturally carbonated, sulfur, and sodium chloride. Springs can be found near Alaverdi, Katnaghpiur, Stepanavan, Tsater, Dzoraget, Vahagnadzor, Spitak and Vanadzor.

For a complete list of thermal and Mineral springs see [TourArmenia Springs pages](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/springs)

(www.tacentral.com/nature/natural_story.asp?story_no=4).

Challenges Lori also has some of Armenia's most endangered environments: the government and local interests crave the metal ore under the native forests, and plans to clear-cut the area are under foot. Felling of trees continues, locals unable to pay the price for imported Russian gas using their nearest resource to heat and cook with. Other concerns are the copper smelting plant at Alaverdi and the chemical plant at Vanadzor. North are Soviet behemoths, both blessedly mostly idle. But the threat is real.

DO: ▲

Visit Lori's World Heritage Sites, the monasteries at Sanahin and Haghpat. Visit Dendro Preserve Park at Giulagarak. Explore the 10th-14th cc Tashir-Dzoraget Kingdom of the Kiurikians, Orbelians and Zakarians, along the Dzoraget River: Lori Berd, Giulagarak and the triple vanks at Hobardzi, Vardablur, & Kurtan. Visit Goshavank, the monastery of Mkhitar Gosh, Hnevank river monastery and the pagan monument at Odzun. Stop by the Stone Age workshops at Chakhmakhkar, Bronze Age sites at Vanadzor, Lori Berd, Vardablur, Spitak and Margahovit. Cross the Gaili Dur Pass through Georgia to the remote forests and magnificent monasteries at Jiliza. Hike the mountain plains of Mts. Achkasar, Ampasar and Gogasar, and the forests of Mts. Chatin, Arji Glukh, Airisar and Bovakar. Stop at the Greek village of Yaghdan and Jiliza and the Russian villages of Blagodarnoye, Lermontovo and Fioletevo, the latter two homes to Armenia's dwindling Molokan population. Cross into Georgia at Gogavan, then on to Tbilisi, 121 km from Tashir.

WHEN? ▲

Lori is a land of contrasts, harboring 6 weather zones, from the snow covered mountain tops to the dense forests and moist climes along riverbeds. Summers are cool and moist throughout the marz, the air in the west considered the cleanest in the country. Winters are snowy and sunny around Tashir and Stepanavan, with alternating snows and rain with fog in the east. Off roads are impassable in the winter and spring rains (mudslides common), but the snows make for wonderful winter sports; cross country skiing, hiking and snow boarding. Birding is

optimum during the migrations of spring and fall. Flowers begin opening their buds in the riverbeds as early as late February, the showiest on the Western mountain plateaus in May and June, with Armenia's endemic water flowers erupting in ponds, ditches and marshes between Stepanavan and Tashir in July and August.

HOW LONG?

Vanadzor is about 2 hours from Yerevan, letting you visit the World Heritage Haghpat and Sanahin Monasteries and return the same day. However, why would you? There is so much worth seeing, Lori deserves at least one overnight, either in Vanadzor or in the region. An overnight let's you explore the entire Forest trail around Alaverdi to the Georgian border, taking in Odzun, Akhtala / Shnogh, Kober and D'segh, meandering through the forests of upper Armenia. Add more days to fully explore Vanadzor and the immediate environs (1 day), Stepanavan and Tashir and the unique Armenian water flower ponds (1 day), Spitak and Armenia's Molokan region (1 day). We explore some day trips from Vanadzor below, which can be rearranged to suit your travel route.

Hitting the Highlights Hitting only the most popular spots, from Vanadzor: D'segh, Odzun, Sanahin, Haghpat (1 day). Spitak, Stepanavan, Lori Berd (1 day). From Stepanavan: Dzoraget river – Lori Berd, Vardablur, Hobardzi, Kurtan, D'segh (1 day). Metsavan, Tashir, Norashen (1 day).

HISTORY ▲

Lori region has a long history, its evolution roughly parallel to that of the Ararat Valley in the south, though shaped by Georgian and Central Asian influences to a greater degree.

PREHISTORIC AGE ▲

Considering how rich a resource it is, Lori has received relatively scant attention by archeologists and historians, its history mostly buried in the broad sweep of generalities about Bagratunis, Zakarians and the "Armenian" Georgian kingdoms. There is too much material evidence to not deserve separate study, and one hopes a detailed history of this region will be forthcoming. In the meantime here is how we piece it together:

Archeologists have found evidence of human activity in the area going back to around 250,000 BCE. Geological and paleontology evidence show that the Armenian Highlands have been densely inhabited from the time the Tigris and Euphrates

rivers began flowing into the Persian Gulf, during the interglacial eras. Likewise, inhabitants on the upper plateaus and mountains of modern-day Armenia are traced to the same time, as the volcanic domes of Aragats and Ararat and surrounding mountains began to cool, contributing to a moist environment. In Lori this environment is partially preserved with forests and meadows blanketing the northern and eastern parts of the marz.



Stone Age artifacts include tools from a variety of locations in the region. The teeming forests and tall grasslands supported a huge variety of species of animals, prehistoric cattle, deer and horse among them. The rich alluvial soil and minerals left from the eruptions of surrounding volcanoes (Aragats the largest) promoted organized settlement at a very early age, some say more than 10,000 years ago.

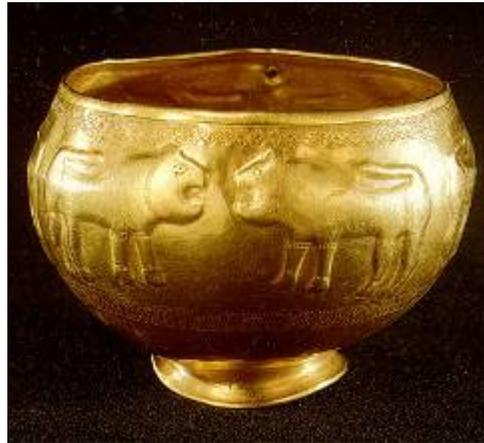
At least by 5,000 BCE, Lori experienced the growth of larger settlements, based on forestry, agriculture, trade and, by 3000 BCE, bronze.

COPPER AND BRONZE AGES ▲

When you stand in Armenia, you are standing in the birthplace of metal. The ores required to produce copper, bronze and iron were abundant here, fuel to operate kilns and the water to grow the abundant crops and animal resources necessary to support large settlements. This is especially so in Lori (Tashir-Dzoraget), with early Bronze Age peoples exploiting the local copper and metal mines.

Bronze manufacturing seems to have been highly developed in the region, with some evidence pointing to Shirak region, but Lori was the focus of mining at an early age, its copper veins still producing ore. The abundance of copper, iron,

gold, silver, lead and zinc, in relatively easily mined locations, led to the early development of metallurgy here.



Excavations at Lori Berd and Vanadzor uncovered a dense network of Bronze Age settlements (over 35), mostly congregating on the Dzoraget, Pambak and Debed Rivers. Structures were topographically like that found in other mountain regions (Kotaiik, Argatsotn), the houses built in round or rectilinear shapes, in centralized fashion. Rich troves of artifacts have come from excavations at Vanadzor, and grave sites throughout the region, from which most of the artifacts (including jewelry and a sophisticated black and red cast pottery from an early age) are on display at the State History Museum in Yerevan a few at the Lori Tradition and Culture Museum in Kurtan. The pottery, made of fine clay with sand admixture, is polished to a metallic sheen, with yellow, gray or black interiors. Though the economy was apparently based on agriculture and cattle breeding, the peoples of this time showed a capacity to understand engineering (copper mining) and to fix time (pictograms show stars, sun and perhaps an early calendar).

Ornaments with geometric motifs are cut in relief, relief-concave or incised techniques. Bronze jewelry and plates, metal earrings and knives, pipe-head and lop-head axes, tools and weapons, stone processing centers, pottery, ornamental clay plates and glass from each of the Bronze and Iron Age periods were found in the region. During the 3rd-1st millennium BCE the tribes living in the area had significant contact with Transcaucasian Near

East and Central Asian inhabitants, with items manufactured in Tashir-Dzoraget find their way as far as Eastern Europe (Veremeye).

Prehistoric excavations in Lori region include the copper age settlements at Spitak, Kosi Choter (Vanadzor), Bronze Age and Iron settlements at Arevatsag, Lorut, Stepanavan, Lori Berd, Takavorakan, Mashtots' Hill, Shnogh, Shirakamut, plus numerous sites along the Pambak, Debed and Tashir – Dzoraget corridor, and Vanadzor.

MYTHOLOGY ▲

Because of the lush vegetation in Lori, it is easier to imagine how the area was during the Bronze Age, when even grander trees and vegetation crowded the hillsides and indigenous myths formed the basis of the Armenian culture. Mts. Ararat & Aragats, now dormant, were still active, exploding at regular intervals. Their night show must have been remarkable and frightening. At the mercy of the violent process around them, people were also nurtured with warm weather and rich soil, ripe for the imagination. Add to this the discovery of Copper and Bronze in the earliest ages and a rich mythology of the region arose. There is some evidence this was not just local myths and legends, but those that entered the world stage.

The regions of Armenia, including Lori, appear early in other mythology, including versions of the Sumerian epic Gilgamesh as well as Greek mythology. Gilgamesh (ca. 4000-3500 BCE) mentions the "Ererat" Kingdom in the area, with fiery gods inhabiting the sky. Some even think these myths originated either in this area or passed through it on their way to a later version. One such is the Greek Myth of Jason and Argonauts, and the Golden Fleece, the fleece seen as a symbol of the mineral wealth in Armenia, the sorcery of its women that of early herbologists.

URARTIAN & ROMAN ERAS ▲

One of the fringe tribes of the Nairi in the 2nd millennium BCE, Lori became a part of the Urartian empire in the 8th c. BCE. Starting from here, the region is practically a part of the larger Gugark region, grouped together with Shirak, Tavush and the areas to the west. Lori was a part of the Ishkiguli kingdom, an outback of the empire, its main purpose a buffer against the tribes up north and as a metal and wood resource for the empire. Huge wooden posts and roof beams at Erebuni most likely came from this region.

Urartu was a remarkably developed culture that had extensive contacts with the major empires of

the Ancient world stretching between the Mediterranean and India, and rivaled them for trade, military and cultural hegemony. The fall of Urartu is in part traced to invading Cimmerians (also called Skythians) from the north, which entered through Lori en route to Anatolia.

Urartian settlements in Lori include Lori Berd, Vanadzor, Tashir, D'segh, Alaverdi, Teghut & Margahovit.

Very little is mentioned in historical chronicles of the area during the Roman and Parthian periods, though in 387 after the division of Armenia between Persia and Rome the region was united to Georgia as part of Gugark.

Roman/Arshacid period sites are at Lori, Vanadzor, Alaverdi & Tashir-Dzoraget.

EARLY CHRISTIAN – MIDDLE AGES ▲

S. Grigor Lousavoritch is said to have traveled the region, "baptizing" Pagan Temples by having them cut short and erecting Christian edifices on top. The conversion of the region was not as easily done as it was in other areas of the country, the local clinging to their pagan beliefs, so much so that clergy incorporated many details into the Christian iconography. Vishaps (Dragon stones) were preserved in the new Christian designs, the monument at Odzun being a prime example.

By the 4th c. Lori was controlled by the Kamsarakan family, who later revolted against the Arshakuni kings and were almost wiped out in revenge. Medieval Lori reached its height under the rule of the Bagratunis, overlords of the area during the Golden Age of Architecture, and the building of the Ani Kingdom.



Following revolts and uprisings by Georgians and Armenians in 851, and a victorious campaign by Byzantine armies, the Arabs adopted more conciliatory policies towards the Armenians. This led to the appointment of Ashot Bagratuni (the Carnivorous) in 861, as Prince over Armenia, beginning a long period of eminence for his family (The Bagratid Dynasty). Early students of the PR machine, the Bagratunis claimed to be the descendants of David and Bathsheba and to be cousins to the Virgin Mary.



They enlarged their lands to include Shirak and Arsharunik, and renewed the lands of Tashir-Dzoraget with its capital Lori Berd. A branch of the Bagratuni family was also established in Georgia, struggling against repeated rebellions by its princes. In Lori region, the area became known as "kingdom of Albania", ruled by junior branch of Bagratunis, Kiurikians. Its capital was originally Samshvile, later Lori (Stepanavan). The kingdom was founded by the son of Ashot III Gurgen I (or Kiurikeh I) in 1079. Ashot had rebelled against his brother Smbat II, a corpulent, incompetent ruler. The more skilled warrior Ashot conquered the land of Tashir-Dzoraget, bequeathing it to his son. Gurgen (Kiurikeh) built a formidable bastion, and capitalized on the trade routes of the region, enriching his kingdom and his people.

This began a renewed period of cultural development, including churches, monasteries and a flourishing of manuscript art, which--though begun as early as the 5th c. CE--achieved new levels of artistry. Resumption of international trade brought prosperity and the revival of artistic and literary pursuits. Hundreds of monasteries and churches, as well as thousands of exquisitely carved stone crosses (Khachkars) are traced to

this period. The churches assumed their conical domed cruciform shapes, with elaborate carved images on the facades and frescoes in the inner sanctums. The capital city of Ani grew to a population of almost 100,000, more than any urban center in Europe. Religious life flourished and Ani became known as the "city of one thousand and one churches".

The glory was short-lived. Ani was captured by successive waves of invaders, and the Gugark region became fractured, as Lori fell to Emir Kizil in 1105. The city quickly recovered under the patronage of the newly powerful Georgian Kingdom to the North.

THE GEORGIAN KINGDOM ▲

Lori was freed by the Georgian King David (the Builder), founding the Orbelian branch of the Georgian royal family. The Georgians, beginning in the 8th century repelled the Arab invasions and forged a powerful country. Related to the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty by marriage, when the Ani kingdom fell, they quickly usurped the eastern regions of Gugark, Lori and Tavush. Lori was given as a gift to the Armenian prince Sarkis (Zakareh) Zakarian by King Giorgi III and his daughter Queen Tamara.



With the transformation of Georgia into a major military power in the 12th century, the political situation for Armenians in the Caucasus improved decisively. Under the leadership of two Armenian generals, the brothers Ivaneh and Zakareh Zakarian, the Georgian army swelled with Armenian volunteers and surged southward, recapturing from the Turks all of current Armenia, parts of Azerbaijan and parts of central and southern historical Armenia.

The Zakarian brothers also set up a rivalry in church construction, based upon their personal beliefs. Still smarting from the 660 CE schism of the Georgian and Armenian Church, intense religious rivalries continued between followers of each church, while they formed alliances to repel mutual adversaries. The Zakarian brothers are a case in point; allies in the fight against the Turks, they were nonetheless rivals at the Georgian Court, Ivaneh a convert of the Georgian branch of the Greek Orthodox church while Zakareh was a follower of the Apostolic church. The great vanks built for these overlords demonstrate the stark differences between their faiths: Ivaneh's sponsored the construction of Kobair and Akhtala, each elaborately decorated both within and out, Kobair's frescoes exceptional examples of their time and Akhtala's exteriors the most elaborate and beautiful in Armenia and Georgia, both design to be jewels in the Orbelian Crown possessions in Lori.

This was in line with their beliefs; the followers of the Greek (Byzantine or Orthodox) Church celebrated the rites in elaborately decorated churches boasting frescoes of ever grander styles with altars bedecked in gilt wood screens and golden icons. The Armenian Apostolic church maintained its (relatively) restrained interiors, professing a belief in minimizing obstructions between the worshipper and God. Of course both sides gave the best craftsmanship and treasures they could to the maintenance of "God' homes", and one could argue that apostolic architecture is just as rich and elaborate with its exteriors and khachkars, and even the Apostolic Church moved towards frescoes and painted churches in time; but there is a difference in style that can be detected in the churches built during this period; generally the more elaborate the interior, the more orthodox the intent, the more refined, the more apostolic.

In Lori the monasteries at Haghpat, Sanahin, Shnogh, Akhtala, Odzun, Kober and D'segh reached their penultimate splendor. At all monasteries, but especially Haghpat and Sanahin, the best preserved, the art of miniatures reached new heights of beauty, and the centers for learning were so advanced that they have been called by Armenia's first universities.

Khachkar art was also renewed, with more elaborate and realistic depictions of the crucifixion above the central cross, and with masterpieces created throughout the country, including that at Goshavank, Haghpat and Sanahin. The intellect and writer, Mkhitar Gosh taught in Lori during this

period, founding the monastery at Nor Getik (Goshavank). Gosh authored more than a dozen works, including the codification of Armenian law (the Armenian Law Book), the Fables, a number of prayers, sermons and theological works, and a short chronicle. A confidant of the most powerful rulers of his day, Gosh embodied the intellect of the period, an artist, philosopher and teacher.



The glories were short lived, Lori falling again with the invasions of Jalai-al-Adin in 1228 and the Mongol hordes in 1238, who laid waste to the city and the region.

Beginning in the 15th century, Armenia suffered through more invasions, resulting in the division of the kingdom between Ottoman Turks and the Persians in the 16th c. Lori fell to the Persians, and a steady decline continued for the next 200 years. The region continued under the titular control of the Georgian kings, who, much reduced in stature, made peace with the Persian khanate and won in return semi-autonomous status. In the 18th century the region became the battle ground between the two powers, the Khan of Yerevan waging battle, burning Vanadzor to the ground and sacking monasteries and villages. Haghpat is one notable event of this time, recorded as the place where the Armenian bard Sayat Nova, a favorite of the King but banished from Tiflis for falling in love with the princess, was tortured and killed by Persian soldiers attacking the monastery.

Around the same time Russian interest in the region (beginning with Peter the Great sending for Armenian architects to build his new capital St. Petersburg) grew, first with trade, then with the Russian commitment to extend its borders to a warm water port. That ambition quickly grew to

include the entire Transcaucasus, and if they could take it, Eastern Turkey, historic Armenia.

19th CENTURY ▲

Lori's rebirth, like that of Eastern Armenia, exploded on the scene with the arrival of Imperial Russia, which began taking the region from the Persians in 1801. Battles in succeeding years resulted in the capture and burning to the ground of Vanadzor (1806), while victories in 1810 to 1825 wrested the remainder of the country from Persia, and ushered in a new era of economic and cultural growth.

Not as large or important as Giumri to the West, Lori was nevertheless prized for its natural resources and the transportation corridor with the North. As Armenian enclaves in Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Giumri grew, Loretsis contributed to the new Armenian identity, based on art, poetry and above all political freedom. One of the most famous was Hovhannes Tumanian (1869-1923), a poet and fable author.

In 1899, the Tbilisi-Alexandropol, later the Alexandropol-Yerevan-Persia railways made Lori a major transport corridor, further feeding its growth. The city of Vanadzor, then called Gharakilisa ("Black Church") reached an extraordinary level of sophistication in design, and a love of culture ensued, with shops, homes, theatres and musical entertainments imported from Russia and Europe.

GENOCIDE AND FIRST REPUBLIC ▲

The devastation of the Armenian Genocide hit Lori as thousands of refugees fleeing the Turkish troops sought out relatives or simply places to stay. Most of the villages in the region were first inhabited by survivors of the genocide, especially in the Tashir area. The area was a strategic link with Russia, and a focus of Turkish invasion after the fall of the Tsar and the withdrawal of the Russian army in 1918. Vowing to demolish the Armenian people, The Young Turks began an invasion of Armenia to the north, and Giumri surrendered on May 15, 1918. In the same month General Nazarbekian's outnumbered troops fought the Turkish Army to a creditable tie in Vanadzor, pushing them back a few days later at the crucial battle of Sardarapat on May 28, the Turkish troops and helping to establishing the first Armenian Republic.

The republic was short-lived. Besieged by continued Turkish aggression and the Red Army, Lori was again the focus of armed struggle, as the

Red Army and Armenian partisans led by D'rastamat Kanaian ("D'ro") fought for turf, D'ro pushing the red Army to the edge of Tbilisi. No sooner had a truce been signed but the Red Army pushed through Lori, capturing Vanadzor and forcing the end of the Republic in 1920. For the next 70 years Lori was a part of the Soviet Union.

THE SOVIET PERIOD ▲

Lori's development during the Soviet period was extraordinary, if ecologically destructive. The Soviets built enormous factories along the Rivers and rail line. Vanadzor, changing its name in 1935 to Kirovakan, after a Communist hero buried in the Moscow Kremlin, experienced the biggest growth, its population exploding as large petrochemical and manufacturing plants were built. Alaverdi built the largest Copper processing plant in Eurasia, perhaps the only manufacturing in Armenia based on a local resource. All others were shipped in by rail, creating one of the busiest rail ports in the Soviet Union. Both the population and heavy industrialization increased 10-fold within the next forty years.

After World War II (in which Loretsis sacrificed up to 30% of their male population), a new industrial boom began, with the expansion of the copper and chemical plants, plus new manufacturing centers. The pollution generated from these plants took a significant toll, before the 1988 earthquake locals talking of the entire Vanadzor valley blanketed with white powder, a product of the sulfur dioxide belching from factory smokestacks.

By the 1980's the city had 190,000 people and was a major chemical producer for the Soviet Union. Long accustomed to petty corruption in daily life, the housing boom needed to house the incoming workers was no different: substandard construction was common, as contractors skimmed off the top of supplies and ignored building codes. In 1988, this was to have terrible consequences.

EARTHQUAKE AND 2ND REPUBLIC ▲

At 11:41 a.m. on December 7, 1988 Armenia was rocked by severe earthquakes across the North of the country, killing more than 25,000. It is estimated that up to 15,000 people died in the first tremor, as poorly constructed concrete buildings collapsed on families, factories and schools.

The city of Spitak was completely destroyed, as was much of Giumri in Shirak region, and parts of Vanadzor, Stepanavan and dozens of villages in the area. More than 500,000 people were left homeless, just as the coldest weather of the year

began. Constant bungling by the Soviet authorities to help survivors and bring in aid led to bitter criticism of the central government, and for the first time in history the opening of the Soviet borders to caravans of medicine, construction material and aid workers from the West. Vowing to rebuild the earthquake ravaged area, two years later the Soviet Union collapsed, and people sat destitute housed in domiks (metal shipping containers).

Following the earthquake and Armenia's independence an undeclared war with Azerbaijan began over the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh, carved out from Armenia by Stalin in the 1920s. Azerbaijan followed by cutting off the only supplies of gas into Armenia, and Turkey followed suit by closing its land borders with her country, refusing entry even for humanitarian aid and medical supplies to the earthquake victims.

Years of suffering followed, entire forests decimated as people cut trees to heat with during the long mountain winters. Much of the forest land around Vanadzor was lost during this time. During the worst 3 winters in memory, the US government stepped in with the largest emergency effort in the region, distributing heating fuel to 2.5 million Armenians. The aid, plus countless efforts by the UN, Oxfam, Save the Children among others, rescued a desperate situation and provided some hope. When the Metsamor reactor was restarted in 1995, Armenia broke the back of the Turkey-Azeri blockade, and recovery began.

Still, the country, and Lori faced a mass exodus, a migration out of the country as large as that into the country following the 1915 genocide. From a population of somewhere around 3.5 million, Armenia lost 1.5 million, and Vanadzor fell from 190,000 to perhaps 100,000 now. Those who left went for work, mostly to Russia, which now has the largest concentration of Armenians in the world.

LORI NOW ▲

Lori's economy is mostly based on remittances from family members working abroad, with that money being used to create small shops and businesses and a steadily improving standard of life. Graft and corruption in the local government is rife, the proverbial 'waxing of palms' required for anyone wanting to do business, and locals simply calculate it as a cost of doing business.

Lori's rich resources are its greatest risk; forests continue to be decimated, exported to furniture

makers in Germany, France, Russia and Yerevan and for wooden barrels at the Yerevan Brandy Factory, owned by the French conglomerate Pierre Rochard. With only 13% of its former forests, Armenia can ill afford to lose more, yet real employment is not within reach of the average Loretsi, who sees any business—even that which spoils their land—better than no business at all. The copper plant is working, and a plan to clear cut 600 hectares (1800 acres) of old growth forest in order to strip mine the area for copper has received scant protest, despite its close location to some of Armenia's greatest monuments, two of which are world heritage sites.

And with perhaps 40% of the population gone to Yerevan or abroad, there are few left to protest, those who remain cynical from facing years of promises, graft and corruption and the numbing task of making ends meet. What surprises one is how genuinely friendly and trusting these same people are with guests and tourists, proudly sharing their land, their culture and their hospitality to any who come.



And at the same time, with reconstruction, and some of the \$250 million in remittances sent each month, life in has become a little more predictable, people a little more hopeful.

After independence in 1991, Kirovakan was renamed Vanadzor, but locals still use Kirovakan, remembering a pleasanter time and better life.

IN AND OUT ▲

By Air Though Vanadzor, Alaverdi and Stepanavan have local airports, there is no scheduled air service to the region. Military helicopter flights and private aviation theoretically can be chartered,

if you have the time and money. Not sure why you'd want to drop \$1,000-3,000+ on a charter flight to an area you can reach in just over an hour by car, but if so, contact a travel agent in Yerevan to arrange.

By Rail The *g'natsk* travels between Yerevan and Tbilisi every other day via Alaverdi and Vanadzor. It is a cheap and pleasant way to see the countryside, if you don't mind the slow pace: on even number days of the month it goes to Tbilisi (leaves Yerevan 19.00, stopping in Vanadzor 4-5 hours later) and on odd number days of the month to Yerevan (leaves Tbilisi 16.15 and stopping at Vanadzor 01.00 and Yerevan 06.00). The *g'natsk* also stops at Tumanian (Kobaiyr station), Alaverdi and Shnogh (along with numerous unscheduled stops at villages). Basic Seating Class is 1470 AMD, sitting compartment is 3600 AMD, and a place in a 4-bed compartment is 5600 AMD.

By Road There are five main routes into and out of Lori, all connecting to Vanadzor. From Vanadzor, **the Northeastern route** is 47 km to Alaverdi, another 40 km to the Georgian border at Sadakhlo (M6) and a full 150 km to Tbilisi (connect to M7 at Sadakhlo). **The Northwestern route** travels 34 kilometers from Vanadzor to Stepanavan, another 18 km to Tashir, then another 15 km to the Georgian border at Gogavan (A328 / M3). From Tashir it is 46 km to Giumri (A304 / H31). At Stepanavan, there is a northern route that goes 18 km past Urut and Sverdlov to Privolnoye, then branches off NW 12 km to Apavan and the Loki Pass to Georgia or NE 13 km to Aghkiorpi in Georgia. **The Southwestern route** travels 17 km to Spitak, then 47 m W to Giumri (A330 / M7). At Spitak there are two southern routes; the main road meanders past J'rashen for about 17 km to Pambak Pass then 12 km to Aparan, the other, disused road zigzagging across Spitak Pass and on to Aparan, from which it is another 40 km to Ashtarak and a full 91 km to Yerevan from Spitak. **The Southeastern route** travels 40 km to Dilijan (A330 / M8), passing the Russian Molokan villages of Lermontovo, Margahovit and Fioletovo.

Public Transport includes intercity buses and minivans (Marshrutni Taxis) that travel from village to village and village to town. Buses to Tbilisi and Yerevan travel daily from Vanadzor, Spitak, Alaverdi, Stepanavan & Tashir, with stops along the way. Cars with drivers can be rented in Yerevan, Taxis can be found in Vanadzor and Alaverdi, most welcome day trips, even on short notice. Figure 100 AMD per kilometer plus

something extra for stops (negotiate). If you stop for food, treat the driver as well. Worth it if you don't know the language.

OVERNIGHT/EAT ▲

Lodging Vanadzor has a couple of decent hotels, plus a few apartments that can be rented by the night. Alaverdi & Stepanavan both have basic hotels (\$20+) and locals anxious to rent out apartment rooms or host guests in their homes (5000 AMD for room and breakfast is fair). In addition Lori has some pensionats and summer camps and if they have room, a cheap stay at 2500-10,000 AMD a night. Along the highway to Sadakhlo you will find a few restaurants/motels, catering to truckers and tête-à-têtes. They are relatively cheap at \$15-\$20 a night. And on the Debed river is the ultra luxurious and pricey (\$60+ for a single, \$100+ double) Avan Dzoraget Hotel. Villagers will put up anyone in need; the amenities may be sparse, but the hospitality will be warm and inviting. You will have to insist to pay in many cases, villagers especially taking offense at the idea of selling their hospitality. 5000 AMD for bed and breakfast is reasonable. Details for lodging are listed in Day Trips). **Eating out** in the region can be found at roadside stands and cafes along the highway to Sadakhlo, while Tashir, Stepanavan, Spitak, Vanadzor and Alaverdi all have restaurants, cafes and Khorovatz joints. Bottled water is generally not available outside of larger towns. Lori has a number of roadside springs that locals love to visit to fill up their bottles with. They are considered safe by locals, and we have never had a problem with one, but you need to use your own judgment in using one.



DESTINATIONS ▲

Lori has so many places worth visiting you will find it hard to choose, especially if you just have a day or two.

Picturesque villages and locales include Shnogh, Akhtala, Haghpatt, Odzun, Kober, D'segh, Dzoraget, Vardablur, Gargar, Pambak, Lori berd, Urut, Sverdlov, Privolnoye, Metsavan, Pushkino, Geghasar, Katnajur, Shirakamut, Jiliza, Akhtala, Atan, Haghpatt, Tekhut.

Prehistoric / Urartian excavations in Lori Region include Spitak, Lori Berd, Dzoraget River, Vanadzor, Shirakamut, Tashir, D'segh, Alaverdi, Teghut, Shnogh & Margahovit.

Roman / Parthian excavations **include** Lori, Vanadzor, Alaverdi & Tashir-Dzoraget.

Medieval monasteries, churches, Khachkars & ruins will be found at Haghpatt, Sanahin, Shnogh, Akhtala, Odzun, Arvi, Kobaiyr, D'segh, Dzoragiugh, Vardablur, Gargar, Lori Berd, Mt. Lalvar Pass, Metsavan, Noramut, Shirakamut, Spitak and Ghursali.

NATURE TOURING ▲

Natural areas include the entire western area of the marz, where the spectacular Mts. Urasar, Achkasar and Bazumtar cross each other with both rocky and forested effect. This is also the least inhabited area, so the wildest. In the North above Stepanavan lay alpine country, while the great forests of Lori are in the NE, while rugged terrain with intermittent stands of forests are the SE, and the mountains of Airisar and Bovakar.

Hiking and Mountain trekking is spectacular throughout the marz, especially on Mt. Achkasar in the far NW, down to Mt. Urasar and the Chichkan river. Also in the W, a trek from Mt Urasar to Mt. Bazumtar travels across some of the most deserted and wildest areas in Armenia. The Dzoraget and Debed Rivers are excellent hiking in the SW, passing Bronze Age excavations, Medieval ruins and rustic villages. In the SE the hiking is good along the Pambak river and up Mts. Bovakar and Mt. Airisar. In the NE, hiking trails pass more villages, with their welcoming overnight opportunities, and the spectacular Mts. Chatin, Galvanasar, Lalvar, and Dzigatar.

For most hikes or climbs, an experienced mountain guide is required, for safe travel and to navigate the local populations. They also know which areas

are off-limits (some sections are restricted military areas, and not marked) as well as the secret cubby holes and gorges with rare delights.

Caving For avid spelunkers, the most spectacular images in Armenia are underground, and with more than 10,000 caves throughout the country, Armenia aims to please to subterranean explorer. Caves are located in every region of the country, but the more interesting line river gorges.

Caving in Lori will be found at Geghasar, Noramut, Shenavan and in caves along the Debed river. For more details see [TourArmenia Caving pages](http://www.tourarmenia.com/nature/natural_story.asp?story_no=30) (www.tacentral.com/nature/natural_story.asp?story_no=30)

Flower Watching June and July have the mildest weather in the region, plus some of the most spectacular flower shows, esp. in the western region. Best places to look are on the Pushkin Pass, around Stepanavan, Tashir and roads leading west to Shirak.

Birding Spring (April-May) and Autumn (September-October) are the best times to observe migrating birds, while summer is ideal for woodland species that call the region home. Best places are the most difficult to reach: mountain crags and plateaus, recesses of river canyons and feeder streams, as deep in the forest as your jeep (or legs) will carry you. The mountains west of Stepanavan and East of Vanadzor, on the plateau towards Metsavan, woodlands east of D'segh towards Atan and around Jiliza/Shamlugh/Akhtala are prime areas (subject to logging).

Nature - Adventure Tours Operators ▲

Ashot Levonian (tel. 010 57 03 28, mob. 091 49 58 34), e-mail: levash77@mail.ru is an expert hiking/climbing/camping guide, his team arranges hiking, mountain climbing, caving, geology tours, churches and fortresses. They will arrange hotels in Yerevan, airport pickup, transport, sight-seeing, etc. Group support includes guide, translator, cooker, rescue doctor and driver. Standard tour is a two-week hiking trip averaging 5-10 km walking a day: Yerevan - Mt. Aragats - Alaverdi - Ijevan - Dilijan - Sevan - Martuni - Yeghegnadzor - Kapan - Meghri - Jermuk - Yerevan.

The Armenian Mountain rescue teams "Spitak" (tel: 010 35 00 06), 50 Halabian p., Yerevan, email: spitak@yerphi.am, moon.yerphi.am/~spitak/adventure.htm, stationed in both Yerevan and Stepanavan, can organize

hiking, rock climbing and mountain expeditions. Guides are experienced rescuers-rock climbers, and they can also arrange horse riding along picturesque routes, by a horse cave and "Ancient Armenian horse games."

One of the most experience mountain climbers in Armenia is *Andrey Chesnokov*, (tel. 010 57 67 57), 10 Vardanants St., Apt. #49, Yerevan, Armenia 375010, email: ruzan@aua.am, who has climbed most of the mountains in Armenia and is a recommend, reliable guide.

Armenia Green Cross Ecological NGO ("AGCE"), 14-10 Batumi, Vanadzor (tel. 0 322 24066, fax. 58449, mob. 093 32 32 84) is a local NGO that provides eco-tours as part of its mission to preserve and enlarge ecologically vital areas of the country. Eco-tours are expert-led hiking, climbing and camping tours, including hiking and climbing equipment, tents, sleeping-bags, emergency and first aid facilities and the services of their professional rescue group (EU certification).

Avarayr Adventure Tours, (tel. 010 56 36 81, 52 40 42, Fax: 010 56 36 81), 1 Pavstos Biusand p., Yerevan, E-mail: avarayr@arminco.com, URL: www.avarayr.am/ has been arranging cultural and adventure tours to Armenia for more than 12 years, one of the first to provide fully equipped hiking, climbing and adventure tours. Tours include expert guides, cooks and support staff for all tours. Tours run the gamut from hiking and climbing in the wilderness to cultural visits for the more comfort-minded. Their best seem to be tours that combine both aspects. A good, solid company.

The Eco-Tour Center (tel. 010 27 87 28 / 27 40 12), 2 H Hakobian St. apt. 22, 375033 Yerevan, Armenia, email: zhanna@netsys.am, www.ecotourismarmenia.com, arranges nature tours, climbs and camping, as well as birding., flower watching and other nature tours. Contact Zhanna.

Hike & Go, (tel. France (+33 6) 88 34 04 11, local cell: 091 20 41 38), email: info@hikeandgo.com an adventure travel group operating out of Armenia and France (English spoken) is an interesting group that features tours of Armenia combining traditional touring with hiking into Armenia's wilderness and off-the-beaten-path monuments, some of which can only be reached by hiking. [See web site \(www.hikeandgo.com/\)](http://www.hikeandgo.com/)

Adventour Travel (tel. 010 53 96 09, cell.: 091 42 67 45), Email: adventour@netsys.am, URL: www.armeniaexplorer.com, 39 Pushkin p., Yerevan, Armenia, 375002, arranges adventure, birding, botanical and historic tours.

Oxalis Tours, (tel. UK (+44 20) 78 70 80 37, USA (+1 201) 984 1420; Fax: (+44 20) 76 81 31 31) 68 Landseer Road, London N19 4JP UK, URL: www.oxalis-adventures.com/armenia/index.php provides trekking, climbing and botanical tours to Armenia, specializing in combining off-the-beaten paths with primary sites. They hire expert guides from in and out of the country and provide full tour services. Worth looking into, well organized.

Flower Tours

Professor Nora Gabriellian is Armenia's preeminent expert on flowers in Armenia, personally discovering several new species of endemic flowers, the latest in 2006. She is the author of the upcoming Field Guide to Armenian Flowers, the culmination of 50+ years work in the field. This seventy-something still out-hikes the fittest members of her tours and combines expert data with humor, enthusiasm and great good will. She is not easy to book (she continues to do her research and is not for the casual tourist), but if you can arrange for her to take you on a 1 to 8 day flower tour, you will never see Armenia the same way again. She doesn't have a travel agency but contact her through Rafi at (tel: 010 53-24-55) who can check her schedule and make arrangements.

Archeological Tours ▲

MassTour (tel./fax. 010 27 78 32), 8 Komitas, Yerevan, e-mail: info@masstours.com, URL: www.masstours.com, specialize in archeological tours and participation in archeological digs supervised by working archeologists include the Urartian fortress Erebuni (Arin Berd) forerunner of present day Yerevan, the Bronze Age temple-city of Agarak, Bronze -Iron Age tomb field of Aghavnatun, Paleolithic caves in the Kasakh River Canyon near the village of Apnagiugh, guided visits to the petroglyphs in the Geghama mountain range. They also run basic tour packages with expert guides. Excavation packages begin from \$750/week for full service land-expeditions.

VANADZOR (Kirovakan) ▲

(DD 40.81522 x 44.48689)

[Map on page 13](#)

✚ **VANADZOR ՎԱՆԱԶՈՐ** (formerly Kharakilisa, from 1935-92 Kirovakan, elev. 1324m, pop. 100,314) runs along the valley between the Pambak and Bazum mountain ranges at the confluence of the Tandzut and Pambak river. Vanadzor is caught up in the midst of change, with hallmarks of its old industrial base, the old rusting hulks on its outer edges, spoiling the views of the magnificent mountains and forests surrounding the small city. Inside, you will see signs of change and growth everywhere, as old Soviet shops are converted to shiny new shops, internet cafes and business centers. Much to be done, but much is also being done.



Background. Prehistoric sites in at Vanadzor date back to the Stone Age, with especially rich Bronze and Iron Age sites on the territory of the modern city.

Bronze and iron Age sites include the Takavoranist (King's Hill), Mashtots Blur and Kosi choter. Excavations show a culture tied to the Ararat plan and Asia minor while maintaining local animist connections, iconography and idols featuring both sun symbols (Araratian) and bulls, mountain lions, goats and canines (Vanadzor). Water birds figure in excavation along the riverbed, as do water imagery on pots and jars, seen to symbolize the universe or a boundless world. As opposed to the settlers on the Ararat Dashtavar and Siunik, no evidence of a prehistoric astral observatory have been found in the area and star imagery is limited to obvious events (meteors, comets, sun, moon).

By the late Bronze / early Iron Age, the metal trade was significant, the peoples at Vanadzor involved in smelting and exporting ore to Anatolia. They do not seem to be vassal states in this period, but rather people tied to the Etwini mentioned in Assyrian and Urartian chronicles. Urartu considered the area a valuable outpost, Vanadzor one of the tops along the "metal road".

Vanadzor was a part of Tashir-Dzoraget Province of the Yervanduni, Artashes (Artaxes / Artashasid) and later Arshakuni (Arshak / Arshakuniats / Arshacid) Kingdoms (5th c. BCE – 3rd c. CE), with temple complexes dedicated to Vahagn, Anahit, Tork and later a Mythra, a fire god related to Zoroastrian beliefs from Albania (present Azerbaijan) and central to the Roman pantheon of the 2nd c. CE. The valley, its gorges and side canyons with their sacred springs and vishap stones ("Dragon Stones"; tall monolithic columns representing the godlike phallus quickening the fertile ground, hence the rushing spring underneath), the mountain plateaus and fertile valleys protected dozens of animalist and pagan shrines to the gods and goddesses of the woods (later the gods of Haik, later still their Hellenistic versions and Roman copies).

The area was (and still is) rich in nature; hard woods of ash, oak and walnut were harvested and found its way into Anatolia and the Levant. The river was a major conduit for trade from current Georgia, Russia and central Asia and copper, zinc, lead, and barium were dug from the mines near Alaverdi, just 50 km north, and exported into Greater Haik, Rome and Central Asia.

Vanadzor's history really begins in the 9th c., when the Bagratunis of Ani, having successfully reformed northern Armenia into a kingdom after the fall of the Arshacid kings, began building castles, forts and monasteries in the area. Vanadzor was a mere speck, their focus going to Lori Berd, Haghpat, Sanahin, Odzun and Spitak, but it gained importance as the Kiurikians earned the territory after the fall of Ani and the ascendancy of the Georgian Kings, who laid titular claim to the region. The Kiurikians shared the area, then lost it to the Zakarians in the 12-13th cc, before the whole kingdom fell to successive waves of Mongol, Seljuk/Ottoman and Safavid Persian invasions.

Vanadzor was formerly known as Kharakilisa ("Black Church") after invading Turks burned the city and old church at the beginning of the 13th c.

The town and church were to the north of the present city, in the hills. The city rebuilt, only to be destroyed again in 1806 by the forces of Hasan Khan during the Russo-Persian war, which ended in Vanadzor and East Armenia becoming Russian protectorates.

The city had a growth spurt when the train from Tiflis (Tbilisi) was built in 1899, and it was crucial to the fortunes of the Armenians in 1918, as the Armenian general Nazarbekian and his volunteers pushed back the advancing Turks, leading to their defeat at the battle of Sardarapat.

Vanadzor's real growth occurred in the Soviet period when its population exploded from a few thousand to 170,000 in 1990. The city developed into a heavy industrial base, receiving raw goods and chemicals from outside to remanufacture and export. The chemical plant on the west end of the city was the largest in the Soviet Union and close to Acetate, fur, precision tool, furniture, sewing and automobile part manufacturing centers. All are now close, save limited work at a few centers. The huge rusting factories remain behind, the government dreaming of someone foolish enough to buy their hopelessly outmoded technology to rev yup the local economy (and pollute the nearby forests).

From 1935-1995 the city was named Kirovakan, a name locals refuse to part with, much as Giumretsis refuse to part with their beloved Leninakan. The name is for the Bolshevik hero Sergei Kirov, who led uprisings in the Caucasus and was instrumental in defeating anti-communist forces in the region in 1920.

The city experienced a crushing blow with the 1988 earthquake, which totally destroyed Spitak but spared Vanadzor of the worst catastrophe. Still hundreds died and thousands were left homeless, and it is only recently (see Spitak) that permanent housing has been built, allowing people to leave their 'temporary' metal containers they have been living in for over 13 years.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and the conflict with Azerbaijan over the Armenian enclave of Karabakh escalated into an undeclared war, the region was further devastated as outside suppliers no longer sent raw materials and customers no longer were able to buy products. The activity of the hulking factories on either end of the city (one petrochemical behemoth stretching for 5 km along the river) came to a screeching halt, forcing thousands of workers onto the streets to make do

as best they could. These factories continue to lie dormant, their outmoded equipment no longer able to produce goods competitive on any market, and (blessedly), their toxic wastes no longer spewed into the air and water. The winters of 1992-1995 were particularly harsh, the normally mild winters suddenly the coldest on record and people without electricity, heat or jobs. US aid staved off the worst, but a mass exodus of the able bodied workers to Russia, Europe and the USA reduced the population from a high of 170,000 in 1991 to perhaps 90,000 now. Remittances from abroad prop up the local economy, no real industry or sustainable business has been introduced to date.

What the city lacks in industry, it makes up for in education and small businesses that try to make gains in the fledgling IT world. There are four institutes of higher learning and a fairly impressive computer and Internet center (regional government center). The city has mostly completed its reconstruction, benefiting from the relatively minor damage it sustained the 1988 earthquake (Vanadzor lost about 18% of its infrastructure, vs. Giumri's 70%), and the center seems a new place with shops, cafes and restaurants opening on the main streets and the markets buzzing with activity. Another sign of progress is the relatively high number of young people you can find in town, a sure sign more and more are staying to make a go of it, vs. the high numbers forced to leave for Russia or the west in other cities.



Problems Petty corruption is rampant in officials circles, the mayor and his cronies notoriously on the take for just about everything and locals resigned to living with petty bribes for the foreseeable future. This was in fact a legacy of the

late Soviet period, and—truth be told—a legacy of the feudal Armenian culture that thrived before then. As a result locals are cynical of any promises by the government or international agencies, seeing help diverted to the power brokers again and again. Tourists will rarely face these kinds of problems, except indirectly, in paying higher prices or just knowing a part of the money you spend at local shops is being diverted to the power bosses. Feel free to spit on their Mercedes as they race by.

Another problem is the massive deforestation going on in the area, all of it illegal business diverting funds to the mafia and local and central government officials. Locals benefit from this trade in having some kind of work (logging and creating products from the wood), so are less open to suggestions they are harming their future in the process. Having survived a decade of brutal winters and poverty, it is a bit futile to preach to those who have been without, unless you are prepared to create a viable, immediate alternative. A lesson in reality.

Attitudes The corruption, harsh life and constant string of broken promises have created a kind of cynicism here that is unsoftened by Giumri's famous biting humor or Yerevan's refusal to admit defeat. On first meeting, some have found the locals to be guarded and unresponsive (though I must confess I did not encounter anything like this myself). If so, the protective gaze is soon replaced with genuine warmth and a quick wit, paired with an obsession to be good hosts.



Vanadzor's youth are its best hope and most creative engines of change, and if the chance to meet the new generation occurs, take it. Their soft, friendly disposition simply masks a ferocious

determination to make a better life for themselves, and to avoid the steady stream of émigrés to Russia. They are also some of the funniest, fun loving young people you can hope to meet in the country, devoid of the too-too cool attitudes and hang ups in Yerevan.

Other Vanadzor is also home to NGO medical centers and rehab centers built after the earthquake, the YMCA being one of the more familiar to tourists. A visit to one of these centers—here or in Spitak—is highly recommended, if for nothing else but to see the face of triumph and recovery. Some also have housing which you might be able to use while here (for a fee, of course).

Weather. Vanadzor's is rather nice, the locals calling it "soft weather". Winters are snowy but warmer than Giumri or even Yerevan, the summers mostly cool and humid, with a short spell of hot weather in July-August.

Ecology Vanadzor was once surrounded on all sides with teeming forests, 40% of the mountains on both sides of the city covered as late as 1992, when the crisis with Azerbaijan led to the city losing electricity and gas. The forests were decimated as locals were forced to fell trees to cook and heat with. The results are plain to see: denuded hills on both sides and scant success at reforestation so far. A project to reforest the area has begun with community run reforestation nurseries, and 750,000 saplings are being grown for eventual planting on the hills. The industrial parks and mammoth chemical plant on the W end of the city are closed, a mixed blessing with the toxic fumes that once spewed ash over the entire area now gone, but massive unemployment that forced perhaps half of the population to emigrate in search of jobs. People love the clean air, but say they cannot live on it and many long for the old days when they choked on the air but had a few kopeks in their pockets.

In 2006 the OSCE opened an *Aarhus public environmental information Centre* at the Agricultural University (tel. Mobile: 091 75 10 85), director Lilitte Karapetian. The centre exists to educate and empower locals in drafting rational legislation to preserve the environment. Ms. Karapetian is a good source of information on the current status of the environment, and can lead you to others of like mind. She will also be aware of eco-friendly guides in the area.

Bearings The city center is mostly on a grid, main streets running West-East and North/South. The main street is Tigran Metz, which runs west to east parallel to the Pambak river. The city is built off this street in both directions, mostly to the south and uphill. Other main streets are Demirchian, Lusavorich and Vardanants.

To enter the city by car you either cross the bridge on the western end of the city and enter on Demirchian, or East of center at Tumanian, then S to Moskovian or Tigran Mets.

The city is anchored by a central square and Movses Khorenatsi p., a divided avenue that runs N to the train station. Vanadzor's central district, where most of the sights, lodging, restaurants and shopping are located is bound by Shirakatsi on the west, Tumanian on the east, Moskovian on the north and Zorian/Abovian on the South. Within this area, most points of interest lie east of Khorenatsi.

Vanadzor is easy to **walk**. Except for outlying restaurants and monuments (which are a 20 minute walk) the central district is very compact, most points within 10 minutes of each other.

And while you can walk most of the town, **taxis** are as cheap as they are prolific, engineers, professors and old factory managers plying the streets in search of fares. Taxi drivers an excellent source of information and directions, and can lead you to overnights in apartments or private homes. 100 AMD/km is standard.

SIGHTS

The city has a number of pretty buildings, many built from pink tufa quarried in the area, homes featuring stone and wooden siding and intricately carved detailing.

Central (HAIK) Square

The center of town is marked from Haik or Central Square, which is built on the main street, Tigran Mets p. The square has the run down Gugark Hotel, the Mayor's Office and the Inecobank (exchange, wire transfers). The pretty *Khorenatsi p.*, with a central median, runs 3 blocks from the square to the train station.

Takavoranist, is an important archeological site in a park of the same name between Arapnia and Narekatsi pts. Settlements from early Bronze Age, and from the 6th-5 c. BCE it was a seat of royal power. The only gold coin with an image of King Tigran Mets (Takavor Tigran II, 95-55 BCE) was

found here and is on display at the State History Museum in Yerevan. The excavation has long been covered over, but a monument marks the spot, and the park has a couple of cafes and locals strolling in good weather. The route to Alaverdi goes through the recreation area.

Monuments

The **Monument to the 40th Anniversary of Soviet Armenia**, at the end of Haghtanaki p. off of Zoravar Andranik east of the stadium. The tall slender column, almost like a pin balanced on a book, rises at the apex of two diagonal walls sloping towards mountains in the distance once covered with trees, and was built to commemorate the establishment of the Soviet republic of Armenia in 1936.

Monument to Vazgen Sarkissian, in front of the Train Station at the end of Khorenatsi p., was recently erected in honor of the former Minister of Defense, assassinated in Parliament on October 27, 1999. This controversial modern figure is officially recognized by the ruling party as a hero for leading the defense of Karabagh and Armenia against attacks by Azerbaijan. He was assassinated by an Armenian claiming Sarkissian was a traitor to the Armenian people and democracy. His name is polarizing in conversation, people either worship or detest his memory.

This monument is paired with **Karen Demirchian Street**, for the former first secretary of the communist party of Soviet Armenia during its final years, who later made compact with Sarkissian to establish rule in Armenia and oust the reigning president Robert Kocharian. Both were gunned down by an assassin, who is still being tried.

The heavy, evocative **Monument to Exiles**, also opposite the train station, is at the corner of Khorenatsi and Demirchian pts. in Matevosian Park. The black metal statue depicts a muscular fleeing man, his hands clinched in defense or anger, looking over his shoulder to one of two flanking 'arms' of stair steps. The obvious heaviness of the monument was a popular feature of late Soviet statues, some saying it was a comment on the culture of the time it was made, as well as the tragic event it depicted, the exile of World War II soldiers, German prisoners of war, who, on being freed and returning to the Soviet Union, where then branded as traitors by Stalin and exiled to the Gulags at Altai (Siberia).

This marks one of the Soviet Union's rare admissions of guilt, as the party reformed itself

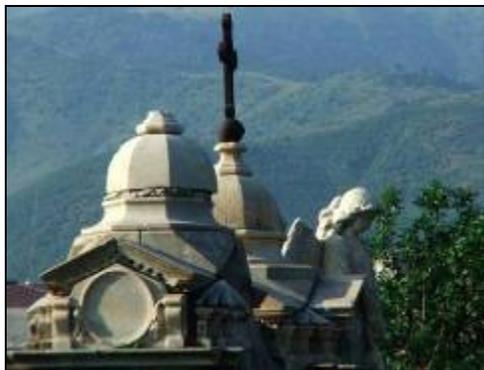
after Stalin's death and "rehabilitated" these lost men. The statue has a distinct malaise about it, the figure, though muscular and defiant, is inordinately heavy, undoubtedly unable to defend himself from the looming figures of what seem to be layer and layers of steps. It is a painful statue to look at, and still brings tears to relatives of the exiles.

The **Statue of Hovhannes Abelian**, on Miasnikian between Tigran Mets and Grigor Lusavorich, is of the actor, director and namesake for the [State Dramatic Theatre](#) (on page 11).

The huge bust in the **Monument to the victims of the World War II** in the park along Shirakatsi (between Vardanants and Tigran Mets) depicts an Armenian soldier, stoically holding a three-tiered 'baton' or torch. The figure is massive, the hand clutching the baton much too large for the figure, almost as large as the soldier's head. In this it falls back on early iconography, where figures were not depicted realistically but symbolically, heads, hands and torsos large or small in relation to the message. The baton is three-tiered, with small arches, and may be representative of the Armenian country.

The figure is stoic, emotionless, there is no hint of victory here. It is estimated Armenia lost half of the 450,000 soldiers it sent in defense of the Soviet motherland, an inordinate percentage among republics. The setting is very pretty, in a park with large trees and flowering bushes.

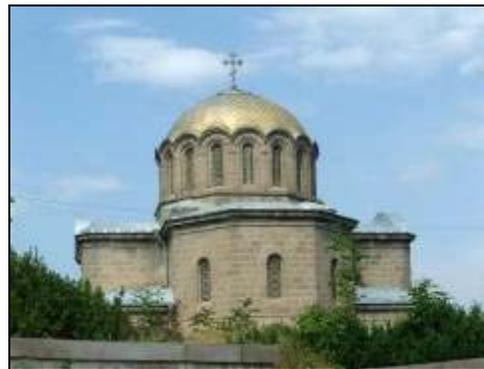
Churches



S. Astvatsatsin (Mother of God) cathedral (Tumanian p., tel. 40488) is at the NE point of the Tumanian-Moskovian roundabout, one block W of

Takavoranist. The 15th-17th cc domed cross type church with semicircular apse. The church is rather well preserved, and has a few nice khachkars from the region. Note the 18th and 19th c tomb monuments among the older khachkars, hallmarks of the Russian period, and some say, a more genteel time. Facing the church on the opposite side of its main square is a row of fireplaces, used for the preparation of matagh (sacrifice).

Russian (Cossack) church, Park after H. Matevosian (end of Khorenatsi p. from Central Square, left of the train station at corner of Moskovian and Matevosian) is a 19th century Orthodox domed church, its pretty brick work covered with a thick slab of gray paint. It still graces the area, its graceful domed hall with winged apses topped by a 12-arched drum (its windows sadly also blocked out) supporting a tapered cupola. If restored, this will be a magnificent example of Russian Empire architecture in Armenia. Closed.



The new **S. Grigor Narekatsi church**, 2/A Abovian, is located next to the Stepan Zorian House museum, in the wedge between Abovian and Miasnikian pts. Narekatsi (b. 951--d. 1003; feast day February 27), poet and theologian, is generally considered the first great Armenian poet and the principal literary figure in Armenia during the 10th century. He was renowned for his mystical poems and hymns, biblical commentaries, and sacred elegies. A major prose work was *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Absolutely nothing appealing about it except the flowers in the surrounding gardens.

The *Primacy (Bishopry) of the Gugarkats* (Gugark kingdom) Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic

Church, 33 Zakarian (tel. 20488) is at the 19th c. **S. Sarkis** church, a domed cross-form type with semicircular apse. The bishopric itself is a monstrous building made from a base of black tufa in a kind of fantasy of prairie style Frank Lloyd Wright and Russian Empire classicism. The whole thing is topped of with Slavic roofs.

To the East and West of town, located several km away on the top of tall hills are **two Matur's (chapels)**, both built upon Pagan shrines. The one to the W is just N of the Stepanavan Hwy turn off, on the R (E). It is called **Kamakatar** ("Katar's Wish") (DD 40.84962 x 44.44181) for the heroine of a local legend, 14 year old Katar who was found on top of the hill praying in the middle of the night by her frantic father. She made her father promise he would bury her at that same spot when she died, which she did that same night. The heads of the surrounding villages (Bazum, Darbas, Ghshla) realized she was blessed by God and decided to build the 13th chapel at the site, interring her underneath. The building is actually the latest incarnation of a Pagan temple to a deity perhaps much like the 13th c Katar.



Near the chapel are a row of saplings bedecked with colored cloth (the fabled "burning bushes" found throughout Armenia, the cloth taken from personal clothing and tied on for good luck). When we visited there was a line of locals trudging uphill to pray and bless their matagh offerings. A difficult hike, the road can be mounted by a Niva, and the views are spectacular.

Museums

Vanadzor Museum of Art (52 Tigran Metz, tel. 43938, email: vanart@freenet.am, open 10-5) was founded in 1974 as a branch of the National Art Gallery. In 1994, was transferred under the

auspices of Vanadzor municipality. The museum collection contains about 2000 European, Russian and Armenian paintings, of which 150 are part of the permanent exposition. The museum regularly hosts exhibitions of local contemporary artists.

Lori Local Tradition Museum (1 Tigran Mets p., tel. 41751, open 10-5) was founded in 1938 at the S. Astvatsatsin (Mother Mary) cathedral. The museum collection is based on archaeological finds from excavations in the area (Kosi-Choter, Mashtots Blur, Takavoranist, Dimatz) and collected by the archaeologist Yeghia Momjyan. After the 1988 earthquake, the museum was relocated to makeshift wagons near the Russian church, research activities were stopped. The museum has 32,000 items categorized into archaeological, ethnographic and modern collections.

Stepan Zorian House-Museum (24 Stepan Zorian p., tel. 43093, Hours 10-5, *Closed for renovation, expected to reopen 2007*) was opened on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian writer who spent his summers and autumns in the house from 1964-1967. This former summer house (with one floor added) was designed by the sons of the writer, the architects Levon and Karen Zorian. The outside entry has a bust of the writer (sculptor Marat Minasian) and a beautiful apple garden. The collection contains about 1,400 items related to the life and the work of the writer.



Born Stepan Yeghia Arakelian in 1889, Zorian tried twice to enter the prestigious Nersisian school in Tbilisi, but was turned down because he knew only two languages, Armenian and Russian. His first poem was published in 'Luma,' entitled 'Starving People.' As a budding writer in Tbilisi he became acquainted with Hovhannes Tumanian and helped organize the Caucasian Union of Armenian Writers.

Largely self educated, he rose to become an editorial assistant and an accomplished translator. A great admirer of Russian writers (especially Chekhov), he translated into Armenian from Russian the trilogy of Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace. Seizing on the temporary easing of restrictions during World War II, Zorian began to write historical (national) novels. Zorian is best remembered for his trilogy King Pap (1944) which was followed by The Fortress of Armenia (1960) and then Varazdat (1967).

The ground floor hall has a panorama of the writer's birthplace - old Vanadzor (former Kharakilisa) and items related to his childhood and adolescence. His study is also on this floor. The second floor has materials related to the writer's literary work in Tiflis, Yerevan and Vanadzor, as well as publications and translations of his books, photographs and documents.

Theatre, Concerts

The scene is fairly sparse, compared to Yerevan, but Vanadzoretsis still try to have a season, even if made of individual artists or performers doing one-off plays and concerts. If folk music or dance is offered—no matter how amateur the troupe—go! This is one field Armenians of every walk of life excel in, the combination of performance, music and audience revelry is not to be missed.

Abelian State Drama theatre, 3/A Taterakan p. (tel. 21855), named after Hovhannes Abelian (1865-1936), a prominent Armenian actor and People's Artist of Armenia. Abelian founded theatrical troupes in Georgia and Azerbaijan during the silver age of Armenian culture, the late 19th-early 20th cc. His work includes a particularly popular production of Othello in 1904 with amateur performers in Shusha, Karabakh. Abelian was a protégé of Petros Adamian, perhaps the greatest Armenian actor of the last hundred years.

The theatre is sadly a shadow of its former glory when it had regular seasons featuring some of the best Armenian actors of the day: Siranush, Abelian himself, V. Papasian, H. Nersisian, and Hasmik are some of the names that locals still wax poetic and argue the merits of. The theatre stopped performing after the 1988 earthquake, and performs intermittently now. The one-off still occurs, if one is performing when you are there, it will be posted around town. 500-2000 AMD

Chamber Theatre "BOHEM", Charles Aznavour Culture Palace, 2 Tigran Mets p., (tel. 43503)

performs some interesting material, plus hosts performances by other artists. 200-1500 AMD.

The Puppet Theatre (Tiknikaiyin Tatron), 110/A Vardanants (tel. 25102) presents puppet shows on Saturdays and Sunday afternoons. 200-500 AMD.

Song Theatre, Charles Aznavour Culture Palace, 2 Tigran Mets (tel. 43503) performs popular singing by young people and children. There are 'amateur hours' for children and young adults that can be as painful to watch as they can be thrilling, but if someone has a featured performance, give it a try. 500 – 2000 AMD.

The Chamber Orchestra, 9 Vardanants (tel. 44832) rarely gives a concert, but worth a stop if they do, or if there is a visiting orchestra. 200-1000 AMD.

The Chamber Choir, 9 Vardanants (tel. 43731) fares better, presenting concerts throughout the season. The choir consists of 33 members that sing traditional, folk and classical music. 200-1000 AMD.

Folk Dance

Horovel State Dancing and Singing Ensemble, email: horovel@vanadzor.net, has performed internationally, in Moscow, Kiev and throughout Armenia. The ensemble performs in Vanadzor from time to time, if they do while you are there, it is worth your while, a great way to sample folk music and dance.

Cinema

The *Cinema* is in the Charles Aznavour Culture Palace, 2 Tigran Mets (tel. 43503), and shares the space with theatre, dance and other events. The cinema shows Russian language films on occasion.

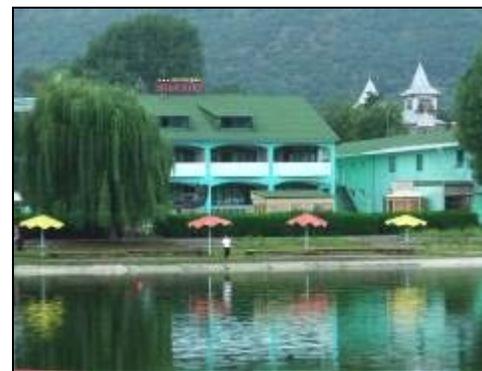


Art

The Aesthetic National Center, Vanadzor Branch, 19/A Miasnikian (tel. 25394, 21050, email: ecenter@vanadzor.net), a group of traditional buildings with wood trim in a sea of grass dotted with modern sculpture, is an art academy for students from the area. Student exhibitions are held throughout the year.

Parks

There are several parks in the city, popular with people of all ages, particularly the elderly and for young lovers. The more popular have cafes. The most popular is probably the **Tandzut River park**, between Sankt Petersburg and Tumanian S of Tigran Mets, which has a lagoon and paddle boats.



The **Botanical gardens** are S of town, on Fidainneri (take Miasnikian S from Tigran Mets past Zorian to Fidainneri then continue on, entrance to the gardens are on the right, at the T-section with Lalvari, and are a favorite haunt for tête-à-têtes.

The **Matevosian Park**, opposite the train station is named in honor of the Armenian writer Hrnt Matevosian (d. Dec 18, 2002), greatly loved by readers esp. in the rural areas and the regions. His works included 'August', 'Trees', 'Our pace', 'Station', 'Gomesh', 'Alis' and others.

The Park and recreation area **Takavoranist** 🏰 is located just across the bridge on Tumanian (veer left at the Moskovian roundabout, then continue about 100 meters). The park includes the Takavoranist Bronze Age excavation site.

Springs

The area is rich with mineral strings, Vanadzor once one of the most popular health spas

(*Sanatoriums*), the *Gugark Spa* still has a season with mineral springs, massage and 4 meals a day, in 12 and 18 day packages, but you might get lucky and get them to sell you an overnight or two.

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 322
Long Distance: 0322 + local number
From abroad: +(374) 322 + local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell
International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + local number
Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0322) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 322 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Train

The Train Station (G'natsk Kayan, 3 Moskovian, tel. 21009) is on Moskovian St, at the end of Khorenatsi p down from Central Square.

The g'natsk runs between Yerevan and Tbilisi stopping in Vanadzor along the way. The train is not fast, it takes about 8 hours to Tbilisi, but it is cheap and can be a nice relaxing way to travel between points. The train makes frequent stops so if you plan your trip right you can get off at Tumanian (Kobaiyr), Alaverdi (Sanahin/Haghpat) or Akhtala and return the next day or wait an extra day and continue. Intercity buses run daily, but you need to plan overnights using this plan. Still, cheap beginning at 1000 AMD.

The train departs from Yerevan on even days of the month at 19:00 and stops in Vanadzor 4-5 hours later (23.00-24.00), arriving in Tbilisi at 09.45. From Tbilisi it departs on odd days of the month at 16:15 and arrives in Vanadzor at 01:00 and Yerevan around 07:35.

By Bus, Minivan

The bus is a cheap means of travel (500-2000 AMD). The vehicles are older and frayed around the edges, but work. Minivans are more covenant, dropping you off pretty much where you want, though they do not have asset schedule, drivers and passengers can tell you when to expect the next one.

Buses stop at Vanadzor on routes from Tbilisi (Alaverdi, Tumanian, Odzun), Tashir, Stepanavan, Giumri and Yerevan. The bus station

(aftokaiyeran) is at 3 Moskovian p. (tel. 43787), just east of the train Station.

Yerevan-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Yerevan Aftokaiyeran on Admiral Isahaakov p. and the Vanadzor aftokaiyeran. 500 AMD.

Tbilisi-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Tbilisi and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans. 2000 AMD

Giumri-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Giumri and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans via Spitak (1000 AMD)

Stepanavan/Tashir-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Stepanavan/Tashir and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans (500/800 AMD)

Tumanian-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Tumanian and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans (400 AMD)

Odzun-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Odzun and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans (500 AMD)

Alaverdi-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Alaverdi and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans (600 AMD)

Dilijan-Vanadzor buses run daily between the Dilijan and Vanadzor aftokaiyerans (400 AMD)

International Bus

Vanadzor-Istanbul bus runs regularly on Friday evenings and leaves from in front of Aerostar Tour Office, 71/2 Tigran Mets (around corner of Garegin Nzhdeh), tel. 22-790 (Lusine), 21-467. Talk to Lusine to arrange, forget her boss, who can be very rude. Fare is \$30 plus \$15 for border crossing, plus whatever the Georgian patrols

manage to wring from your pockets along the way. *In Istanbul*, the bus arrives and departs from the Otto Gari (Otto Gari No: 5/A Aksaray). Istanbul tickets bought at Emniyet Keskibirler Turizm, Kucuk Langa Cad. Emniyet, tel. (0212) 632-7874, (0212) 32 8461, mob: (0535) 716-2384, (0535) 770-8272, email: rayaistanbul@hotmail.com.

The *Vanadzor-Athens* bus runs irregularly, but is popular among the many Greeks in the region, their villages even posting the schedule at the post office for local pick up. It also leaves from Aerostar's offices and costs about the same. Irregular service.

The bus runs via Yerevan, Giumri (tel. 22-311, 40-932), Kilikia Avtogayan (tel. 54-07-56) and Trabzon (tel. 0462-325-5522)

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) leave from the Bus Station at 3 Moskovian p. Minivans do not have asset schedule, they leave when they are full and generally run once a day to outlying areas, ask.

Minivans connect Vanadzor with *Yerevan* (1000 AMD), *Tbilisi* (2000 AMD), *Giumri* (1000 AMD), *Spitak* (100 AMD), *Stepanavan* (600 AMD), *Tashir* (1000 AMD) and *Dilijan* (300 AMD).

By Taxi Taxis are more expensive, but the most convenient way to travel (you decide when you go, and you can stop along the way). If you split the price between 2 or more travelers, it is pretty reasonable.

Yerevan-Vanadzor

From Yerevan, taxis to Vanadzor are located in the parking lot beside **Kino Hairenik (Kino Rossiya)** at the corner of Agatangeghos and

Movses Khorenatsi Pts. Taxis normally charge 15000 AMD for up to four passengers, though be prepared to bargain. Our first taxi driver asked for \$40 then bargained down. If your party is less than 4, you will still be charged the full fare, and some drivers will still want to wait for more paying passengers to fill the car! You can also order a taxi by phone. The going rate is 15,000 AMD. Most Yerevan taxi services provide this service, but we called Kalina (tel 010-555-333). Note even the best can go bad overnight, ask around when you arrive for best taxi service.

From Vanadzor, taxis to Yerevan are at the *Aftokaiyeran* (bus station). Bargaining is harder here, and gets harder the later in the day, when chances of finding a return passenger are more remote. [See taxi list for call taxi](#).

Vanadzor-Stepanavan taxis run on order, around 10,000 AMD. **Vanadzor-Alaverdi taxis** run on order, around 6000 AMD. **Vanadzor-Dilijan taxis** run on order, around 6000 AMD. **Vanadzor-Tbilisi taxis** run on order, around \$30 each way.

By Car Vanadzor is on the east/west highway between Spitak and Dilijan and at the southern terminus of the Tbilisi/Alaverdi road. Highways serving Vanadzor are the M3 (Yerevan – 108 km, Stepanavan – 34 km, Tashir – 64 km), the A330/M8 (Dilijan – 40 km) and the M6 (Alaverdi – 47 km, Tbilisi –121 km). It takes about 1.5 hours to Yerevan, 3 hours to Tbilisi, 2 hours to Stepanavan, 2.5 to Tashir, 1 hour to Dilijan, 1.5 hours to Alaverdi.

Petrol stations and rest stops/kebab stands proliferate the southern end of the highway (Vanadzor, Spitak, Pushkin Pass).

AROUND

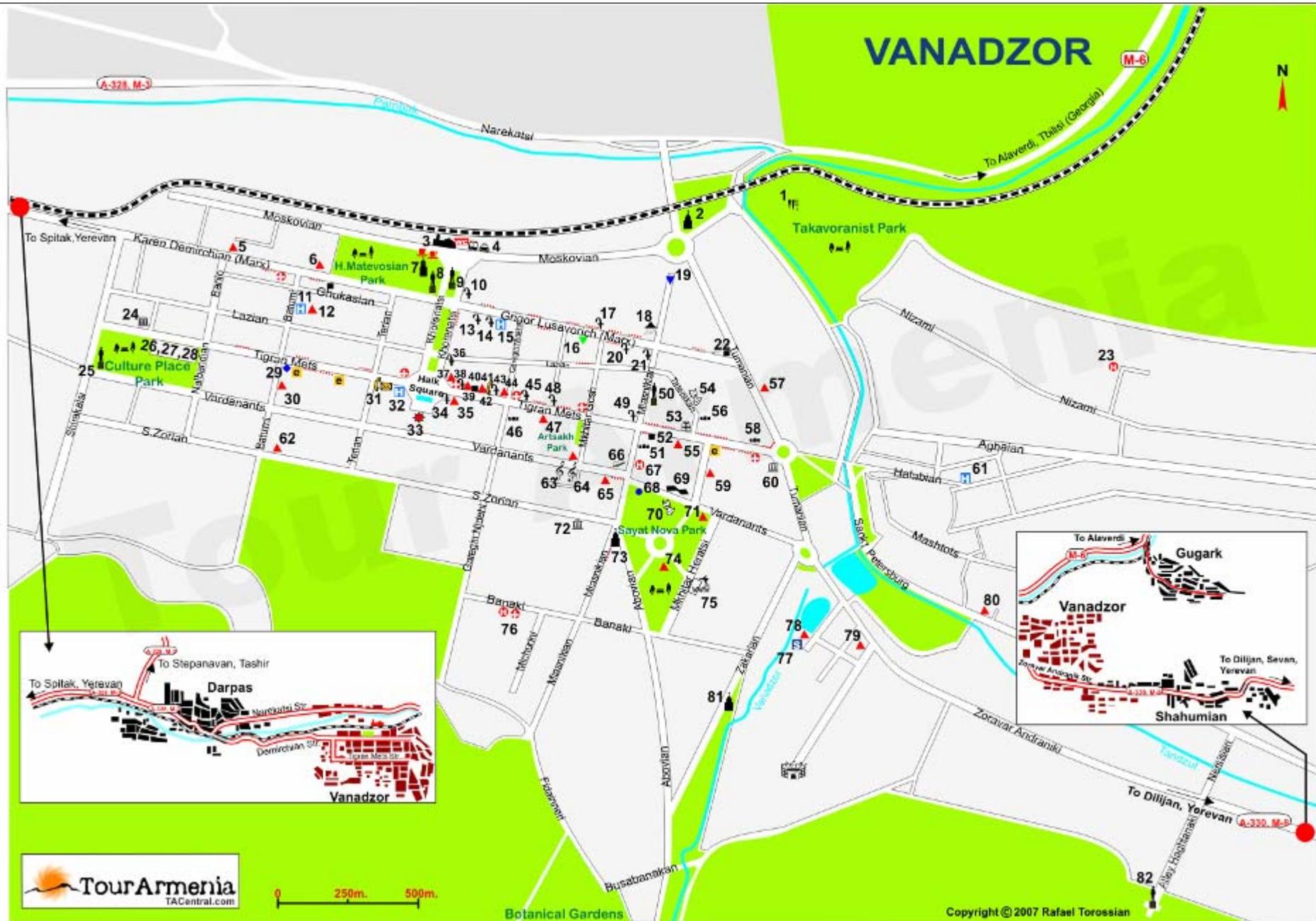
On foot is the best way to take in the city's atmosphere, most worth seeing is within a 15-20 minute stroll. The main streets are Tigran Mets (Spitak-Dilijan road), Khorenatsi and Moskovian. If you arrive by rail or bus you will be on Moskovian p. Directly in front of the rail station is Khorenatsi p, which leads to Haik Square and the intersection with Tigran Mets. Bear left on Tigran Mets to go by the retail area and lodgings. Use our map to navigate other places.

Taxis Vanadzor has plenty of taxis, it seems every professor, engineer and ex-factory manager mans a car trying to make a buck. The services is good, the driver knowledgeable (some speak English), and willing to show off his city. The rate is 100 AMD per km.

Taxis are a good way to travel outside the city, cheapest if you are two or more to split costs, which are per vehicle. Negotiate before starting on your journey. Spitak is 1000 AMD, others are as pre-arranged but figure 100 AMD/km as fair, add 500 AMD per hour for waiting. A full day's trip into region and back should cost around \$20-30, you should buy the driver's meal if you stay out all day.

Taxi Services

Call taxis in Vanadzor are reliable and affordable. 100 AMD/km. *Ars* (tel. 59919, 39919), *Merci* (tel. 40888), *Roba* (tel. 41881) or *Shok* (tel. 58885, 33388). Others are (tel 45454) and (tel. 59919).



Vanadzor Map Key

OVERNIGHT

- 11. Argishti Hotel
- 15. Hotel Gross
- 32. Gugark Hotel
- 61. Hakobian Hotel
- 8. Elkani Restaurant/Hotel

Edik Amirbekian's B&B, 3a Aghbabian
Lusine Simonian's B&B, 26 Orbeli
Haykants Tun Holiday House, 21 Maimekh

SPA

- 77. Vanadzor SAR Aroghjaran

FOOD & DRINK

- 5. Iceberg Restaurant
- 6. Tonir Khorovatz
- 12. Argishti Restaurant
- 30. Jasharan / Café
- 35. Bistro "Shaurma"
- 38. Mona Pizza
- 39. Tea House
- 41. Café "Aleman"
- 44. Ajarakan Khachapuri Café
- 47. Jasharan/ Café
- 55. Café Oasis
- 57. Lori Restaurant
- 59. Jasharan / Café
- 62. Bellissimo Restaurant
- 65. Jasharan Restaurant
- 71. N'shkhark Bakery
- 80. Lahmajo Restaurant
- 74. Park Café
- 78. Elkani Restaurant/Hotel
- 79. Flaminko Restaurant
- 80. Restaurant Lahmajo

OUTDOOR CAFÉ

BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

- 4. Aftokaiyan

TRAIN

- 3. Railroad Station

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY, SCHOOL

- 24. Museum of Local Lore of Lori Pambak
- 60. Fine Arts Museum
- 68. Aesthetic National Center
- 72. Stepan Zorian Home Museum

MONUMENTS - SITES

- 1. Takavoranist – Bronze Age Settlement
- 8. Monument to the Exiles
- 9. Vazgen Sarkissian Statue
- 25. Mon. to Victims of World War II
- 50. Hovhannes Abelian Statue
- 82. Mon. to 40th Anniversary of Soviet Armenia

CHURCHES

- 2. S. Astvatsatsin Church
- 7. Russian "Cossack" Church
- 73. S. Grigor Narekatsi church
- 81. S. Sargis church (Primacy of the Gugarats Diocese)

THEATRES, MUSIC

- 26. Chamber Theatre "BOHEM"
- 27. Culture Center
- 28. Song Theatre
- 54. State Dramatic Theater after H. Abelian
- 63. The Chamber Orchestra
- 64. Chamber Choir
- 69. Cinema ANI
- 70. Puppet Theatre

SHOPS, SHUKA, SOUVENIRS

- 16. Shuka (Market)
- 19. Yarmaka
- 40. Cognac Shop
- 53. Souvenirs

STADIUM, SPORTS

- 75. Natatorium, Swimming

INTERNET, PHONE, POST

- 31. Central Post Office

GOVT. OFFICES, LIBRARY

- 33. Vanadzor Mayor's Office
- 66. Library

BANK, ATM

- 10. Converse Bank
- 13. Ardashinvestbank
- 14. Unibank
- 17. Exchange Point
- 20. Arminvest Bank
- 34. ACBA Bank
- 36. ATM, Incombank
- 43. Sperkasa, Western Union
- 45. Exchange Point
- 48. Armeconombank
- 49. ATM

APOTEKAS

MEDICAL/HOSPITAL/CLINIC - DENTAL

- 23. Vanadzor Hospital #2
- 29. Dentist
- 67. Hospital, Polyclinic
- 76. Vanadzor Hospital Medical Center

PARKS

- Culture Palace Park
- Botanical Gardens
- Sayat-Nova
- Hrant Matevosian
- Takavoranist

PUBLIC TOILET, SHOWERS

- 18. City Baths

SERVICES, PHOTO

- 22. Viva Cell
- 46. Kodak
- 51. Konika
- 52. Aeroflot, Air Tickets
- 56. Kodak
- 58. Kodak

TRAVEL AGENCIES, BUS. CENTERS, AGENCIES

Gushar Travel Agency, 53/59 Grigor Lusavorich p., tel. 22216, 23313, cell: (+374 91) 218654, web: www.gushar.am email: gushar@arminco.com a

locally based travel agency offers 7 day trips in Lori region: D'segh, Odzun & Ardvı, Kober & Hnevank, Akhtala, Lori Berd – Sverdlov (Tashratun), Sanahin & Haghpat, Metsavan. The tours are \$80 for one person or family, or \$350 for

groups of 6-10. They can also arrange Hotel or [B&B](#) in Vanadzor from \$20 to \$80 per night/person including breakfast.

Aerostar Tours, 71/2 Tigran Mets (around corner of Garegin Nzhdeh), tel. 22-790 (Lusine), 21-467,

arranges air fare, local travel excursions and once a year a trip to Historic Armenia in Turkey. They also sell tickets to the bus to Istanbul and Athens.

Adventure, Nature Tours.

Armenian Green Cross Ecological NGO ("AGCE"), 14-10 Batumi (tel. 24066, fax. 58449, mob. + 93 32 32 84) provides full service expert led hiking and camping trips into Lori and the near regions.

See [Adventure Tour Operators](#).

A & L Business Center, 34 Vardanants p., tel. 22719, email: bdsc@lori.am, provides business support but is also a source of information about the region.

Aarhus public environmental information Centre at the Agricultural University (tel. Mobile: 091 75 10 85), director Lilitte Karapetian. The centre exists to educate and empower locals in drafting rational legislation to preserve the environment. Ms. Karapetian is a good source of information on the current status of the environment, and can lead you to others of like mind. She will also be aware of eco-friendly guides in the area.

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

Fire – 101
Police – 102
Ambulance service – 103
Rescue Hot Line - 118
Gas emergency service – 104
Trunk Line – 107
Telephone directory information – 109

Phone, telegraphs

The Central Post Office is at 18 Tigran Mets. Two others are at 6 Grigor Lusavorich and 14 Vardanants. [See Hay Post site for list.](#)

Additional phone services are around town. They advertise in front of their shops, sometimes with internet.

Armentel is at 18 Tigran Mets, (tel. 22112)

The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Internet

Internet cafes provide dial up, computer usage and slow SMS/VOIP services. Venues and prices fluctuate, ask at your overnight for the latest place.

Arminco, the largest internet provider in the country, has an office at 59 Tigran Mets (tel. 23563, 41171), email: vanadzor@arminco.com.

There's an internet café at 11-4 Tigran Mets p. (tel. 42622), email: krsnadamy@yaho.com.

There may still be internet access at the Mayor's Office, established by UNDP supported freenet

IATP, Lori Region Library, is a UN funded training and access program. It is not intended for visitors, but the friendly staff may let you borrow access if they're not too busy.

ATM, Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks, exchange at banks, hotel and exchange points throughout the town.

ATMs are at 22a Tigran Mets, 71 Tigran Mets, 41a Tigran Mets and 38 G. Lusavorich.

ACBA Bank, 22/A Tigran Mets, tel. 23848, 42432.

ARDSHININVESTBANK, 38 Grigor Lusavorich, tel. 40484

ARMECONOMBANK, 59 Tigran Mets, tel. 43153.

INECOBANK, 41A Tigran Mets (tel. 40921, 40924) has a branch at central square.

CONVERSE BANK has a branch at 1 G Khorenatsi (tel. 42910).

UNIBANK, 38/1 Grigor Lusavorich, tel. 40872, 40873.

Shopping

The Univermag is the big round building on Tigran Mets (Miasnikian). Once a bustling Soviet store that theoretically offered everything ("Univer") in one store ("mag" short for "magazin"), it is now closed for renovation due to reopen "soon". All around the building are stores, shops, Mterks (food shops), as well as khorovatz stands, grills, cafes and bistros.



The Shuka (market) is on Grigor Lusavorich at the N end of Miasnikian and sells fresh produce, meat and staples. Prices are cheaper than Yerevan, the food fresher in the summer, atmosphere is pure haggle.

There are food markets throughout the center and a new Supermarket on Tigran Metz, close to the Univermag. The supermarket sells imported foods as well as baked goods and local dairy produce.

Film

There are Kodak and Konica shops on Tigran Mets and the off streets. Film and batteries are in most shops, most of the batteries are useless for digital cameras, be sure to bring enough from home or check voltage before buying. Rechargeable batteries with charger adapted to 220v will work as well.

Pharmacy

Apotekas (Armenian: deghatenehr) can be found throughout the city, some of the better are on Tigran Mets, including one at 55 Tigran Mets, open from 10.00-23.20.

Reading

Local newspapers are found in kiosks on Tigran Mets and other main streets. A unique addition is the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly of Vanadzor, which publishes newsletters and watchdog reports. Visit their office at 59 Tigran Mets (tel. 42268).

Hospital, Polyclinic

For a medical emergency, dial 103.

There are a number of clinics and hospitals in the city, your lodging will know the closest and best for tourists.

Areshian Hospital and Medical Center, 8 Banaki, tel. 23658, 20286 is both hospital and polyclinic.

Vanadzor Hospital #2, 53 Nizami, tel. 53598, 52290

Dentist

Dentists in Armenia are generally quite skilled, though their equipment may be worn around the edges. Still they are absolutely cheap by western standards. There are several dentists in town, check with your guide or overnight venue for recommendation.

Central Dental Polyclinic, 29 Zakarian p., tel. 22401.

Dental Polyclinic N. 2, 13 Nersisian p., tel. 50037.

OVERNIGHT

Hotel

Elkani Restaurant/Hotel, Tandzut River Park, is a large turquoise blue building facing the park's lagoon. Like all restaurant/hotels in Armenia, the rooms are mostly used for late night trysts and diners who had a little too much to drink and need to sleep off their revelry. Still, manager welcomes tourists (and what hotel isn't used for trysts?), the rooms are clean enough, and affordable starting at 10,000 AMD.

Gugark Hotel, Haik Square (tel. 41519, 41511, 41510) functions but barely. The lobby is lit by blinking florescent lights, the office is smoke-filled and a little scary and the new paint cannot hide the threadbare rooms and Soviet mentality of the manger and staff. Still, locals can afford this, and you can meet some interesting people, as well as travelers from other former Soviet Republics and trade stories and cultures. If you want good clean digs with service, use this as a last resort. Basic rooms with water, phone, TV in Lux rooms. The cheapest in Vanadzor but over-priced with SGL/DBL/LUX at 4000/6000/12000 AMD.

Hotel Argishti, 1 Batumi p. (tel. 41552, 42556, 42557) is a three-story building with 14 standard and 3 luxury rooms located in the center of Vanadzor. All rooms have bathroom equipped with all necessary utilities, refrigerator, color TV, telephone and hair-drier. Hotel has restaurant, game room, sauna, international telephone connection, conference room, business meeting room. Rates are by room, Standard/Triple/Luxury at \$50/70/80.

Hotel Gross, 38/1 Grigor Lusavorich p. (tel. 42558, 41552, 41553), www.gross.am, e-mail: hotel@gross.am, has 5 double rooms. Amenities include bar-cafe, parking, conference hall and satellite TV. Rooms include breakfast with SGL/DBL at 12,000/ 15,000 AMD with breakfast.

A. Hakobian Hotel, 1 Halabian p. (tel. 58350) is a boutique hotel of sorts, three rooms with TV, phone, fridge, internet and fax. All rooms include a bottle of mineral water, juice or coca-cola, tea and coffee. Provides lunch and dinner with advance notice. Intercity telephone via "Express-Line". Rooms start at \$17 for SGL

B&B

OJAKH B&B (tel. in Yerevan +374 10 220138), Fax. (+374 10) 220140, email: info@bedandbreakfast.am, or ask once you are in

town has several rooms, 1 non-smoking. Kitchen and bath included, color TV. Host is Ruzan Grigorian. SGL/DBL at \$10/20 and \$6 per child.

MARINE DAVTIAN'S B&B (tel. in Yerevan +374 10 220138), Fax. (+374 10) 220140, email: info@bedandbreakfast.am, or ask once you are in town is located in the center of town, in a sweet wooden-laced house with a garden. 2 rooms are available with SGL/DBL at 7500/14,000 AMD and 3500 AMD per child.

LORI B&B, (tel. in Yerevan +374 10 220138), Fax. (+374-10) 220140, email: info@bedandbreakfast.am, or ask once you are in town) is in a nice stone home with back yard and khorovatz patio. Host is Gabriel Sadaryan. 2 rooms for guests, smoking allowed. One room has a king size bed that can split into two and a TV, the other has a queen size bed. Bath is in corridor for both. SGL/DBL at 11,000/22,000 AMD and 5500 AMD for child.

EDIK AMIRBEKIAN'S B&B, 3a Aghbabian p. (tel. 20875) has 3 Rooms and a sauna 5000 AMD per person.

LUSINE SIMONIAN'S B&B, 26 Orbeli p. (tel. 46268, cell: (091) 534403) is in a large 2-story home and has 5 bedrooms, 2 baths, large kitchen with gas, hot water 24 hours and a garden with beautiful flowers. Guided tours can be also organized.

Boarding/Apartment is a distinct possibility in Vanadzor, the locals crave the income and some have very sweet little places to offer. Ask around and you will have your pick of several rooms or apartments to choose from. 5000 AMD a night and breakfast is fair.

Spa/Sanatorium

VANADZOR SAR AROGHJARAN (32 Zakarian p., tel. 50197, 50198, cell: 91-543673, entry off of Zoravar Andranik) is the old Gugark health resort (sanatorium), popular among the wheelers and dealers of the communist regime, now catering to wealthy Armenians and Russians seeking the summer retreat. This is not a simple overnight, the spa sells 12 and 18-day packages with mineral baths and massage. We have crashed the spas in Jermuk for an overnight and even talked them into providing massage and mineral bath in the service, so it is worth a try!

Rooms have cold and hot water, heating, bathing facilities, toilet, telephone (general in the lobby), TV, refrigerator (lux and deluxe). The complex has bar, tennis, billiard, chess, dancing halls, library.

Travel Package: 18 days including stay, treatment (massages, physiotherapy, etc.) and 4 meals a day for DBL/DELUXE/LUX at 140,000-190,000/160,000/190,000 AMD per person. "Tourist" Package: 12 days including stay, meals and light treatments at 82,000 AMD per person. If you try an overnight, figure offering \$20 per person.

Resort

HAYKIANTS TUN HOLIDAY HOUSE, 21 Maimekh, Vanadzor, email: info@haykhouse.com, www.haykhouse.com, is under construction at time of writing, but slated to open in the next season. The resort is located in a hollow between the Pambak and Bazum mountain ranges, at 1350 m. in an area combining pine tree forests and a mountain lake. Features hinted at are winter sports (skiing, snowboarding) and summer activates (swimming, boating, spa). No price yet.

FOOD AND DRINK

Cafes and bistros are throughout the city, as are khorovatz joints in town and on the Highway to Spitak/Alaverdi. Food can also be bought at mterks and kiosks around town.

\$ = 2500 AMD or less for meal w/o drinks
\$\$ = 2000-3500 AMD
\$\$\$ = above 3500 AMD

Center

ARGISHTI Restaurant, 1 Batumi, tel. 42558, 42557 is part of Argishti Hotel, good food \$\$

Ajarakan Khachapuri Tigran Mets, good Khachapuri, try the Khinkali if they haven't sold out \$

AvanGard, Tigran Mets, good food in a popular haunt of young folks \$ / \$\$

Bakery N'shkhark (Host Bakery), 25 Vardanants, tel. 41011 good jasharans \$

Bistro Shaurma Tigran Mets, cheap eats, sharma \$

Café OASIS, 42 Tigran Mets, tel. 40646, has a salad bar and a pretty upper balcony \$/\$\$

Café Aleman Tigran Mets, good café food \$

Mona Pizza Tigran Mets, good, cheap pizza \$

Restaurant Bellissimo, 9/A Batumi, tel. 20622, 40622 \$\$

Restaurant ICEBERG, 15/A Karen Demirchian, tel. 29030 \$\$

Restaurant Lamahjo, 1/A Sankt Petersburg, tel. 56-818 Cheap eats, and tasty. \$

Tonir Khorovatz, Karen Demirchian (Marx), good BBQ, cheap by the shish, more if you add grilled eggplant and tomatoes (and who wouldn't when it's this good?) \$

East

Restaurant Flaminko, 14 Zoravar Andranik, tel. 55003, good food, pricey \$\$/\$\$\$

Restaurant Elkani, 3/4 Zoravar Andranik, tel. 21919, 51919, good food, good price \$\$

Restaurant Lahmajo, 1/A Sankt Petersburg, tel. 56818 \$\$/\$\$\$

Restaurant LORI, 8 Tumanian, tel. 43351, hosts weddings and celebrations, decent food, a little pricey \$\$/\$\$\$

Outside

On the Spitak Highway, facing the river are a couple of *khorovatz restaurants* serving good wholesome BBQ.

On the Hwy to Alaverdi, about 13.8 km from Vanadzor and around a bend in a forest is the famous *Anush Restaurant/Hotel* (built with a wooden porch and balconies overlooking the tree-lined gorge. Serves great khorovatz and in season (summer) incredible *sunk* (mushroom) soup and *julienne*. Hotel has rooms at 12,000 AMD.



NEAR VANADZOR ▲

Most sites near Vanadzor are part of our Day Trips, but there is a beautiful path (on a rocky road) towards Mt. Depakli, which takes in the area in its rich tapestry of past and present: recovering earthquake villages, refugees from Azerbaijan, farmland, hills, trees and finally, mountain steppes, where eagles and falcons soar, and one of the best views of the Vanadzor valley.

LERNAPAT – (Halavar) – (Verin Halvar/Kilisa) – (Nerkin Halvar/Kilisa) – (Geghadzor)

☞ In Vanadzor, take Demirchian p. out of town W about 4 km to Darpas, continue through and past Darpas as it meanders and climbs about 3.2 km to **Lernapat** (DD 40.82 x 44.3972222) 🏠 🏠

✚ **LERNAPAT** - **Լեռնապատ** (till 1946 Hajighara till 1946, till 1959 Makarashen, elev. 1817m, pop. 26266) has a basilica erected in 1868 and an Early Iron Age fortress on a nearby hill to the west (1694 m). The village is also the home to the Folk Ensemble "Lernapat," made up of older members of the village, a charming group of senior citizens who maintain the tradition of dance through their versions of *Kochari*, *kogh* and *ververi*. The group is featured at the annual Lori Folk Festival, held each year.

Camping in the area, **overnights** in village homes (5000 AMD for B&B is fair).

☞ From Lernapat, continue S following the Lernajur River and skirting the eastern face of Mt. Spitak (2158m.) about 2.1 km to **(Haidarli)**

SIDE TRIP: **(Haidarli - Հայրաշի)** is in the shadow of Mt. Spitak, and deep in the Lernajur river gorge. There are a few stands of trees to the SW and S, the landscape is rugged.



☞ From Haidarli, continue S about 2.2 km to **(Halavar, DD 40.77 x 44.3841667)**

SIDE TRIP: **(Halavar - Հալավար, elev. 1809m, pop. 7460)** is home to refugees from the conflict with Azerbaijan, some of whom moved here just before the earthquake of 1988.

☞ From Halavar, continue S about 1.6 km to **(Verin Kilisa)** and another 0.4 km to **(Nerkin Kilisa, DD 40.7397222 x 44.4230556)** 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: **(Verin Halvar/Kilisa - Վերին Բիլիսա)** and **(Nerkin Halvar/Kilisa - Ներքին Բիլիսա, elev. 2246m, pop. 3702)** are on the Lernajur River, actually a stream this far up the mountains, with mountain creeks feeding the river every kilometer or so. The mountains loom above these villages, Mts. Karakayanin-Bashi (2524m) and Mustafa-Buzaburan (2540m) looming to the east. These are excellent stops for mountain trekking on both sides of the villages.

Camping near the village on the river, in the mountains. **Overnight** in village (very rustic) with excellent village yogurt.

☞ From Nerkin Kilisa, the road gets treacherous, but continues S about 800 meters to **(Geghadzor, DD 40.7397222 x 44.4230556)** 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: **(Geghadzor – Գեղաձոր** - before Giulludara, before that Mollanishlaf, elev. 2246m, pop. 3702) is at the end of the road, a tiny hamlet of a just a few houses, goats and shepherds. The hamlet is at 1898 m. and just 4 km NW of the top of Mt. Depakli, a 4 hour climb following the Lernajur River on its SE course, or further SE to the larger 3081 M Maimekh, an even more challenging climb. From either point the views are stunning; all of the Pambak river valley lies before you, from Spitak to the hills just S of Vanadzor.

The previous name either means "Rose Weight" or "Rose coin" in Turkish, or it is older, from the Sumerian "Gul," to ignite, the warm colors of the mountain sides in the evening sun seems an apt description.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home possible, if they are not up in the mountains with their flocks.

EXPLORING THE REGION ▲

These trips can be done in a single day by car, depending on how many sites you visit and how long you take at each site. All originate from Vanadzor, though with decent overnight venues available at Alaverdi and Stepanavan, you can change the order as you wish. Sites in UPPER CASE can be visited in a single day trip and sites marked in parenthesis () are side trips or too far from the main route to include in a one day trip, and may have to be skipped if you want to finish in a single day.

- 🏕️ camping possible
- 🏠 overnight
- 🍷 food and drink
- ♨️ thermal, mineral spring

TRIP 1: NORTHEAST: ODZUN ▲

MAIN ROUTE 1: VANADZOR – (Pambak) – (Vahagnadzor) – (Vahagni) – (Dzoragiugh) – **HNEVANK** – (Chkalov) – **D'SEGH** –

SIDE ROUTE: (Dzoraget) – (Marts) – (Ikatak) – (Lorut) – (Shanut) – (Atan) – (Tumanian)–

MAIN ROUTE 2: (Tumanian) – **KOBAIYR** – (Hagvi) – **ODZUN** – (Ardvi) – (Mghart) – (Arevatsag) – (Tsater) – (Kachachkut) – (Akori) – **ALAVERDI**

If you hit only the UPPER CASE destinations, you can pair this with Trip 2 for a long day trip. Otherwise take two days and visit the side trips (highly recommended) and overnight at Alaverdi or Avan Dzoraget Hotel by D'segh. The route drives up the Pambak and Debed riverbeds, following the rail line, into Lori's forest monasteries D'segh, Kober, Goshavank and a little of the Tashir-Dzoraget

- 🍷🏠🏕️♨️

Stay: Overnight in Vanadzor, Alaverdi, Avan Dzoraget, Tumanian, roadside restaurant/hotel, village home (rustic).

Eat: Roadside stands and cafes on the Highway, Alaverdi, Tumanian, classy at Avan Dzoraget Hotel.

Springs: Pambak, Vahagnadzor, Vahagni, Dzoragiugh, Chkalov, Hnevank, D'segh, Marts, Lorut, Shanut, Atan, Kobaiyr, Ardvi, Arevatsag, Odzun, Hagvi, Akori, Kachachkut.

MAIN ROUTE 1:

➡ From Vanadzor, cross over the N bank of the Pambak River to the Alaverdi Highway and go N about 6.5 km to **(Pambak, DD 40.3861111 x 45.5319444)** 🍷 🏠 🏕️

SIDE TRIP: **(Pambak - Փամբակ, elev. 2100m, pop. 2670)** has the remains of a medieval castle built on an Urartian fortress, and before that, a citadel from the Bronze Age. The locals are descendants of Armenians from Kars, liberated by Russian troops that defeated Abas Mirza in the battle of Giumri in 1804, the second of several wars between Russians and Persians for control of the country. Pambak is mentioned in treaties of 1804, 1813 and 1826 Pambak was a strategic location for control of the southern Caucasus, the highway lying on a trade route as old as human settlement.

Overnight 200 m from Pambak on the right is the **Maner Restaurant/Motel**, with a few rooms for rent by hour or night, at 5000/10,000 AMD.

Camping on the Pambak river and up mountain terrain towards Karaberd (with ruins of a castle fortress, 2.8 km NW)

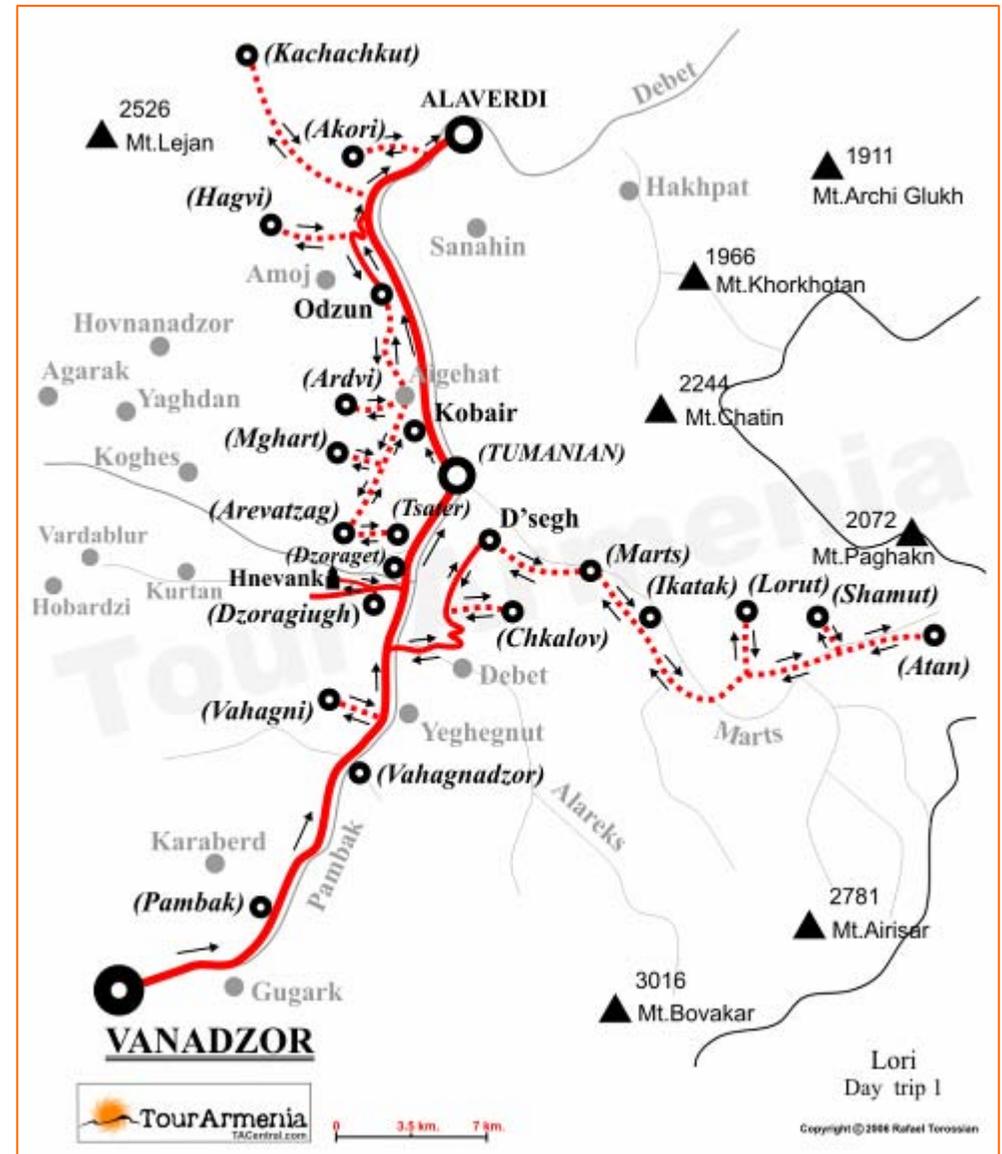
➡ Continue N on the Highway about 7.5 km to **(Vahagnadzor)** 🏠 ♨️

SIDE TRIP: **(Vahagnadzor - Վահագնաձոր - till 1995 Shahali, pop. 1110)** Cross the bridge over the Pambak river to enter the village, which has the ruins of a fort, the so-called "Sisi Berd". Vahagnadzor has the dubious honor of being rated the fifth poorest town in Lori region, and one of the 100 poorest in Armenia. Villagers welcome overnights, amenities are sparse, but the home grown food is excellent and the hospitality warming. 5000 AMD for B&B if fair. There is a good view of Sisi Berd from Shahali Railroad station.

Just S of the village is a mountain road that goes about 2.2 km to the village of Lori, high in the mountains (1263 m).

Food: Look for **Getap** Restaurant which is famous for its Georgian and Armenian food. Full meals at 3000-5000 AMD. If not busy may have a decent room or two for the weary traveler at 5000/10,000 AMD.

Overnight: Just before Vahagnadzor is the small but nice Anush Restaurant/Motel (Tel:



(32-293) 40808) with 4 studio rooms overlooking the Pambak river gorge. Rooms are clean and cheap at SGL/DBL at 12,000 AMD. 24-hour hot water, restaurant. Not a bad overnight for Vanadzor either, since most of the

sites are N of here and Vanadzor can be seen in a day or less.

Near the village are two venues worth looking into: the **Lori Hangestian tun**, a pensionat located 3 km uphill of the river with decent

rooms (basic, clean, hot and cold water) for 6000 AMD per person which includes 3 meals a day, and the amazing **Gugark summer camp**, located below the pensionat in a beautiful wooded area (DD 40.86377 x 44.58929). The camp caters to both groups of children and adults, and welcomes tourists (May-September).

Having survived the economic crash of the 90's plus attempts by local mafia to convert the camp into a casino resort, the jambar renewed itself and now hosts over a thousand children a year of all means (none are turned away for lack of money) in 14-28 day sessions. Children come from Armenia, Georgia, Russia and, in a new experiment at Conflict Resolution, Azerbaijan. It is a delightful camp, with pool, playgrounds, cafeteria, recreation hall and camping facilities.

Not normally on your traveling radar, this camp is one chance to immerse yourself in the local culture that you should not miss and it may just prove to be one of your best memories of Armenia—there is nothing like having dozens of kids clamor all over you with questions or grabbing your hand to dance with their "team" under the stars! Clean rooms are set aside of tourist, with hot water. The cost is very reasonable at 6000 AMD per bed in rooms of 4-6 beds. 3 meals a day are included. For B&B only 2500 AMD. Contact Ms. Danielyan, Director of Gugark Camp in Yerevan at (tel. +010-551915/520421).

Camping in the area, villagers welcome **overnight** (5000 AMD), **Springs** nearby.

➡ Continue N on the Highway about 4.1 km to a road leading W about 200 m to (**Vahagni**, DD 40.9080556 x 44.6069444) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Vahagni - Վահագնի**, elev. 1017m, pop. 3419) The village has a S. Sarkis and a Verin Vahagni (upper Vahagni) church nearby.

Camping near the village and up the Zamanlinksi mountains.

➡ Backtrack to the Highway and continue N about 1.9 km to a right (E) turn N for D'Segh (signposted) then another 2.6 km to the center of **D'SEGH** (DD 40.96418 x 44.64910) 🏠 🏰

🏠 **D'SEGH - ՂՍԵԴ** 🏰 (elev. 1224m, pop. 4125) is a major destination in Lori, though it is often missed by non "Akhbars" who think it

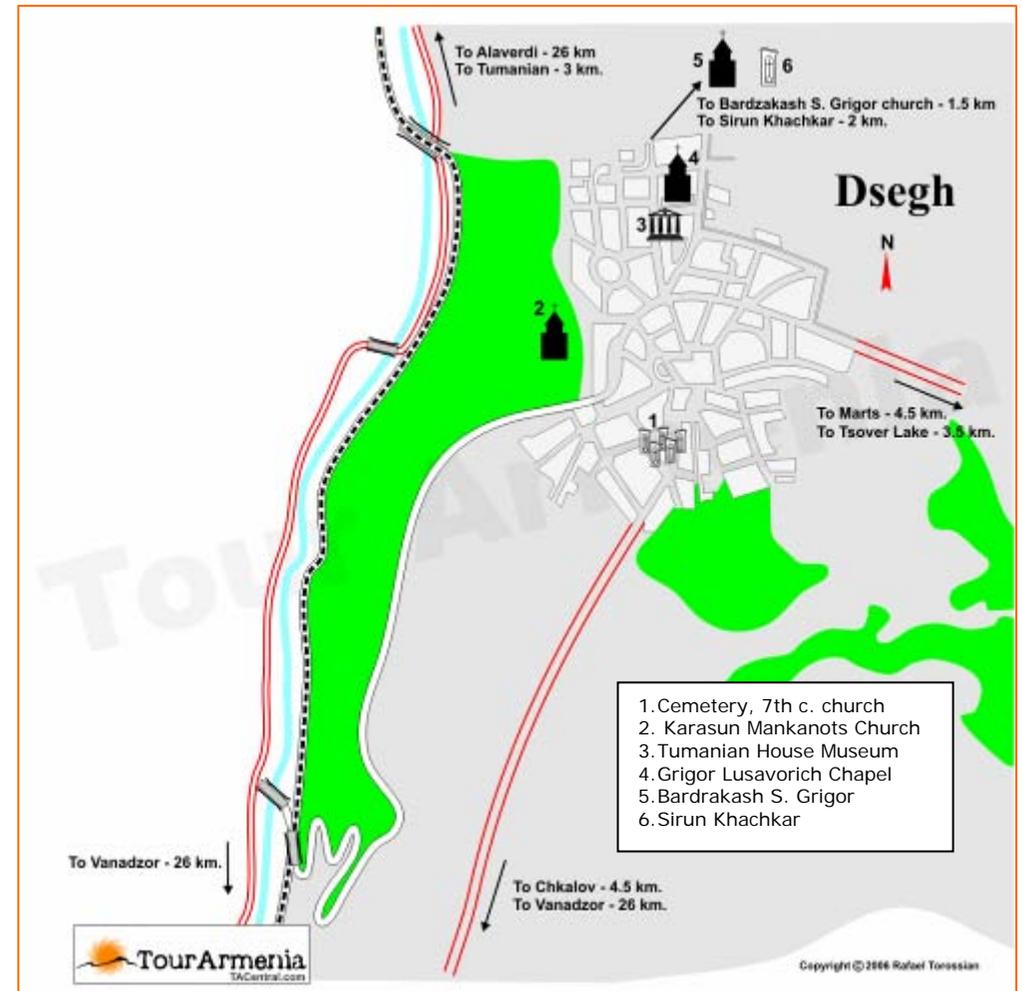
contains only a museum to a writer who wrote in a language they cannot read. It is true the town was the first and last home of the Armenian writer, poet Hovhannes Tumanian (1869-1923), for whom it was named for a few decades (1938-1969), but it is also true that this was one of the richest cities in medieval times, with major vanks, churches, shrines, khachkars, the patrimonial mausoleum for the Mamikonian royal family as well as a house museum dedicated to the writer. It is also the home to some gorgeous scenery and one of the most beautiful monasteries in Armenia, tucked into a dense forest on the River valley.

Guide. An excellent local guide is Karo Ghazarian (tel. 091-72-93-94), who has been taking visitors to the local sites for several years. He is not a professional guide, and in this case that is a good thing, since he combines basic info about the sites with an expert awareness of the geography and local folklore. He isn't n the take, either, but do give him something for his troubles.

Begin in the S of the village, behind the long stone building on your left as you enter the village, where a **cemetery** includes some fine **khachkars**, funerary pillars carved from Bronze Age Vishap (dragon) stones and the foundations of a small single-nave basilica from the 7th c. The basilica was built of basalt with khachkars placed in the walls at a later date. Chronicles mention that the church was built in 655.



Continue to the square, and about 100 m off to the N is the **Hovhannes Tumanian House Museum**, founded in 1939 as a branch of the Charents Literature and Art Museum (Yerevan). The poet was born and spent his young years, as well as the last period of his life in this house. The collection contains close to 300 items from his life and work,



though the vast majority are at the Tumanian Museum in Yerevan. Still, the home, the village and the surrounding wooded mountains, with their fantastic tales and myths that figured in Tumanian's early work are easy to imagine here. Take a bit of a walk through D'segh and its ruined castles and monasteries and caves and you take a bit of a walk into the mind of a creator.

It is hard to describe the impact Tumanian had on Armenian literature, he was one of the great talents to emerge from the 19th c. rebirth of the arts, and probably the most successful writer of

the Armenian Arts era, his fame based mostly on his romantically instilled poems.

Hovhannes Tumanian was born on the 19th February, 1869, in D'segh. Tumanian went to primary school in his native village, then at the Nersessian School in Tiflis, which he left early to pursue his own interests. The Russian poet Valeri Brussov could describe Tumanian as "largely self-educated, and an extremely well-read man if not systematically so. . . in whom genius, are astonishingly synthesized." Until his death in 1923, Tumanian lived in Tiflis (Tbilisi), which up to

the revolution was a great center of Armenian culture. Tumanian was born and died in his ancestral home in D'segh.

Tumanian's writing combined yearnings and disappointments, ideals and the cold hand of harsh reality. Writing in a romantic style, he was equally comfortable with realism and the nationalistic patriotic style popular during the Armenian uprisings of the 19th-20th cc His best work used Armenian symbols (mother, homeland, freedom, death before dishonor) in stories meant to evoke strong emotions in the reader. His work encompassed children's stories and fairy tales, comedy, tragedy, poems and stories and essays on the human condition.



Tumanian's master works include "In the Armenian Mountains," "Armenian Grief" and "With My Fatherland," poems which set the course for future Armenian patriotic poetry. Stories include "The Bet", "The Construction of the Railway" and "The Deer." His epic poems include "David of Sassoon," considered a definitive version of the Armenian epic oral poem of the same name; "Parvana," depicting the yearnings of unquenchable love; "The Poet and the Muse;" "Sako from Lori;" and, finally, "Anush" considered Tumanian's masterpiece.

An example of his romantic period is the poem Coral bead,

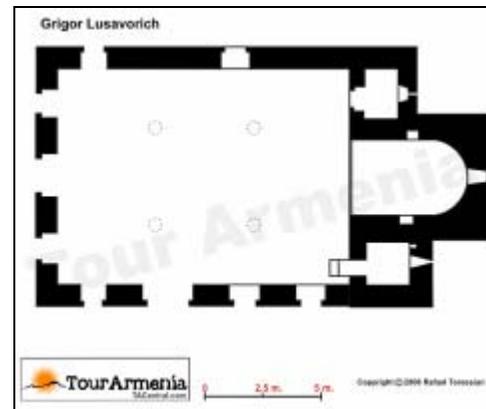
*If I became your coral bead,
A coral bead , a scarlet coral bead,
I would caress you all day long,
And melt , like snow in the sun.
I wish I were your coral bead.
And melt like snow in the sun.*

*If I became your silk shawl,
If I became your veil.*

*I would caress you all day long,
Like the pearl in your necklace.
I wish I were your silk shawl, your veil,
A pearl in your necklace.*

*If I became your guitar,
I would sing for you,
If I became your guitar.
I would sing serenades to you,
And be your beloved.
If I became your guitar,
I would sing serenades to you,
And be your beloved.*

Outside the museum is a bust of the poet (sculptor Aitzemnik Urartu) and a small chapel (architect R. Julhakian) where the poet's heart is buried, the rest of his remains still in Tbilisi, where he lived and worked for most of his life, and died.



Across the road from the museum is the completely reconstructed **Grigor Lusavorich chapel** with graves on its S side. The chapel is a rectangular hall with a protruding eastern apse with two vestibules. What remains of the original building are the wall anchors and the bottom of the vestibule walls, easily detected by the huge basalt blocks. It was rebuilt by the Mamikonians in the 12th-13th c., when they had their emblem (a two headed eagle clutching the lamb of Christ in its talons) placed on the eastern wall, decorated with yellow-red felsite stone and a sun dial placed on the south wall.

It was further renovated in 1900 and again in 1969 when it was converted into an **ethnographic museum**. The museum housed artifacts from excavations at Bronze Age, Iron Age and Medieval

sites in the area, as well as artifacts from the Soviet era. The museum was closed when the chapel was converted back to a religious purpose, the collection given to the Tumanian Museum, which stores them until a more suitable space can be constructed. Light a candle in hope this will not take as long as it took to reclaim the chapel.

To the N of D'segh, on its plateau (not far from the path to Bardzrakash S. Gregori Monastery) is the "**Sirun Khach**" on a three step pedestal (DD 40.97976 x 44.66935). This is a masterpiece of khachkar carving, its front dripping with front is covered with delicate ornamental patterns, rosettes and geometric details.



The undated inscription on the khachkar says it was carved for "Teri's son Hairadegh" but it assumed 13th c. due to pedestal construction and the dates of surrounding monuments.

Pull out a 5000 AMD note and just right of the Khachkar. Position yourself just so and you will find, in the distance, the same landscape that Martiros Sarian painted when he visited D'Segh, and which landed on the Dram note.

About 500 m S of the Sirun khach, in the River canyon through heavy forestland, is a masterpiece of Armenian architecture, the rarely visited **Bardzrakash S. Grigor Monastery**. It is about 1.5-2 km from the village on the north road (look for a large water pipe in an opening the canyon ridge tree line. The path down begins there, DD 94977 x 44.58734, elev. 1077m) To get there follow a narrow rocky path down into the gorge, a 500m hike over steep terrain.

The path is enchanting, combining thick forests of trees, vines and ferns with a large collection of

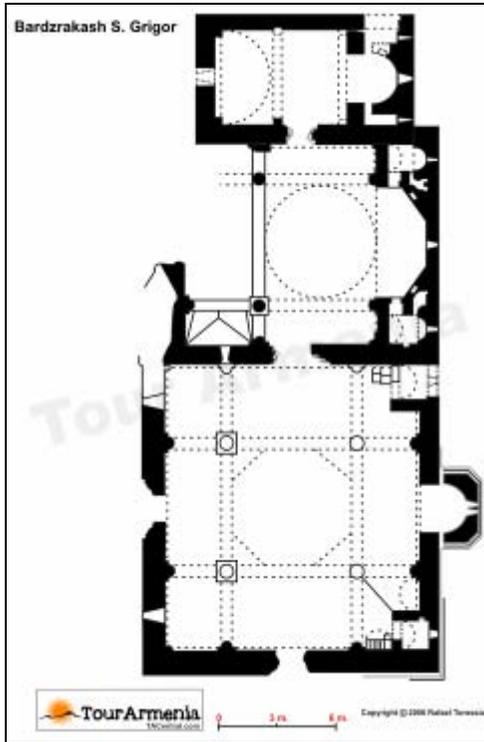
khachkars from the village (erected by an enterprising local who received sponsorship to create the "forest of crosses"), a picnic spot with mammoth stones used to grind grain for the table, and a wonderful Pagan shrine half way down dedicated to a sacred Crow that saved a young couple's life by diving into their porridge to attack a venomous snake that had slipped into their soup (!).

Another great spot is the **cold mountain spring** you pass two-thirds of the way down, famous to locals as the spring in the film "Gikor" after the story by Tumanian. In the film, the father of a poverty stricken family sends his son to Tbilisi to find work and have a better life. The family he entrusts his boy to banishes the boy to the elements and he soon dies of exposure and starvation. The father, en route to retrieve his son's body, stops at this spring, the same he and his son drank from when they first went to the great Armenian city to the North.



Bardzrakash S. Grigor Monastery.

This is a true forest monastery, almost a fairytale location with the wild flowers wreaking havoc over the thick grass in springtime, the river flowing by below and the trees standing sentinels over the faded walls and foundations of the complex. An inscription on the lower part of the church walls dates the start of construction to the year 1221, by order of 'Hamazasp (general) Mamikonian's grandson and Sarkis' son Mertzpan during the reign of the Georgian Queen Tamar's son Giorgi IV in the dukedom of Ivaneh Zakarian'. The monastery is assumed to have ended in the mid 13th c. when the last inscription on the walls was made.



associated with the construction of the eastern apse of the church.

The **single nave church** is connected by its southern entry to the North wall of the main church, which has its entries on the south and west. It was built from blocks of basalt and felsite, the inside plastered over.



pop up in inscriptions found at Sanahin, confirming their shared work. The last inscription was made in 1247 and is assumed to represent the gavit's completion.

South of the monastery is a **medieval cemetery** with the remains of a number of 13th c. **khachkars** and the patrimonial graves of members of the Mamikonian princely family.

S. Harutiun chapel is in the cemetery, its three walls and roof made from large slabs of basalt. The entry forms the 4th wall, opening it to the west. The roof is stepped, indicating it was also a pedestal for a khachkar, now gone. Chapels as khachkar bases were replaced with simple pedestals beginning in the 12th c., making this a rare example of late use of the chapel roof.

The inscription on the east wall says it was constructed in 1234 for the Precept Hovhanes and his brother Sarkis. There used to be a secondary chapel on the south wall, now gone save a parts of its wall and an inscription saying it was built for the preceptor Gevorg during the reign of Vahram Mamikonian.

Not far from Bardzrakash Monastery, on the left bank of the Marts River (just up from the road crossing to Marts) is the top of a **Medieval bridge** built for the Mamikonians.

The name refers to the showing of a new born 40 days after birth, hence the visit to the Christ child by the Magi. The path is rocky and difficult to travel but well worth the stop to see the incredible stalactite vaulting over the gavit door and the monumental carvings on the façade.

Camping in the forest, along the river. Overnight in town home possible (5000 AMD) or at Dzoraget (see next entry).

➤ **SIDE ROUTE:**

The side route follows the Marts River basin to Lori's furthest east village Atan. The roads are poor, give yourself half a day for this side trip, as you climb through wild forests and mountain passes to remote and rarely visited villages and great jumping off points for mountain hiking and camping. Nature vies with history for pride of place.

➤ *From D'segh follow the East village road across the D'segh plateau then as it switchbacks down the sides of the gorge into the Marts river valley and across the river about 4.6 km to (Marts - Uung, DD 40.9569444 x 44.7044444) 📍🗺*

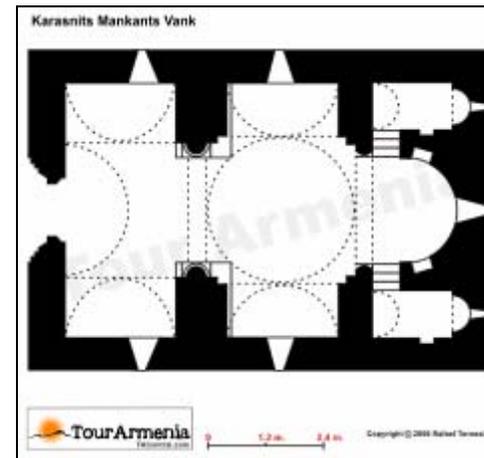
SIDE TRIP: (Marts, elev. 1272m, pop. 4084)
Above the village on the right bank of the Marts River is a khachkar dated to 1285. The forests around you bear scars of an impending ecological disaster; the village is situated on a hill with soil that has eroded from poor farming techniques and loss of forests. Villagers are poor and depend on the lumber trade in order to live. The wood industry is centered in these forests, illegally felling trees in plain sight of the forest authorities who are forced to sell the forests to make up tier budget (and also to feather their own caps with the central government). The most valuable sorts of trees are milled and exported from Armenia - to France for oaken casks, to Italy for wine-barrels, to Germany for the interiors of Mercedes cars, to Spain and the United Arab Emirates for furniture and hardwood floors. Ironically, the EU, which forbids illegal deforestation in its own borders has not taken steps to prevent its member states from doing the same in an EU candidate. There are enough forests to still overawe you in the area, the further east you travel the more remote the wilderness becomes.

And on an ambiguous but hopeful note, reforestation efforts by the [Armenian Tree](#)

The main church is the 13th c. **S. Astvatsatsin** (Holy Mother of God), as written in an inscription on the walls. Astvatsatsin is situated between a single nave church (7th?) and the gavit. Preserved are the southern and western parts of the walls with pillars and sections of flying arches over the southern corner, and a riot of fragments of walls, arches, arcature details, geometric and ornamental carvings, etc. Nothing remains of the former dome which was supported by a single pair of free standing piers, a refinement of the dome cross beginning in the 7th c. and refined in the 12th-13th c. These arches, in a North-South orientation divided the almost square (9.6 x 10.2 m) hall into three naves. The middle nave is three times wider than the outer naves with a semicircular apse on the eastern wall, the others are finished with two-story semicircular apses, their entry on the 2nd floor from the central bay.



The gavit was built apart from the church, again not usual for this period. Inscriptions on the walls mention the craftsmen (Hamlik, Mamkan, Zatkhar, Asanet, etc.) who worked on the separate parts of the gavit (sacristies, pillars). These same names



NW of the village in the Debed River valley at a place called "Takter" are the ruins of the 12th c. **Karasun (karasnits) Mankants Vank (40 Days Convent)** with some of the foundation remaining.

[Project \(www.armeniatree.org/\)](http://www.armeniatree.org/) and private donors in partnership with local communities shows promise, though villagers notoriously prefer fruit trees over the native species. The project is still experiencing teething challenges, often planting seedlings in unprotected areas so that the majority are eaten or succumb to the elements. More serious efforts are required, as well as capturing local interest in preserving their heritage.

Camping in the forests and on the riverbed.
Overnight in village homes (5000 AMD)

➡ From Marts continue SE on the road about 3.8 km to (**Ikatak - Իկատակ**) 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Ikatak**) has a 1255 monastery of the same name on its southwestern end.

Camping in the forests and on the riverbed.
Overnight in village homes (5000 AMD).
Springs in the village.

➡ From Ikatak continue SE about 4.8 km to a place where it abruptly turns N (a smaller road continues E towards Atan), take the N route as it follows the Lorut river about 1.8 km to (**Lorut, DD 40.9388889 x 44.7725**) 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Lorut – Lnznun** – formerly Babajan, elev. 1510m, pop. 4300) is a source for some impressive Bronze Age artifacts from an excavated pottery workshop and cemetery (barrow graves). The pottery uncovered is of the type and design found in the Kura-Araxes Cultures of the mid Bronze Age (2600-2300 BCE). The village also has two medieval bridges, a small S. Sarkis hall church with semicircular apse on the east end and a medieval settlement with 10th-13th cc khachkars. The village is slightly attached to the 13th c. historian Kirakos Ganjaketsi who, while studying under the historian Yovhannes Vanakan (d. 1251, hid on some nearby caves while running from Jalal al-Din in 1225, staying there until 1236 when a Mongol army under Molar occupied Tavush (of which Lorut was a part). Locals know the caves and it is possible to take a guided climb to them.

Camping in the forests and on the riverbed.
Overnight in village homes (5000 AMD)

➡ From Lorut back track to 1.8 km then take the small, dirt road E about 400 m to a fork in the

road, take E/NE path as it switchbacks up the hills about 1.9 km to (**Shamut, DD 40.9333333 x 44.7833333**) 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Shamut - Շամուտ**, elev. 1407m, pop. 4300) has a 17th c. church and 18th c. outpost fort built under the Safavid domination to protect against competing Muslim incursions from Azerbaijan and later, Russian advances.

Shamut has the dubious honor of being the focus of US Dept of Geological Survey study into its Oil Shale Coal reserves, considered the largest in the country and part of a study by the US to build a 50 megawatt power station using Armenia's coal. The coal is of such poor quality with a high pollutant content it was deemed insufficient for the project, which may just save the area from being strip-mined. For now it seems safe.

Camping in the forests and on the riverbed.
Overnight in village homes (5000 AMD).
Springs in the village.

➡ From Shamut backtrack 1.9 km then take the road E about 3.5 km to the end of the road at (**Atan, DD 40.9338889 x 44.8491667**) 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Atan - Աթան**, elev. 1801m, pop. 3867) has a small church in the village and SW of the village some ruined medieval secular buildings. The forests are thick and heavy here.

Camping in the forests and on the riverbed, also up Mts. Paghakn (2072 m), Hibrsanlikial (2050 m) and Gilak (2039 m). **Overnight** in village homes (5000 AMD)

➡ Backtrack past Shamut and Lorut roads to Marts then take the N/NW road that switchbacks up the hills about 3.4 km to (**Karinj, DD 40.9733333 x 44.6886111, elev. 4117, pop. 4197**) then past Karinj another 4 km to **TUMANIAN** (DD 40.9633333 x 44.6516667) to rejoin the main tour.

MAIN ROUTE (continue from D'segh): ⚡

➡ From D'segh backtrack to the Highway and turn right (N), continuing about 2 km (or 100m from the Dzoraget sign, 200 m from the tunnel) and at the road sign for the tunnel look for a sharp Left (NW) fork that heads uphill on a rocky dirt road that switchbacks as it ascends. This is the Dzoragiugh/Karnut Road, which eventually joins

the Stepanavan Hwy. Follow it about 2 km to the top of the hill on your right in and around a group of low trees and bushes are the (**Dzoragiugh Iron Age Fort and medieval cemetery** (DD 40.9500 x 44.5902)

SIDE TRIP: (**Dzoragiugh Amrots and Cemetery**) is not that easy to find, but you can chart it by your first glance of the stunning vista of the mountains ("stone curtains") on the opposite side of the river. The fort is mostly gone save a few cyclopean stones, but you can detect the outline of a pre-Christian/early Christian temple in the grass as well as a few evocatively carved tombstones scattered around the low hillock.



➡ Continue on the same road about 750m to a L (S) fork to (**Dzoragiugh, DD 40.9516667 x 44.6052778**) 🏠 🏠

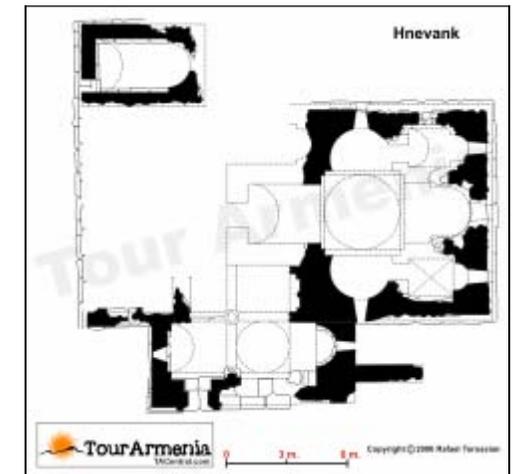
SIDE TRIP: (**Dzoragiugh - Զորագյուղ**, formerly Taraghent, elev. 1239m, pop. 3683) is a small mountain village surrounded by meadowlands and a few stands of trees. There are no historic sites inside the village, most continue past the turnoff to enter the valley and visit Hnevank.

NOTE: From Dzoragiugh the road continues W parallel to the Dzoraget River to Hnevenak, Kurtan, Vardablur, Giulagarak, with a number of cyclopean fortresses, excavations, castles, monasteries, churches and villages, eventually ending up at Stepanavan. The road is a slice of history from the each period of Armenia's history.

Camping in the area and on the riverbed.
Overnight in village entirely possible (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair).

➡ Either continue on or backtrack to and turn L (W) on the Kurtan road above the river valley and follow it about 3.3 km to where the road begins to climb a mountain in a switchback. At the first switch, a sign (Armenian) notes the reconstruction of the vank, just where a new dirt road descend rapidly into the valley at **HNEVANK** (DD 40.95252 x 44.58434) 🏠

✠ **HNEVANK – ՀՆԵՎԱՆԿ** ⚡ Monastery (elev. 1055m) lies on a promontory over looking the Dzoraget River just after it merges with the Ghergherchai. The **church** was originally built in the 7th c. but substantially renovated in the 12th c. during the reign of Smbat Kiurikian/Orbeli, founder of the Siunik Orbelian family. A cenotaph on the drum of the dome ascribes this to 1144.



The triconcha was rebuilt in the 12th c., when the drum of the dome was raised, ruining the originally balanced proportions of the church building, and an apsidal (secondary apse) took the place of the entire western wing. The two apsidioles on the eastern end reduced the width of the altar apse. Square recesses were put between the altar apse and the apsidioles, cramping the original spacious feel. The northern apsidal had a barrel vault, the southern a groin vault (two barrel vaults at right angles). An apsidal niche is in the western end of the northern wing. The dome is octagonal on the

outside, fan vaults making the transition from the square to the drum.



The **gavit** just off the western front is late 12th c. and a number of support buildings ring the area. The monastery is beautiful, finely detailed with geometric forms popular at the time, still showing its 7th c. origins in the detailing around the window frames, designs popular in the latter half of the 7th c. (as at Zvartnots, Talin)



The church is again being renewed, its long lost (to the desistudes of time and the itchy fingers of local villagers) skin of ivory stone being replaced with a newer layer of white stone, the original source of stone buried by earthquakes. The new stone fairly gleams in the sunlight, almost blinding you as you approach the monastery, giving a small glimpse into what it must have been like when it was first built.

Camping near the monastery and on the riverbed.

↻ **Shortcut to Arevatsag:** There is a shortcut across the river to Arevatsag and Odzun, if you want to skip D'segh and environs: Continue down the gorge to the river and across the bridge, then go E following the river and up the side of the river canyon (note defense berds on either side of the hills) in a series of switchbacks to the top and Arevatsag (total from Hnevank about 4.4 km).

↻ Backtrack to Dzoragiugh, then back to the Alaverdi Highway and cross the Highway to the D'segh road, and continue about 1.5 km to the Debed turnoff S, do not turn but continue on as it switchbacks and goes about 2 km to small mountain road that starts climbing to the NE (right), take that about 1.8 km to **(Chkalov, DD 40.9344444 x 44.6533333)** 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: **(Chkalov - Չկալով -** till 1936 Saghbaghdi, elev. 1264m, pop. 3852) was named after Valery Pavlovich Chkalov (1904 – 1938) a test pilot and 'Hero of Soviet Union.' In 1936-1937 he completed non stop flights from Moscow to Island Udd (now Island Chkalov in the Far East), and from Moscow to Vancouver (USA) via the North Pole. Chkalov died testing a new fighter in 1938.

The starkly beautiful village lies on Mt. Tzovatsash, and has some beautiful 13-15th c. **khachkars** attesting to a Medieval religious community, now mostly forgotten by the impoverished villagers who remain, half the homes stand empty, as they do in other villages in Lori. Cheese and lavash are excellent here, and it makes a good jumping off point for hiking the eastern mountains.

Overnight in village home (5000 AMD for B&B) and **camping** in the beautiful area.

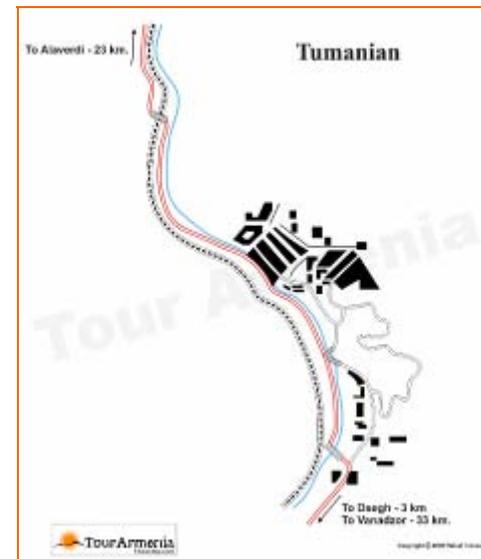
↻ Backtrack to the Alaverdi Highway and turn Left (N), continue through the tunnel into **(Dzoraget)** 🏠 🗺️ 🌊

SIDE TRIP: **Overnight (Dzoraget - Չորագետ -** till 1978 Kolageran, pop. 279) is the location of a monolithic gray hulk, the luxury **Avan Dzoraget** Hotel and conference center (Tel: +(374 10) 54-31-22, 54-34-22, 54-78-88, Fax +(374 10) 547 877, e-mail: hotels@tufenkian.am, URL: www.tufenkianheritage.com) has 34 rooms in a renovated fire station on the Debed river. Amenities include swimming pool, 24 hr hot and cold water, restaurant, spa, and a gymnasium. Not cheap with rooms between 30,600 and 74,280 AMD.

Camping on the river bed (don't get too close to the lodge, they will chase you off), mineral **springs** nearby.

↻ From **Dzoraget** continue N/NW for about 3.3 km to **(Tumanian, (DD 40.9633333 x 44.6516667)** 🏠 🗺️ 🏠

SIDE TRIP: **(Tumanian – Թումանյան** till 1951 Dzaghidzor, elev. 1136m, pop. 4125) is a sad, deserted shell of its former self, when it was an industrial city partially hidden from the highway behind a ridge of hills. The town began in 1943 with the construction of Tumanian fire brick factory, built to process the fire-proof clay from mines near Dzaghidzor, becoming the factory town of Dzaghidzor in 1949 which was renamed Tumanian on July 4, 1951.



Both the factory and initial dwellings were built by German prisoners of war. The town was an important industrial center, famous for its fire brick, pure oxides and carbide-siliceous heaters. There was also a (dormant) textile factory. Its fall was sudden and complete with the end of the Soviet Union, both of the factories closing. The closing of the factories has had the unintended benefit of cleaning the air from noxious pollution, but the unemployment rate is massive (90% by most reliable estimates) and

40% of the inhabitants leaving for work in Yerevan or abroad. Illegal logging in the area threatens to create a second crisis, destroying the eco system that supports the area and eroding the thin mountain soil, causing massive mud slides each rainy season.

Reforestation programs in the area may be the last hope to revive this community, though the rate of illegal logging far outpaces any efforts to replant hard wood species. In 1996 the town was designated a city, in hopes of reviving its fortunes, though the locals left in droves, leaving behind perhaps 30% of the original population.

There is a closed Museum of Local Lore which you can peek through the windows to see the collection of as well as gong inside, and a library in the town. There is one Mterk in town, no Apotekas, no other services. This is a sad impoverished place, in the shadow the luxury hotel nearby.

PRACTICALITIES

Area code is 253

Post, Phone, telegraphs

The Central Post Office is in the center.

The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Supplies can be bought at the new Mterk in town, on the square.

Overnight in the town entirely possible in apartments and homes. Ask around, they are everywhere. 3000 AMD for B&B is fair. Camping up the hills NE of town, or on the road to Karinj.

Near the Kobaiyr railway station, within the city limits, one can see the medieval Kobaiyr Abbey.

↻ From **Tumanian** backtrack to the Alaverdi Highway and continue N/NW for about 600 m to **Kobehr Railway station**

SIDE TRIP: **(Kobehr Railway Station)** is a stop on the Yerevan-Tbilisi rail line, on even number days of the month it goes to Tbilisi (leaves Yerevan 19.00, stopping in Vanadzor 4-5 hours later) and on odd number days of the month to Yerevan (leaves Tbilisi 16.15 and stopping at Vanadzor 01.00 and Yerevan 06.00). Ask at the station for local stopping time, and figure on it being late.

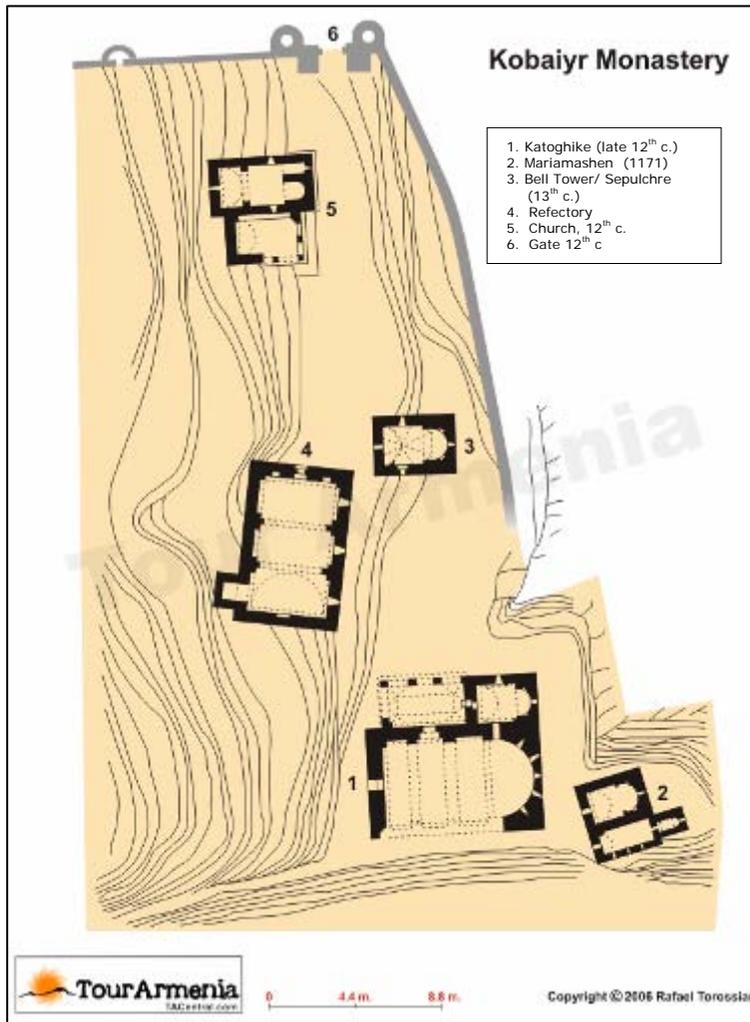
TAKE THE TRAIN: for an interesting ride with locals of all ages, use the train from Vanadzor to visit Kobaiyr and points north. There are DAILY runs between Airum and Giumri (still called Leninaken by locals) stopping at Vanadzor (Kirovakan), at 100 AMD from Vanadzor to Kobair the cheapest ride in the country (300 AMD to Giumri). The elektrichka (train) is punctual, leaving Vanadzor at 9.00 and returning from Kobaiyr at 18.50. From Kobaiyr it is 1 hour to Vanadzor, 2 hours to Giumri.

From Kobaiyr you can hike to the highway and catch a taxi or minivan at Tumanian, or hike throughout the area and wait for the train back to Vanadzor.

Note the name of the station is "Kobehr" but the vank is named "Kobaiyr" (ko-buy-er)

Camping in the area. **Overnight** in village homes (5000 AMD). **Springs** in the village.

➡ About 80 m before the railway station is a paved spur that running by the side of the rail tracks. Over the tracks are hundreds of stone



steps and rocky paths leading through the forest up the steep hill. It is about 15 minutes for the fit hiker, 30 for the rest of us. Continue uphill through the cluster of houses clinging to the mountain slopes and past the fountain (halfway) to **KOBAIYR ABBEY** (DD 41.00613 x 44.63713)

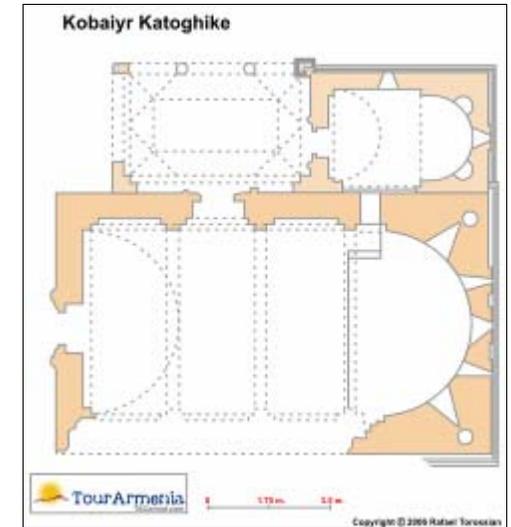
☒ **KOBAIYR - ՔՈՒԲԱՅՐ** ("KO-BYE-ER", Russian 'Kobehr') is a gorgeous monastery, perched high on a shelf above the Debed River with magnificent views of the tree-covered valley. Difficult to get to (imagine carrying blocks of basalt up that steep hill you just climbed), the Vank rests on a spot used by humans for thousands of years, Bronze and Iron Age artifacts having been uncovered on the monastery grounds. Dozens of rocks in the immediate environs seem to weep, mountain springs dripping from their fissures to form creeks running to the Debed. The ruins just drip with atmosphere, its intricately carved stones seeming to rise from the canyon walls, trees and vines covering the remains.

Just uphill from the RR station are a few **houses** you pass through on the way. One facing you is inhabited by the indomitable Rozanna and her mother, both cheerful members of the mountain community and a wealth of local information. About halfway up is a **small spring** with local stones placed in a mosaic around it. Rest here for the second part of your journey, which is more strenuous.

History

The origin of the name is believed to be a combination of the Georgian ("kob") and Armenian ("aiyr") words for cavern. And the surrounding hills are full of caves, many of which were used by hermits and ascetics beginning in the 5th c. when the first church was built on the grounds of a pre-Christian temple.

Its history is closely connected to the beliefs and politics of the most famous medieval Armenian feudal houses - the Kiurikians, the Bagratunis and Armenian branch of the Georgian Zakarians (Kings Shah'n'shah, Giorgi, Mkhargredzeli), the latter of which brought Chalcedonian congregations into Kobaiyr and Akhtala in the mid 13th century. This introduced Georgian elements into the architecture; inscriptions in Georgian language and the fresco style, distinctly Orthodox. Kobaiyr was also one of the most important seats of written language and cultural centers in Armenia, housing the 12th c. chronicler David Kobaiyretsi, while Vartan Areveltsi and others described Kobaiyr as an important cloister by the middle of the 13th c., when it passed from the Kiurikian princely family to the Zakarians.



Complex

The cloister was surrounded with a serf (fortress) wall, of which sections 4-5 m tall survive in the N and NE parts of the complex. The **main entrance** was a vaulted 'tunnel' with cylindrical towers. The complex consists of three **churches**, a **chapel**, a **refectory** and **khachkars**. The churches are in partial ruins, though enough remains to detect how grand they must have been.

The main church, the **katoghike** is a partially ruined large single nave church (late 12th c.) with only the semicircular apse, the north and west walls and the lower part of the south walls remaining. A cylindrical roof on arches covered the long hall. Later a chapel with vaulted roofing was added to the north wall.

The main entry is on the west, and was decorated with an intricately carved door frame. The facades were crowned with concave cornices elaborately carved with ornamental details, rosettes and geometric patterns. The interior walls were plastered and painted with **frescos**. The frescos you see now are magnificent reconstructions of the original frescos, applied in 1971.

The frescos on the apse are in three rows: the Virgin Mary and archangels at the top, the Eucharist in mid-row and figures of saints at the bottom. On the apse walls are figures of prophets, the best preserved the prophet Elijah on the northern apse. The chapel had frescos as well, in the same three-row composition. Also on the north side is a tunnel, with only the pilasters on three corners and the bases of two intermediate pillars on the north surviving.



To the east of the katoghike, the **Mariamashen Church** stands on the edge of the cliff, part of it having collapsed into the canyon. It is a smaller single nave church with simpler decorations. According to an inscription at the entrance it was built for Mariam, daughter of King Kiurikeh II, in 1171 but became the property of the Georgian Orthodox Zakarian family soon thereafter.

The **bell-tower/sepulchre** is north of the katoghike, in the middle of the complex, a square hall with an eastern Apse taking up the entire wall. According to a Georgian inscription on the southern wall, Amirspasala son Shahnshah Mkhargredzeli and his wife Vaneni had it built in 1279. The tower was crowned with an eight-pillar belfry, from which a row of the base and some of three pillars remains. Note the little spring flowing within, cons sided sacred and possibly surviving from a vishap shrine from the Iron Age.

West of the bell-tower are the partial ruins of the 13th c. **refectory**, a rectangular hall (13.5x8.5 m), with only the walls and the bottom end of the vaulted roof surviving. Flying arches supported the ceiling, resting on pilasters fastened to the vaulting.

The remains of a **12th c. single-nave church** with vaulted ceiling and a tunnel lie to the North of the refectory. It has a deeply recessed apse on the east wall, which connected to a side chapel with vaulted ceiling.

There are more **structures** and a **cave** on the upper shelf of rock. It is a bit of a climb but gives a great layout of the monastery and spectacular views of the area, including the town of Tumanian across the river. The upper area has shelters, the large cave (used from the Stone Age) and the sanctuary of **Sghnakh**.

Camping on the premises and in the area. **Springs** in the monastery and the nearby rocks.

✠ **ODZUN, ALAVERDI, SANAHIN**

➡ *Backtrack to the Alaverdi Highway, then continue N about 7.4 km (you will see enter and the Alaverdi city limits sign on the way) to the signposted Odzun turnoff, on the left (W) (a bridge on the right goes to Sanahin junction, not the vank), which switchbacks up the canyon walls about 3.1 km to a fork in the road; take the W fork (the S goes to Odzun) and continue about 800 m to a turnoff that goes N about 1.5 km on a curving path to (Hagvi) 🏰*

SIDE TRIP: (Hagvi - Հաղվի, pop. 387) has the ruins of a 12-13th c. church.

Camping on the river valley and in the hills. **Overnight** in the village (5000 AMD)

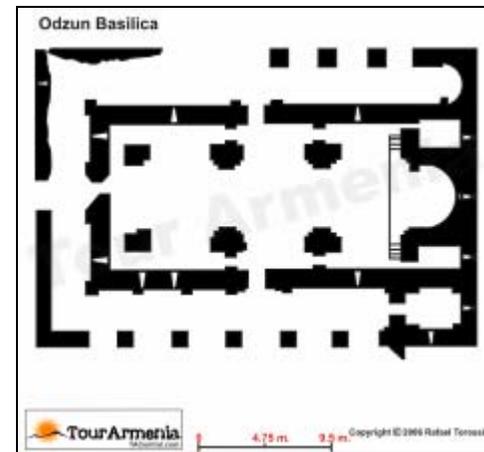
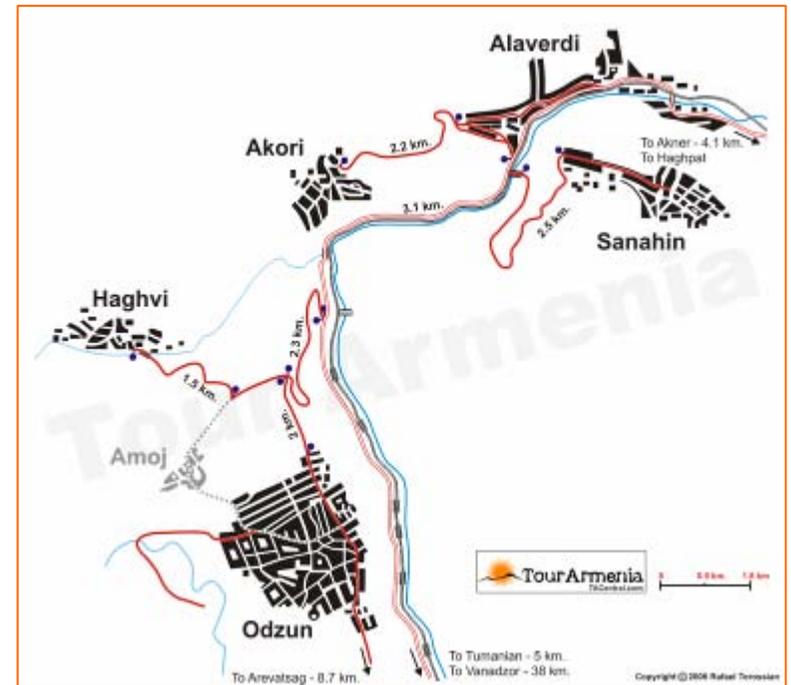
➡ *Backtrack to the fork and take the S route about 2 km to central ODZUN (DD 41.05690 x 44.61530) 🏰 🏰 🏰*



✠ **ODZUN - ՕԶՈՒՆ**

▲ (elev. 1134m, pop. 17725) The village is perched on the edge of a raving, the houses closest to the edge seem ready to fly off at any moment. The view is stunning from the top of the Debed river gorge, the forests of the North, South and East unveil themselves below you while the mountains of Tsengo, Salart and Golurt and their virgin forests rise to the west.

Odzun is one of the settlements of the Giurgen (Kiurikian) kingdom and birthplace of the Katoghikos Hovhannes Odznetsi (r. 717-728), who lived and worked in the village. The name comes from the word "odz" which means snake in Armenian, and can also mean dragon. A story is told of a time when Odznetsi was praying, two menacing dragons appeared, terrifying his assistant who asked the Katoghikos for help.



Odznetsi made the sign of the cross over the dragons, turning them into stone water sprouting from their bellies, considered an antidote for people bitten by snakes (of course being pious is always part of the cure, as the 13th c. chronicler Kirakos Gandzaketsi wrote).

Interestingly Odzun is the home of a rare and magnificent monument of two rough hewn pillars of stone, carved with Christian symbols but showing their pagan origins nonetheless, these two "Vishaps" or dragon stones are not incidentally connected with the legend of the two dragons disturbing Odznetsi prayers.

Historically, the village (the largest in Lori) was first settled in the Stone Age, and excavations in the area have revealed Bronze and Iron Age shaft graves with pottery, tools and idols from the pre-Christian era. It is believed that the church was built on a pre-Christian shrine, the area late in accepting the new Christian faith.

Construction of the church was begun under the Zakarians, who are considered Odzun's first residents. The village consisted of 30 tribes, of

which only 7 or 8 remain now. During the Russian-Persian war in 1765, some people from Karabakh settled in Odzun.

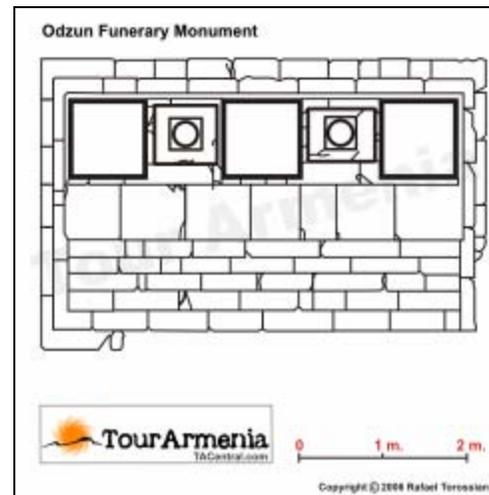


The large 6th-8th c **Basilica** is about 100 m W on the main paved village road. There is no documentary information about the original construction of the church, Gandzaketsi saying it was 'built' by Katoghikos Odznetsi in the 8th c. However its features (porticoes) are unique to the 5th c., and the word 'built' (which more often means reconstruct) place its origins at an earlier age, most saying the 6th century, then heavily renovated by the Katoghikos Hovhanes Odznetsi in the 8th c. What is believed is that the church, as well as its contemporary S. Marineh at Ashtarak, are considered the forebears of the Gothic tradition in Europe, their tall central domes and towering walls predating those in the west by hundreds of years and beginning the traditions that were refined in Europe to create the spectacular Gothic Cathedrals we have today.



During the renovation the church was clasped with pink felsite and expanded using pink tufa into a *triple-nave basilica*, the two side naves being narrower than the central by a half. The plan is an example of the synthesis of the basilica and the central-plan church found also in the 7th century churches Guyaneh, Mren, and Bagavan.

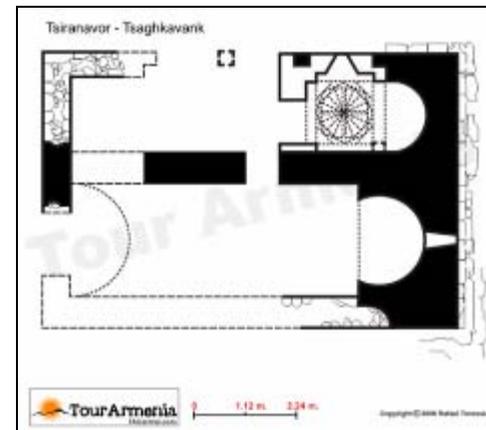
Also added were *arcaded cloisters* or colonnades on the north (missing), west and south sides of the main hall, the west with a blind wall with an arched entrance. The roof is barrel vaulted, four freestanding piers support the central *cupola* with two additional piers at the west end. The transition from the square central bay to the octagonal drum is made through the use of squinches. The small dome has a series of false ribs dividing it into sixteen segments. The church *carvings* are also unique. On the inside of the North wall, the Virgin and Child are shown enthroned and they may have been on the West portal. The depiction of the Virgin is of the Hodegetria type as seen in Byzantine Art. On the eastern facade is a carving of Christ with the gospel of S. Hovhannes (St. John) and two angels. On the south facade on either end of the main window are two angels and traces of another figure, probably Christ. The two bell towers were added in the 19th c.



Near the church is an unusual **funerary monument**; a stepped pedestal supports two carved stele between double arches. The east and west sides depict scenes from the Bible and the

introduction of Christianity in Armenia. King T'rdat III is represented in the form of a boar on the east face of the south stele. Below him, there is a two-story domed structure which may represent the original martyrion erected at the site of Hripsimeh's death at the command of T'rdat. Other scenes include the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, standing apostles holding crosses, the annunciation, nativity, and baptism of Christ, as well as figures in military dress and others who may be members of T'rdat's court. The north and south are carved with geometrical motifs and floral shapes. Thought to have been dedicated to Odznetsi, it is now believed to be a much older monument, probably 6th c. This is one of only two such funerary monuments in Armenia, the other is in Siunik, in Aghudi. Others say the stele are in actuality Bronze Age vishap stones ('dragon stones'), erected in the monument and "baptized" with Christian iconography. If so, the stones (which may have been placed over ancient springs) connect with the legend of Odznetsi and the dragons. In Armenian lore Vishaps are dragons, also snakes, and were placed at the sources of water, often springs. The story of Odznetsi causing the dragons to turn to stone and pour water may just be a wonderful lesson in how an ancient pagan rite (Vishaps) could have been combined with Christianity (Odznetsi 'blessing' the dragons, i.e. the dragon stones) to create a new Christian rite. Hmmm.

There are numerous **gravestones** of the clergy around the church.



E of the village are the remains of the **Tsiranavor - Tsaghkavank church** (5th century), the south

and north walls and part of the refectory. The S. N'shan church is on ridge over the ravine. Villagers celebrate S. N'shan day on first Sunday of November, when hundreds of people visit the village, making dozens of fires at night.

Half way down the ravine is the **Horomaiyr monastery** situated in the gorge among trees. It is a difficult climb to get there, local guides are recommended and available.

OTHER

Ancient Herbsals, Odzun Village (cell 091-20-79-57), email: info@armeniantea.com, URL: www.armeniantea.com, collects and packages Armenian herbal teas at its Odzun center, which is open to visitors. Ancient Herbsals began marketing its tea blends in 1996, using 7000 year old tea recipes for some of its blends. Ancient Herbsals sells its teas under the name "Ancient Herbsals" to restaurants and markets worldwide (Legal Sea Food, Rialto, Chez Henry, Oleana, Casablanca, Whole Foods, Lionidas, Galleries Lafayette, etc.).

Ancient Herbsals offers pre-arranged tours to their facilities, as well as tea-collecting hikes or horseback trips into the mountains. For prices and to book, call them several days before to arrange. They have just opened a new Guest House in Odzun (see below).

PRACTICALITIES

Area code: 253

Overnight. The village welcomes visitors, but because of its popularity as a tourist stop, you may have to haggle a bit, or pay a little more than the typical 5000 AMD for bed and breakfast at a **village home**.

Ancient Herbsals Hostel, Odzun Village, Home 69, (cell 091-20-79-57, 091-20-45-68), email: info@armeniantea.com, URL: www.armeniantea.com, is a guest house for up to four people run by the folks who collect and package herbal tea from the area (see above). The traditionally redecorated hostel has with two bedrooms, bathroom with shower, dining room, outdoor porch, a private garden patio and an on-site herbal garden and tea room. Catering includes country-style meals using local fresh products and of course, their famous tea. Other services include guided excursions, guided trips to collect tea, herbs and fresh mushrooms, cooking classes, and tea time banquets. House rental (4 people) is 25,000 AMD (self-catering) with Half-

board/full board at 4500/6500 AMD per person. Excursions start at 3500 AMD per person. Book at least one week prior to stay.

Hotel Odzun, (tel. 22518, 091-54-36-73), is a pensionat in a cream colored two-story building, much like a motel. To get there, continue going north from the main basilica and follow the village road uphill (ask) for about 2+/- km to the front gates. Rooms are basic but clean and include hot, cold water, heating. Hotel has Café, tennis, billiard, restaurant, swimming pool. 3 meals a day included in price. 6000 AMD per person includes 3 meals.

Two km from the village near a forest is the **Odzun guest house**, from which guests have a full view over the village. Showers, kitchenette. Was 5000 AMD but under renovation so expect to go higher.

Food and Drink There are a couple of cafes in the village, but Hotel Odzun and the Guest House are the best places to eat. If you get the chance sample Odzun's famous thyme **khashlama**, simmered with tomato and flavored with fresh thyme from the mountains. Food is prepared using locally grown products, and the **bread** is made in special brick kilns each home has.

Camping outside the village on the mountains. **Springs** at the Holiday Hotel.

➤ From central Odzun take the S route along the canyon ridge about 4 km to Aigehat, where a mountain road from the center goes W about 2 km to (**Ardvi**, DD 41.0166667 x 44.6) 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (**Ardvi - Արդվի**, elev. 1242m, pop. 8811) Just inside the village are the 10th c. **S. Harutiun church** and an early Medieval **stele** (vishap stone?) with traces of another church nearby. Above the village in a steep climb is a **spring monument** tied to a legendary dragon tale (see Odzun, this is an alternate site for the dragon tale) and beyond that the **village monastery** of S. Hovhannes, believed to have been founded by Odznetsi himself, with a 17th c. church and a large **medieval cemetery** nearby.

Camping in the area. **Overnight** in the village (5000 AMD)

➤ Backtrack to Aigehat then go S about 3.1 km to a T-intersection, then go W on the new road about 2.3 km to another T-intersection and take the new

road N about 400 m to (**Mghart**, DD 40.9980556 x 44.5825) 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (**Mghart - Մղարթ**, elev. 1409m, pop. 3773) This Greek inhabited village has a 14th c. shrine in the village, which was once a fiefdom of the Odzun monastery (18th c.).

From the Mghart turn off, going W you can travel to Stepanavan (17 km) passing Koghges (4.1 km), Yaghdan (2.9 km), Agarak (3.2 km) and Lori Berd (3.9 km) [See Trip 3](#) on page 40.

Camping in the hills. **Overnight** in the village possible (5000 AMD for B&B fair)

➤ Backtrack to the Odzun road and turn S going 1.6 km to (**Arevatsag**, DD 40.9738889 x 44.6105556) 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (**Arevatsag - Արևածագ** - till 1978 Nerkin Uzunlar, elev. 1272m, pop. 3984), has a small church in the village. W of the village on a hill overlooking the left bank of the Dzoraget are ruins of a medieval guard post with Late Bronze/Early Iron Age tomb field nearby. Arevatsag is famous for its yellow felsite quarries, mined since the Hellenistic period but most famously during the Medieval period, the stone adorning the cathedral at Odzun and throughout the region.

From Arevatsag you can continue on a poor road that switchbacks S into a steep gorge and across the Dzoraget River to Hnevank (4.4 km), W to **Kurtan** (7.7 km - [Trip 3](#) on page 42) or E to Dzoragiugh and the Vanadzor Highway (1.4 km)

➤ From Arevatsag center go E about 1.4 km to (**Tsater**, DD 40.9605556 x 44.6294444) 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (**Tsater - Ծաթեր**, elev. 1236m, pop. 4125) boasts a church, and has **camping** near the village and natural mineral **springs**, take a load of and soak awhile. Ask in the village for directions.

➤ Backtrack to Odzun then backtrack to the Alaverdi Highway and go N about 0.7 km to where the road and river bends E and a mountain road turns off W, take the W mountain road (jeeps only) about 3.2 km to the **S. N'shan Vank** and 6.2 km to (**Kachachkut**, DD 41.1166667 x 44.6) 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (**Kachachkut - Կաճաճկուտ**, elev. 1225m, pop. 26256) is located high in the Siskar mountain range, in the Sedvi canyon, just below the confluence of several mountain streams feeding into the Sedvi river. About 3 km south of the village is the 13th c. S. N'shan (Holy Sign) monastery. The church lies within what were once rather thick walls. The church is a rather tall rectangular single-nave hall with vaulted ceiling. There is an apse on the east end with three narrow windows (more like slits) above the altar space. On the west is the main entry with a squared off casing and a distinctly oriental pointed arch above the door. The current door is much smaller than the west portal, and, together with the narrow window that stretches above it and lack of window space in the building, seems to suggest this was a fortress church, built to house parishioners both in service and in defense against outside forces. The façade is severe, without adornment, except for the S portico/bell tower which has some refined cornices. There is an enclosed nave on the north side, with a semicircular apse.

500 meters away is the **Sedvi Castle**, a medieval stronghold for Armenians holding out against the invasions and counter invasions that made up their lives. The castle was built in a place called "Ghuli Ghash" and the defenses are pretty impressive, perched high on rocky promontory, inaccessible except through well defended terrain, off the beaten path.

Also in the canyon are several old villages, medieval cemeteries and khachkars, easily found in the inner gorges of the canyon. This is a good jumping off point for mountain hikes across Mt. Siskar to Mt. Lejan, a 2 day hike in medium to difficult terrain.

Camping in the forest. **Overnight** in village home possible (rustic) 5000 AMD for B&B fair.

➤ Backtrack to Alaverdi Highway and continue NE about 3.1 km to (**Alaverdi**, DD 41.1305556 x 44.6519444) (continue on below)

➤ From Alaverdi, take the W road through town and up the mountains continuing W from the town limits about 2.2 km to (**Akori**) 🏠 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (**Akori - Ակորի**, pop. 261) was part of an estate belonging in the 19th c. to Count Loris-Melikov, and Armenian-Russian general

and Minister of the Interior to Czar Alexander. See [Chochkan](#) on page 39.

In the gorge SE of the village is the S. Gevorg church and the Bgavor shrine nearby.

➤ Backtrack to **ALAVERDI** (DD 41.1305556 x 44.6519444) 🏠 🗺️

🏠 **ALAVERDI - Ալավերդի** 🗺️ (elev. 1296m, pop. 25066) The name means "Given by Allah" in Turkish, but the city owes its existence to the rich copper mines nearby (Shamlugh and others). Greek miners were brought in to supplant force-labor in the 18th c. The mines were the domain of the Argutinskii-Dolgoruki family (said to have descended from the Zakarian nakharars), who were instrumental in securing the annexation of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire, it favoring their monopoly. The concession was sold to the French in the 1880's (from whom was born the future President of France Charles De Gaulle), though the workers remained (and are still partly) Greek.



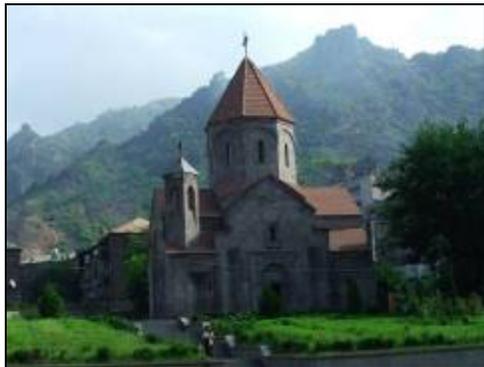
This is not a tourist town, the city is a sad little outpost of civilization, polluted by the belching smokestacks at the smelter in an otherwise spectacularly beautiful forested area. Signs of toxic poisoning are seen on the trees from her northwards. The smelter and the mines work 24 hours a day, though with a fraction of their former workforces they benefit a few corrupt government officials while the rest is left poverty stricken. From a high of 25,000 people, the city now has perhaps 6000 residents.

SIGHTS

The city has an *ethnographic museum* and a *library*, both closed.



Alaverdi Branch of National Art Gallery, 7 Kakhoian p. is located behind the Armeconombank (open 10.30/11-17.00 or whenever they get around to opening and closing) was founded in 1987. The main exposition consists of about 40 works by Armenian painters (Hakob Hakobian, Panos Terlemezian, Grigor Khanjian, Harutiun and Armineh Galentz, Lavinia Bajbeuk-Melikian, Rudolf Khachatryan, etc.). The museum also hosts seasonal exhibitions of local artists.



Just before the copper smelting plant is the working **Funicular**, a great way to see the valley and escape some of the drab city views. It costs 50 AMD and shepherd locals between the new city built on the rim of the canyon and the factory. It works on schedule, from 7.00-10.00, 11.00-12.00, 15.0-20.00 and 23.00-24.00.

On the outskirts of town, close to the Debed River, a **WWII monument** honors those from the area who gave their lives for the liberation of Karabagh. At night, lights at its base illuminate the edifice against the nearby mountains. The monument was created by sculptor Razmik Hagopian.

Next to the copper smelting plant is a **new church**, built by a local big shot. It is a neighborhood church, though it was closed when we went by at 10.00.



There is a **medieval bridge** on the R as you leave town, just past the Copper Smelter and behind some kiosks.

ALAVERDI MAP LEGEND

OVERNIGHT
5. Flora Hotel and Restaurant

FOOD & DRINK
6. Flora Restaurant
7. Cafe

OUTDOOR CAFÉ
10. Café
16. Café Dracht

BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

TRAIN

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY, BRIDGE
9. Alaverdi Museum, Gallery
15. Medieval Bridge

CHURCHES



14. New Church

SHOPS

PHONE, POST
13. Central Post Office

BANK, ATM
2. Exchange Point
3. Exchange Point
8. Armeconombank

APOTEKAS

SERVICES, PHOTO
1. Kiosks
4. Photo
11. Kiosks

PRACTICALITIES

Area code: 253
Long Distance: 0253 + local number
From abroad: +(374) 253 + local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell

International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + local number
Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0253) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 253 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

The *train* stops in Alaverdi on its way between Yerevan and Tbilisi. See [In and Out Lori](#) for details.

Buses travel the main routes to Vanadzor, Stepanavan/Tashir, Tbilisi and Yerevan.

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) travel from Alaverdi to nearby villages and towns, Vanadzor, Yerevan and Tbilisi. Catch them at the bus station.

Taxis go to Yerevan (15,000 AMD), Tbilisi (20,000 AMD), Vanadzor (3000 AMD), Stepanavan (5000 AMD).

AROUND

Taxis can be hailed for in town and regional travel. Figure 100 AMD a km.

ETC.

Post, phone, telegraphs

The *Central Post Office* is at 2 Marx p. [See Hay Post site for list \(www.haypost.am/EN/abt_offices.html#lor\)](#).

Additional phone services are around town. They advertise in front of their shops, sometimes with internet.

The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Internet is available in the center.

Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks, exchange at banks, hotel and exchange points throughout the town.

ARDSHININVESTBANK, 3A J'ravazan, tel. 22829

ARMECONOMBANK, 2 Marx p., tel. 22827.

UNIBANK, 3 Sayat Nova, tel. 23850.

Film

Film can be bought at the Kodak shop in the center of town, batteries here are useless for digital cameras.

Hospital, Clinic, Dental

The *hospital* is at 1 Jeravazan (tel. 23267)

The *polyclinic* phone is (tel. 23312)

Dental Polyclinic phone is (tel. 24232)

Apotekas in town, ask at your overnight for recommendation.

OVERNIGHT

There is a B&B in town, run by Hranush (tel. 32-235). 4000 AMD for basic digs.

Your best bet for overnight may be outside Alaverdi, at [Odzun](#) (on page 25), [Pambak](#) (on page 18) or the [Avan Dzoraget](#) (on page 23) just south of town.

Lori Hotel (tel. Yerevan 010- 566014), a summer pensionat S of town is not the Shangri-La, it may not even be the bowery in some rooms, but its cheap and serves 3 meals a day with the room rate. Cold water, toilet, bathroom and hot water in some rooms, satellite TV set, telephone in the lobby. Playground, parking lot, café, shop. SGL at 2500 and DBL/LUX at 2500/4500 AMD per person.

The *Debed Hotel* in the center may be working and is a leftover of the Soviet days, dirty, no showers but cheap for locals at 1500/5000 AMD.

Apartments/House stays: entirely possible the residents need the money. Ask around and check the spot first. 3000-4000 AMD for bed and breakfast is fair.

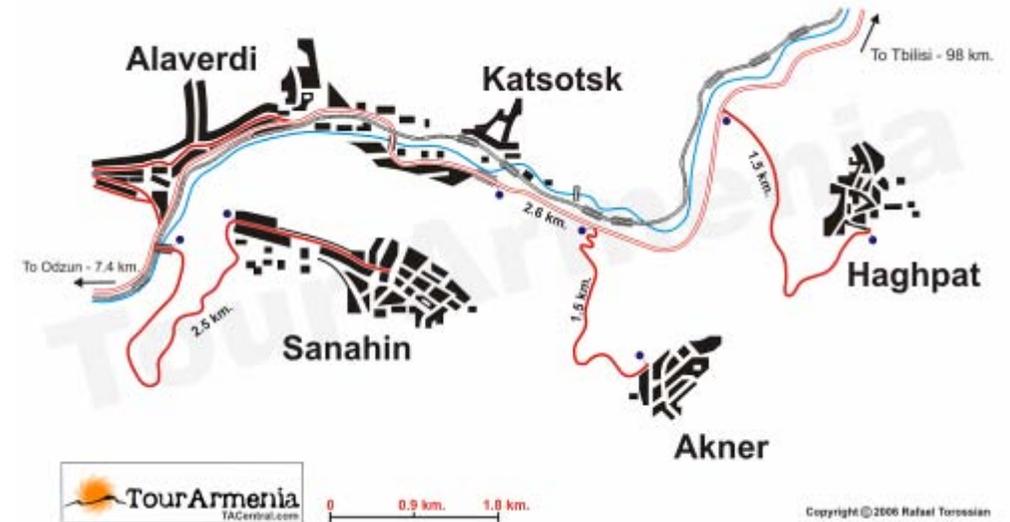
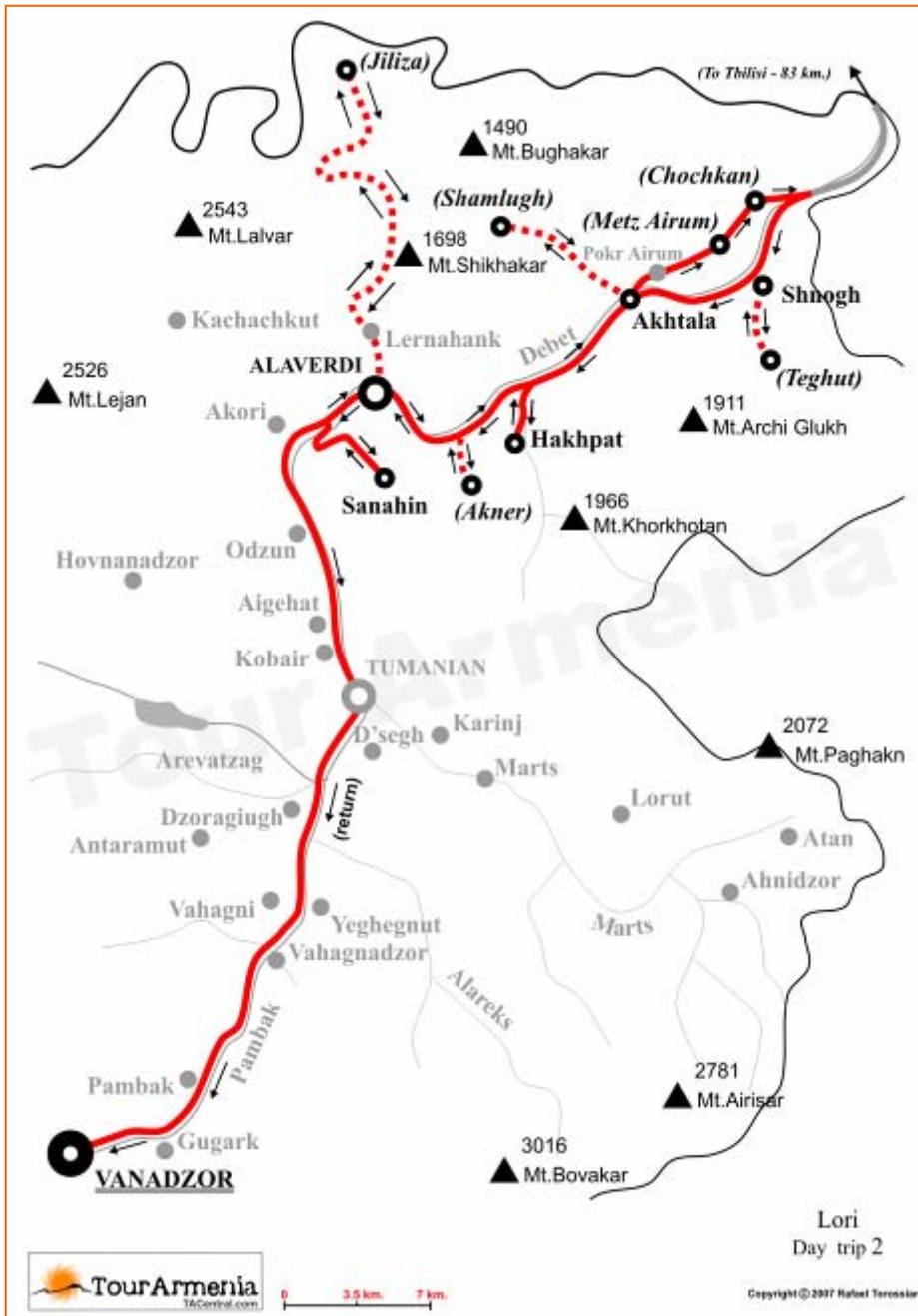
FOOD AND DRINK

Cafés throughout town, esp. on the E side towards Haghpat. *Khorovatz* and grill are favorites.

The large *Café Flora* (tel. 22-474) is located on the cliff overlooking the town center. Reach it by bridges on either side of the center. 3000-5000 AMD.

➔ END OF TRIP 1





TRIP 2: NORTHEAST: HAGHPAT, SANAHIN 
ALAVERDI - (Jiliza) - **SANAHIN** - **AKNER** - **HAGHPAT** - **AKHTALA** - (Shamlugh) - (Mets Airum) - **SHNOGH** - (Teghut) - (Chochkan) - (Alaverdi)

Pair the UPPER CASE stops on this trip with the same on Trip 1 for a long day trip, otherwise take your time and really take in the beautiful forests, wild riverbeds and stunning locations for some of Armenia's most gorgeous Medieval monuments and Bronze Age sites. This trip features two of Armenia's World Heritage Sites, Sanahin and Haghpat Monasteries, a seasonal route to the remote monasteries and Greek/Armenian village of Jiliza and the forests and monasteries at Akhtala and Shnogh, skirting the border with Tavush before crossing the Georgian border at the Sadakhlo rail junction.



Stay: Overnight in Vanadzor, Alaverdi, Avan Dzoraget, Pambak, roadside restaurant/hotel, Village home (rustic). Camping in the forests above the Highway, on the Debed River, Akhtala, Chochkan, Teghut, Shnogh.

Eat: Alaverdi cafes bistros and restaurants, roadside khorovatz stands, Avan Dzoraget.

Springs: Jiliza, Sanahin, Haghpat, Akhtala, Shamlugh, Chochkan, Shnogh, Teghut.

➤ From Alaverdi, take the N road towards Lernahank and continue 28 km on a mud path (closed in off season and rainy season) to (Jiliza DD 41.2155556 x 44.6702778)

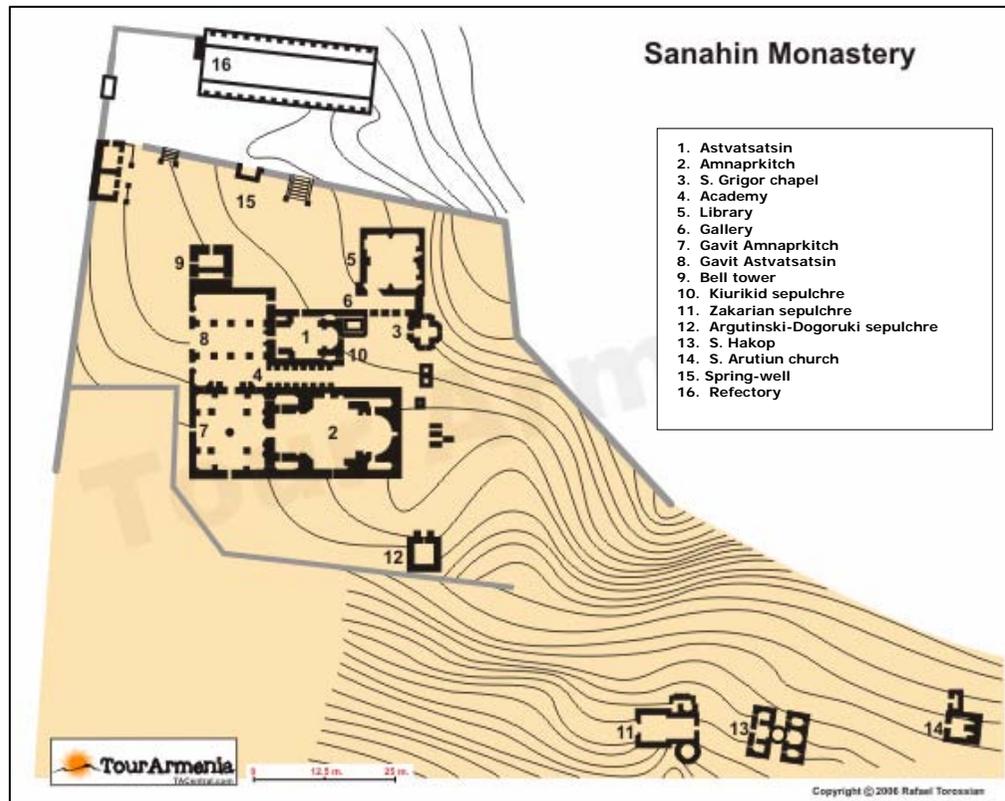
SIDE TRIP: (Jiliza - Ջիլիզա elev. 1032m, pop. 8012) can also be approached from above Stepanavan via Georgia) still difficult by more accessible most of the year. If you have an extra day and a Russian jeep, this is worth the trouble, a beautiful set of monasteries in a remote area of the country. See Trip 4 (p. 49), Jiliza (p. 50) and Khorakert (p. 50) for site descriptions.

➤ From Alaverdi begin the trip with a visit to the three most important medieval monuments in Armenia, **SANAHIN, AKNER and HAGHPAT**

 **SANAHIN, AKNER, HAGHPAT**

These three monuments need to be taken together to fully appreciate their history. The monasteries at Sanahin and Haghpat are two of Armenia's World Heritage Sites, hauntingly beautiful and powerful emblems of their age. Both were built in the same era, both were important centers of learning and together they are best intact examples of the Medieval Silver Age, when

patronage by the Bagratuni and Orbeli Georgian Kings, and the Kiurikian and Zakarian princely



families led to an extraordinary flowering of culture.

The two monastic complexes represent the highest flowering of Armenian religious architecture, whose unique style developed from a blending of elements of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture

and the traditional vernacular architecture of the Caucasian region.

And though both had a similar history (they were both built on the top of Pagan temples) and probably built by the same craftsmen (as similar in design as they are), and though they reached their zenith under the patronage of the same family, they are somehow uniquely distinct and divisive, the focus of discord and jealousies between rival branches of the Zakarian dynasty.

The exact founding of these monasteries is unknown, documentary evidence suggesting these structures date back to the 10th c. around the same time as the formation of the Tashir-Dzoraget Kingdom in 979.

The History of these three magnificent monuments parallels that of the Tashir-Dzoraget Kingdom, of Lori marz, and of Armenia. They represent the best—and worst of Armenian culture. The best in their distinct architecture blending Byzantine, Syrian and vernacular Armenian styles; the worst as they symbolizes the rivalries and petty

jealousies of the ruling families, rivalry that doomed their fiefdoms and the country to invasion, destruction and ultimately to 400 years of subjection to Seljuk, Mongol, Ottoman and Persian domination.

All three sites can be seen quickly in a couple of hours, but give yourself half a day to wander

through and lose yourself to the legacies of these truly exceptional places. There are docents at Sanahin and Haghpat, and for a basic tour do use them, but then give yourself time to savor the atmosphere and wander through the sites. Their histories, their beautiful architecture and their breathtaking locations combine to create an unforgettable experience, if you will just give yourself half the chance.

➡ From Alaverdi train station, take the Vanadzor Highway S about 500 m where the L (E) Sanahin/Sarahart bridge is (by the Gai Station), take it and then follow the road as it winds uphill about 2.5 km to Sarahart. Pass through Sarahart and continue another 1 km or so to **SANAHIN** (DD 41.08778 x 44.66573) 📍 🏰

📍 **SANAHIN - ՍԱՆԱԿԻՆ** ▲ (elev. 768m, pop. 3564) The monastery is located at the back of the village (go uphill till you find "Café Sanahin"), perched on the wooded mountain slope of Mt. Chantin-lehr. The name literally translates as "this one is older than that one", presumably representing a claim to having an older monastery than neighbouring Haghpat. Sanahin was a major monastery in the region, the Zakareh Zakarians its patrons in the 12th-13th cc, during its height of eminence as a school of illuminators and calligraphers, as well as its college of religion, philosophy and science.

History

The monastery was probably erected on the site of a pre-Christian temple. The oldest references to the monastery were found in early 10th century Armenian manuscripts, describing it being constructed over the ruins of a 4th or 5th century church. The churches were built during the reign Bagratunis, who had Astvatsatsin, Amnaprkitich and S. Grigor built as well as establishing the great library and the college.

The monastery was subject to attacks from Seljuk Turks, who decimated the Bagratunis of Ani in 1064, harassing the area until the Orbeli kings of Georgia established rule and promoted the Kiurikians and Zakarians as new overlords, it becoming their particular patronage in the 12th-13th c., receiving enormous amounts of income from the trade that coursed down the Debed River, a primary trade route from Asia to the Levant and Iran. As a result, it was richly endowed with educators, architects and sculptors who enlarged and renovated the churches, library and college of world renown. Along with Gladzor and Tatev (whose patrons were the rival Ivaneh Zakarian

family), the monasteries of Sanahin and Haghpat were the largest centers for higher learning in their time.

The Astvatsatsin gavit and the remarkable Tsiranavor Khachkar are among the last cultural treasures created in Sanahin before the Mongol invasion of 1235, which destroyed Lori Berd and the nearby Akner fortress meant to protect the monasteries, and Sanahin's capture. Its decline was steady, as the Mongols were followed by Timur, the Safavids and the Ottomans, ending with the division of Armenia in 1578.

The monastery briefly revived in the 18th c., when the dome over Astvatsatsin was built, and resumed its college, its students including the great bard **Sayat Nova**, who was born in Sanahin, the birthplace of his mother. See Haghpat for his more details.



Surviving 330 years of Persian rule, Sanahin began to flower again when the Russian Imperial army took possession of the region in 1804. It became a regional bishopric center and college until the Bolshevik revolution of 1920 shut it down. Surviving again, it has always had the favor of the Armenian people, along with Haghpat recognized as a true flowering of their deepest cultural yearnings. The monastery was recognized as a World heritage Site in 2000.

The Complex

Barely 6 km from Haghpat and similar in design, Sanahin is a world apart in its design execution and purpose, focusing on the humanitarian sciences and medicine, while sharing with Haghpat scientific treatises, philosophy, miniature illuminations and calligraphy. In this their rivalries

defined their patronage, Sanahin protected by a rival house to the overlords of Haghpat, both interested in showing their superiority over the other.

The Sanahin complex is made up of five churches, two gavits, a theological college, a book depository, bell-tower, patrimonial sepulchres and other structures encircled with a fortified wall. Sanahin is actually within modern Alaverdi, and seems less remote than it originally was.

The main buildings are grouped around the main church, forming an integrated whole, and should be taken together to appreciate their beauty. They are asymmetrical to their main axes, projecting out from surrounding nature. In this they form an organic whole, with successive structures added to the balance.



Most of the religious buildings are cross-winged dome type, with annexes at each of the four corners, or of the cupola (small dome) hall type.

At the center of the compound is the 10th c. **Astvatsatsin** (Mother of God) church, built sometime between 928 and 944 by the Bagratunis, a domed cross-wing church with shrines at each of the four corners. The drum and cupola were built much later, in the 18th c.

Immediately next to Astvatsatsin is the much larger **Amnaprkich** (Holy Redeemer or All Savior) Church, completed in 966, and built by order of Queen Khosrovanush, wife to King Ashot III (Bagratuni). The church is also a cross-winged dome hall, with annexes in its corners. This magnificent church is topped with a huge dome in the center, its annexes being two-tiered. The altar apse and the drum of the dome were decorated

with graceful arcatures, as were the ornamented window and door bands on the smooth facades. Due to earthquakes and numerous repairs, the high dome was replaced with a low one and the internal abutments became heavier, reinforced with pilasters and wall arches. The arcature of the altar was destroyed and the building lost much of its grandeur. However its size and decoration are still impressive.

The eastern façade is crowned with a monumental sculpture of the Princes Kiurikheh (Giurgen) and Smbat, Khosrovanush's sons. This is the first bas-relief depiction of human figures with a model of a church in Armenian history.

After the installation of the bishopric at Sanahin in 979, the eastern façade and parts of the north were decorated with arcatures and twin and triple semi-columns with flat capitals and depictions of fantastic creatures at their bases.

The interiors of both churches were decorated with frescos which have been almost completely lost, surviving fragments are at Haghpat.

The 10th c. **chapel of S. Grigor** is a miniature dome structure, resting on a high three-stepped stylobate, circular on the outside but "clover-leafed" on the inside, with horseshoe shaped apses that give a sense of movement to an otherwise stoic structure. It was rebuilt in 1061, the previous building encircled with eight arches and unique capitals and archivolts. The triangular niches and casings fit within this 'rhythm', now seeming out of place. There is a nice carving on the door tympanum.

The college (variously described as an academy, university, college, religious school, seminary) seems to be a gallery space between Astvatsatsin and Amnaprkich, but is actually an original work of civil architecture built in two stages, at the end of the 10th c. and the beginning of the 11th. The structure is rectangular in plan, roofed over numerous closely spaced arches attached to the church walls. The arched spaces between pillars are deeply recessed, presumably for students to sit during lectures.

The college was noted for its illuminators and calligraphers, but more for its teaching of religion, philosophy, even science. One such teacher was the 11th c. Armenian philosopher, writer and scientist Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (the Pahlavuni family were patrons of Marmashen Monastery near Giumri). Pahlavuni (985-1059) was an erudite

layman whose letters are a mine of information on theology, literature, mythology, politics, natural sciences and medicine. They are written in an arcane style by a man devoted to the Hellenism of the Alexandrian and Neoplatonic Schools. Sanahin became known as a font of Armenian Neoplatonic teachings.

Though based on the teachings of Plato and the Platonists, Neoplatonism interpreted Plato in many new ways, so that it became quite different from what Plato had written. Its original founders taught that Neoplatonism is a form of idealistic monism. Neoplatonists believed human perfection and happiness were attainable in this world. Perfection and happiness— seen as synonymous— could be achieved through philosophical contemplation and the belief in the concept of One. Christians identified the One as God.

The closest we may come to understand his genius is to compare Magistros to Leonardo DaVinci, who lived 500 years later, and who had equal interest in philosophy, science and politics. Grigor Magistros was not only fascinated by theoretical questions on medicine, he was also a skilled practical physician. In his "Letters" he writes as an experienced physician, well-versed in pathology, clinical medicine and especially in phytotherapy.



The **book depository and gallery** is one of the most interesting buildings at Sanahin, showing a high level of civil architecture at the time. As a rule such structures were built away from the main churches, were square and had niches for keeping manuscripts, with special attention paid to the design of the roof. Sanahin's depository was erected in 1063, it's huge octahedral tent roof resting on diagonal arches resting on four half columns set in the middle of each wall. The facets

of the roof look like tent-roofs of Armenian peasant homes, its inspiration.

The **gavits or zhamatuns** are the largest structures at Sanahin, unique features of Armenian religious structures. They were the place for morning and evening services and meetings, and an overflow space for during mass. They were also sepulchres for persons of outstanding positions or the aristocracy, the bodies interred in the floor. The gavits (zhamatuns) were added to churches, but there were those that stood separately, sometimes next to a church. In this case zhamatuns were not only annexes but also places of meetings and councils of secular and church leaders.



The **Amnaprkich zhamatun** is of this second type, built in 1181 by the architect Zhamhair at the expense of Father Superior Hovhannes and the prince's family. There are four large, expressive columns that support the roof, an early example of the use of four-column construction popular in peasant homes. The columns divide the space into separate parts, their bases and capitals decorated with carvings and reliefs of animal heads. There are geometric designs that emphasize the North Portal.

The **vestry of Astvatsatsin**, erected in 1211 by order of Prince Vacheh Vachutian, is different; it is a triple nave hall covered with vaults and steep two-slope roofs. The similarly sized columns differ in their shapes and ornamentation, and the heavy arcades with low arches and high vaulted ceilings give an otherwise dour place an expressive flavor. There are six tall arches on the western façade.

The **Bell Tower** at Sanahin, along with that at Haghpat, is the earliest structure of this type. Both are tall 3 story towers with small annexes and a multi-columned belfry at the top. Sanahin's bell tower, built between 1211 and 1235, is crowned with a light rotunda, a characteristic of separate bell towers in Armenia. Its western façade is marked by a huge ornately carved cross from dark red tufa. It is further decorated with ornamental windows, khachkars and yellow sandstone spheres.

More than 80 **Khachkars** survive at Sanahin and Haghpat, not all of them memorials. Those at Sanahin include one commissioned by Vaneni, who had the Sanahin bridge built and a khachkar carved (ca. 1192) to memorialize of her husband King Abas, who prematurely died. Others include the building of an inn in 1205, Tepagor (1011) and Tsiranavor (1222).



Most khachkars have the traditional shape of a cross germinating from a grain, with branches on its sides. In the 10th-11th cc the framing of the cross was simpler than 12th-13th cc khachkars, which grew ever more elaborate with stylized depictions of the Tree of Life flanking the cross with the beginnings of the use of the sun at the

base. Ornamentation is primarily geometrical (stylized floral motives, squares and rosettes).

Khachkar Masterpieces at Sanahin are the intricately carved *Grigor Tudevordi khachkar* (1184) and the *Sarkis khachkar* (1215), on the western side of Astvatsatsin, truly amazing works of art and devotion.

Separate **Patrimonial Sepulchres** are a feature of Sanahin, built to entomb members of the ruling families. Architecturally different, the sepulchres are a glimpse into the psyche of those they hold, religious fervor and piety or grandeur and opulent, depending on the person.

Abutting the NE wall of S. Astvatsatsin is the **Sepulchre of Kiurikeh and David Kiurikian** which consists of two vaulted cells separated from each other, one built at the end of the 10th c., the other in the middle of the 11th.

The empty **"Dolgoruki" Sepulchre** with the imperial double-eagle emblem is the sepulchre of the Argutinskis-Dolgorukis, founders of the rich and powerful Russian Dolgoruki family. The Dolgorukis came from Armenia, bringing Christianity with them, and founded Moscow. They became one of Russia's princely families, along with the Imeritinskis, reputedly descended from the Bagratuni king of Imeretia.



The **Sepulchre of the Zakarian Princes**. 50 m to the east of the church, is more complex. Its eastern part (end of 10th to beginning of 11th cc) is an underground crypt with a vaulted ceiling and chapels on top, of which the middle is rectangular, the sides rounded and two-storied. The side chapels are stylistically close to S. Grigor chapel, differing in their miniature size and more graceful

architecture. The western part, built in 1189, is simpler, rectangular plan hall with a large ornamental doorway.

Just E of the Zakarian sepulchre is **S. Hakop Church**, a cross-winged dome church with four annexes in its corners. The church was built in the 9th century, making it one of the earliest structures in the complex.

About 20 m east is the 13th c. **S. Harutunian Church**, a vaulted hall church, is interesting for its two identical altar apses.

The **monastery well** was built in 1831, and is still in use. Another in the village dates to the 12th-13th cc.

NEARBY

The **Sanahin Bridge** that crosses the Debed River (1192) is considered the finest example of Monastery bridges in Armenia, and in a class by itself in the Caucasus region. A single span bridge was uniquely built to accommodate the terrain, its right side being horizontal and its left terracing down to the bank. Parapets are decorated with spiked helmets and roughly hewn figures of lounging cats in the center.

Mikoian Brothers House Museum The museum is located outside the gates to the monastery, and has a collection of about 600 items related to the life and the work of Anastas and Artiom Mikoian.

Artiom Mikoian (1905-1970) is famous as a Soviet Armenian aircraft designer, academician and colonel-general of Engineers. In 1940, together with Mikhail Gurevich, he designed MiG-1, a high altitude interceptor that is partly responsible for the defense of Moscow during WWII. This led to Russia's first jet fighter, the "MiG-9 and "MiG-15", which leveraged off German swept-wing research and British engines. It led in turn to an improved fighter variant, the "MiG-15bis", and a tandem-seat trainer, the "MiG-15UTI". The new Soviet fighter would prove a shock to the Americans and their allies in the skies over Korea. The MiG 21 and MiG 29 are still a mainstay of national air forces.

Anastas Mikoian (1895-1978) joined the Bolsheviks in 1915 and participated in the October Revolution in the Caucasus. During the Civil War he was arrested in Baku by the British Army but escaped and made his way to Moscow where he met Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin and other

Bolshevik leaders. After the death of Vladimir Lenin Mikoian became a supporter of Joseph Stalin, and was appointed to the Central Committee in 1923 and three years later was appointed people's commissar for external and internal trade. He was willing to learn from advances in the West, and in 1935 he was elected to the Politburo. After Stalin's death he supported Khrushchev, becoming deputy premier of the Soviet Union. After Khrushchev's fall from power, Mikoian was appointed as chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (1964-66). Anastas was a key link between Western and Soviet diplomats, making the cover of Time Magazine in 1959.

The museum, first housed at the village school, opened in its present location in 1982. The square in front of the house has a memorial with the last MIG-21 plane designed by Artiom Mikoian.

Camping is possible in the forest area, and in the riverbed. Food and drink are in the Village, at kiosks and on the road. It is even possible to beg a night at a village home, but pay for your supper!

➡ From Alaverdi town limits on its eastern end (the bridge crossing to a small square) follow the Georgian Highway about 800 m to another bridge that crosses S over the Debed River and then about 1.7 km E and just past a bridge to the Akner road, then S on a twisting road about 1.5 km to (Akner, DD 41.0830556 x 44.69) 🏰

✳️ **AKNER - Ակներ** ▲ (elev. 970m, pop. 16209) has the **Kayan Berd** (literally, "Stop" or "Point" Fort) overlooking Haghpat and Sanahin monasteries, Mt. Surplich and the Debed River. Perched on a hill halfway between the monasteries, the fort was built using black tufa 1233 by order of Hovhannes Zakarian, bishop of Haghpat and nephew to Zakareh and Ivaneh Zakarian, founders of the Zakarian dynasty in Lori. This was during Mongolian incursions into the area, just before their capture of Lori Berd and wholesale destruction of the region in 1238.

The Zakarians, like the Orbelians and others of the same period, were overlords not by right of birth or as nakharars of the old order, clans from time immemorial, protectors of the people they ruled, equal or greater in strength to the Arshakuni kings (1st-5th c.). The newer Zakarians earned their lands (the kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget) as war booty for services rendered to the Orbeli (Orbelian) kings of Georgia, and had only the most tentative connection to the region, the bulk of their

wealth coming from trade and commerce, much of it in cash. Even the nakharars from the older families (the Mamikonians, Pahlavunis and Artsrunis) were distantly related, not of the original stock. Their lack of genuine connection to the people and lands they "owned" is seen as one way to understand how such an advanced culture could collapse so suddenly in the face of Mongol aggression. Distrustful, scheming, always looking for the main chance, the new nakharars of Armenia could never set aside their petty jealousies and eternal rivalry to rally around the cause of defense and defeat their foes. Like the Bagratunis before them, the Zakarians, Mamikonians, Orbelians and Proshians (of the Orbeli clan), fought amongst themselves while outsiders prepared the slaughter.



This fortress is a case in point. Built on order of a nephew to one of the founding Zakarians, Hovhannes, may have had in mind the protection of both monasteries, it being strategically able to come to aid, and in light of already mounting Mongol invasions, this seems logical. However, nothing is as it seems, and chroniclers write that the fortress was actually an incursion on family prerogative, the land belonging to Shahhshah, Hovhannes' cousin and King of Tashir-Dzoraget (Shahhshah was son of Zakareh Zakarian while Hovhannes was son of Zakareh's sister, but closer to Ivaneh, Zakareh's rival brother).

Haghpat was still under the royal control of the Georgian Kingdom while Sanahin, not 6 km distant, was under Zakarian patronage, a rival power already making overtures to the inevitable power lords of the entire region, the Mongols.

Was Sanahin threatened by the fortress less than 2 km away? Or was it ecclesiastical rivalry, not

unlike the secular feuds of their cousin patrons? The fathers Zakareh and Ivaneh were rivals, Zakareh is buried in his beloved Sanahin. Whatever the reason, Hovhannes' authority as bishop of Haghpat was strong enough that nothing happened until his death, when Shahhshah had the walls of the fortress torn down. But ah! Not even that is as simple as it would seem, nor revenge for his father; the chroniclers write he had the walls torn down "on orders of the Tatars (Mongols)." A final act to the subjugation of Haghpat and the inevitable defeat of the Armenian monasteries of Lori. Shahhshah and the new nakharars? Those that survived did so by selling out to their Mongol overlords, switching allegiance to the lands for their necks and a new chance at wealth. Many served in the Mongol army subjugating the lands of Western Armenia.

Despite the destruction of the fortress, enough of it remains to imagine its size and ability to repel attacks. Climb up the hill for some spectacular views of both world heritage sites and the area. Inside the fortress grounds is the Dsevanki S. Astvatsatsin church of the same period.

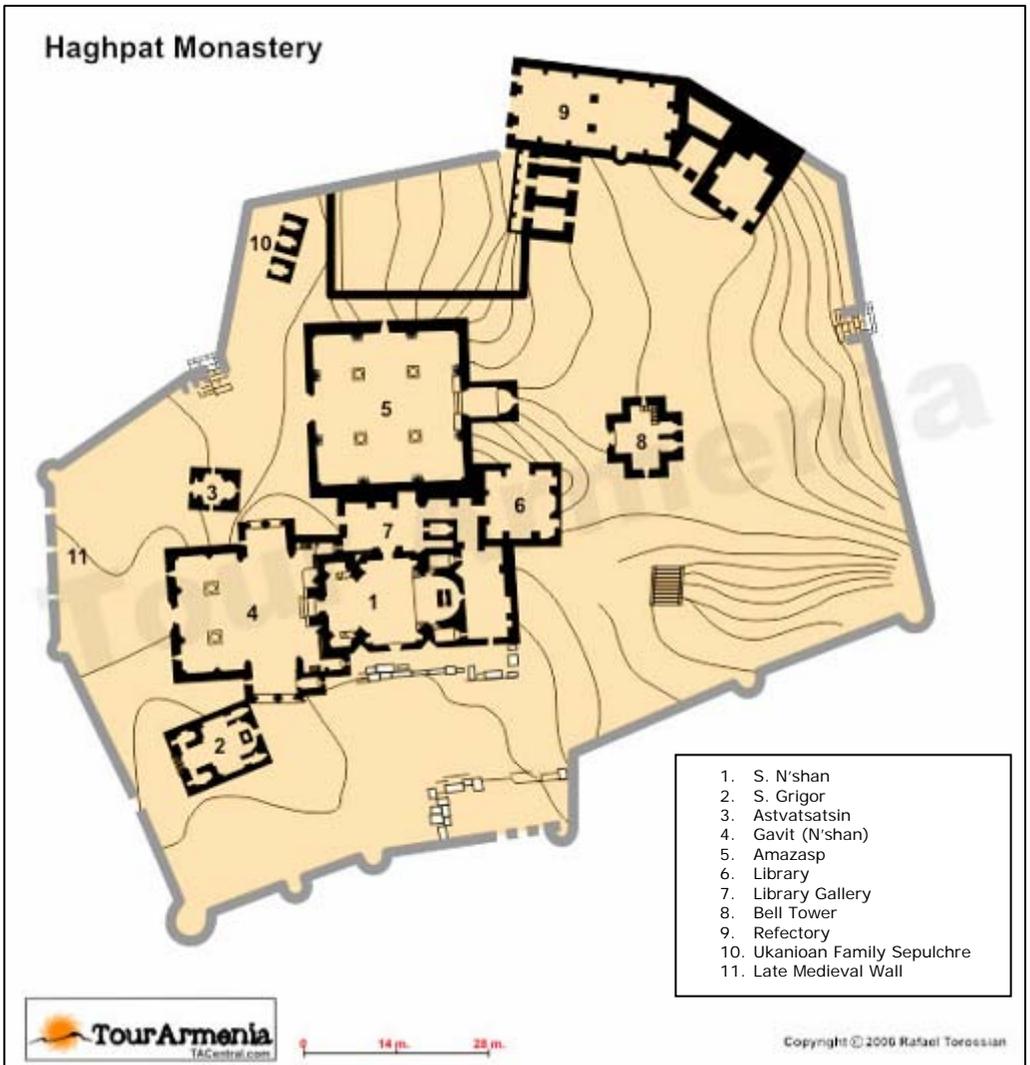
In the village is an Early Iron Age tomb field.

Camping possible by the berd and in the gorge.

➡ *Backtrack to the Georgian Highway, then E about 2 km to the Haghpat road, then S and up the hill about 2.3 km to **HAGHPAT** (DD 41.09367 x 44.71105) 🗺️ 🏰*

🗺️ **HAGHPAT - ՀԱԳՊԱՏ** 📍 (Haghpat, from Hagh "strong" and pat "wall," elev. 1212m, pop. 5092) is located inside the village of the same name, on a foothill of Mt. Surplich (Holy Lake). The sloping complex, together with Sanahin, is considered the best example of Medieval Armenian architecture in existence (promoters of Tatev and Garni/Geghard aside). Haghpat was designated a World Heritage site in 1996.

The complex is truly awe-inspiring, twice the size of Sanahin and nestled in remote forest lands on steeply sloped hills that plunge into the nearby river. Haghpat is also the better preserved of the two monasteries; the buildings retain much of their original character and most are intact. At Haghpat it is possible to imagine life as it must have been, when the forested hills and remote location created a natural, peaceful place for contemplation and the monastery's pursuits of knowledge: some of the most beautiful miniature illuminations on manuscripts were created here, as



were treatises on the natural sciences, medicine, philosophy and religion. Haghpat was a temporary home to Armenia's greatest bard, Sayat Nova, an 18th c. musical prodigy that gave romance and elegance to this extraordinary place.

History

The first church at Haghpat was believed to have been built on the foundations of a pagan temple,

though it is undocumented. The hill, close to the Debed River basin is a prime spot for settlement, and the area shows organized human activity in the Stone Age. Later Bronze Age and Iron Age tribes used the area for trade and settlement, artifacts showing tools, pottery and jewelry, as well as bronze idols featuring sun worship and animist tendencies. Enough use of pagan imagery and the stylobates in monastery construction show

at least a tolerance if not respect for pre-Christian symbolism in the construction of the monastery in its current form.

Haghpat Monastery was founded either in the reign of King Abas Bagratuni (r. 929-953) or founded or renewed by his daughter in law, Queen Khosrovanush. If by Abas, it was only after his death in 967 that new construction begun, with the church of S. N'shan, by Khosrovanush and his grandsons Smbat and Giurgen. Surrounding churches and structures were built beginning in the 11th c. and largely completed by the mid 13th c.



The monastery came into its own with the ascendancy of the Kiurikians (a branch of the Bagratunis) and Zakarians, who received the monastery as partial payment for military service to the Georgian Orbeli Kings, the new power in the region when Ani and the Bagratuni dynasty fell to Seljuk attack and rivalry between competing princes. In less than 200 years, from the fall of Ani in 1064 to the Mongol invasion of 1235, Haghpat tripled in size.

Its **manuscripts and miniature paintings** are legendary. Between the 11th-13th cc the monastery attempted to turn the monastery into a repository for everything written in Armenian, making it the first Matenadaran. Haghpat's monks scoured the Armenian kingdoms in search of manuscripts, copying those they could not take with them. In time of attack, manuscripts were scurried away to mountain caves, saving them from certain destruction at the hands of Mongols and Ottoman Turks. To make them reveal their hiding place, the Mongols tortured the monks, during which three senior and twelve junior clergymen are reported to have retorted with a

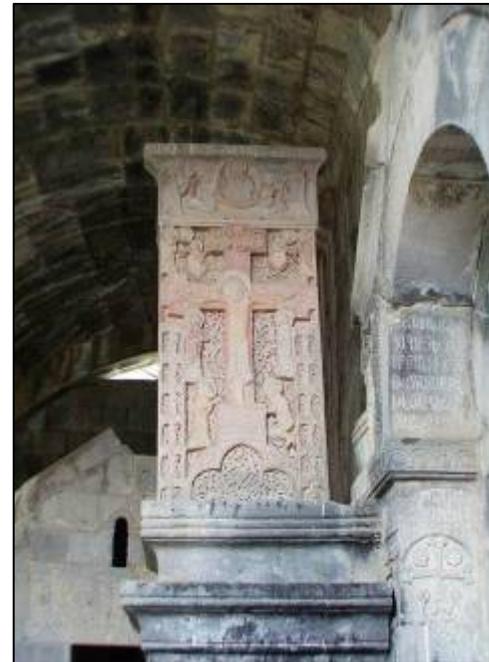
line from the Gospel: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." It is still possible that caves in the area contain fragments or even intact manuscripts.



Teachers at the monastery include Grigor Magistros (See Sanahin) and the legendary Superior of the Monastery, Hovhannes Sargavak ("Imastasser" or Philosopher) (1045-1129). Favored by King David of Georgia, Sargavak counted among his accomplishments the reformation of the Armenian calendar (ending confusion between two competing versions of the previous calendar), philosophical, theological and mathematical treatises, medical and natural science studies, and the collecting, editing and supervising the copying of over 50 religious and philosophical manuscripts. In 1873, an Armenian historian discovered a cave with petrified manuscripts, believed to be the cave where Hovhannes kept his library and studied. His gravestone is under the belfry at Haghpat.

Haghpat became a serious rival to its brother monastery Sanahin, a rivalry exasperated by feuding cousins in the Zakarian family. The Georgian Kings patronized Haghpat, the Zakareh Zakarians Sanahin. Once close allies (the Georgians gave the Zakarians Lori), they had become rivals, even enemies, fighting amongst themselves as the Mongols made plans to conquer the land for themselves. When Haghpat's bishop Hovhannes had Akner fortress erected in 1233 between Haghpat and Sanahin, his cousin King Shahنشah, whose father was buried at Sanahin, was threatened, and had the fortress torn down, by order of the advancing Mongols, with whom he had already made compact. The Mongols captured both monasteries and decimated the countryside, pulling down Lori Berd and much of Ani.

From this neither monastery recovered, further decimated by the legions of Timur and then the Ottomans. When Persia and Ottoman Turkey divided Armenia in the early 16th c., Haghpat went under Persian control, its monastery reduced to a skeleton of its former self. Craftsmen and artisans were removed to Iran, where they enriched the Safavid dynasty at Jhulfa, Tabriz and Tehran.



Haghpat and Sanahin both claim **Sayat Nova** (1712-1795), considered by many the greatest *gusan* (bard) to have lived in the Caucasus; some would even say--with enough of the powerful local vodka (*oghi*)—the world. Sayat Nova is the nom de plum of Harutiun Sahakian. He was born in Sanahin, the home of his mother, and raised in Tiflis (Tbilisi). A renaissance man skilled in writing poetry, singing and playing the Kamancheh (a sort of violin), he achieved fame at the court of Heracleh II of Georgia, where he also worked as a diplomat, helping to forge agreements between the competing kingdoms of Armenia, Azerbaijan (Albania) and Georgia. He lost his place at court when he fell in love with the king's daughter and spent the rest of his life as an wandering minstrel. About 220 songs are attributed to him, though it is

believed he penned thousands. He wrote equally well in Armenian, Persian and Georgian. Locating himself in Haghpat after exile, Sayat Nova wrote some of his more haunting pieces here, of love lost, the despair of unrequited love, etc. etc. In 1796 he was killed at Haghpat during an uprising in the area, by the army of Agha Mohammed Khan in an expedition against the Christian Kingdom of Georgia, which was then reincorporated into Iran. Dying less than ten years before the liberation of the region by the Russian Imperial army, Sayat Nova's songs survive to this day and are still performed by Armenian pop musicians.

The Complex

The complex has eight buildings surrounded by fortified walls. The first structure of the monastery period, S. N'shan was built in the 10th c., followed by the churches of S. Grigor (1005) and Astvatsatsin (Holy Virgin), the gallery for S. N'shan (1201), the great cloister (1257), the campanile (1245) and the book depository & refectory (both 13th c.).

Haghpat was built in the same period as Sanahin and shares the same patrons, same architects, similar plans and in some cases identical decor, but this doesn't mean that if you see one you have seen the other. Despite their similarities, they are truly uniquely designed within their environment, organically growing from their central point, in the case of Haghpat, S. N'shan.

S. N'shan (Holy Sign or Holy Cross) was built between 967-991 on order of Queen Khosrovanush and her sons Giurgen (Kiurikeh) and Smbat. Khosrovanush was a patron of Sanahin, contributing to the construction of Amnaprkich (966) at Sanahin, dedicating it to her sons. Here the sons return the favor, by contributing to the construction. By doing so, they established a precedent for lavishing attention (and money) on two close, rival religious communities, each specializing in religious study, calligraphy, illuminations and the sciences.

S. N'shan is a cupola hall type, its relatively compact design crowned by a huge dome, belies its shape; on the outside it seems a simple rectangle, but on the inside the walls form a modified cross, the transverse arms barely making an impression of the cross form. The cupola is the outstanding part of the interior, its abutments protruding to the center resting on the high arches and gracefully curving to triangular points. At each of the four corners are two-floor annexes, a baptismal font in the lower north room. Stone

steps lead to a specially built balcony for the Kiurikian family when they attended mass.



The walls are spare with a few ornamental carvings on the walls, which were once covered with **frescos**, now mostly gone, save a painting of a Baron Khurlu-bugi on the southern wall which is still fairly well preserved, it's style like that of Georgian portrait painting of the 12th c., when it is assumed to have been done. The altar apse of S. N'shan were decorated twice with frescos, the last time in the second half of the 13th c.



On the outside of the eastern façade is a copy of the **bas relief** at Sanahin of Smbat and Giurgen (Kiurikeh) holding a model of the church, only this one is more 3-dimensional, fitted into a niche in the wall. Smbat became King Smbat II Bagratuni, Giurgen founder of the Kiurikian dynasty in Lori, with Haghpat its religious center.

Gavits were commonly added in 12th-13th cc, and used as overflow spaces for services, for clergy

and liturgical meetings, and as academies or seminaries.

The present **S. N'shan gavit** joins the west front of S. N'shan and was begun by Hovhannes of Khachen in 1208/09 on the ruins of a previous gavit. It is an extraordinary achievement of Medieval architecture in Armenia, for its intricate plan, combining several earlier structures. Originally there was a portico on the Western wall of the church, built in 1185 by order of Princess Miriam, as a mausoleum for the Kiurikian family. The floor of the gavit is paved with gravestones, putting even the most powerful literally 'underfoot'. The gavit is unusual because of its large size (21 x 18 m) and because of its roofing system of ribs composed of two pairs of crossing arches repeated twice in height. This daring use of arches expands the space and gives it lift. The décor is unique among gavits, the arches resting on abutments on three walls, then on massive columns made from slender shafts on the western wall. There are small two-story rooms with apses on the eastern corners, used for reading the liturgy. The S. N'shan gavit had enormous influence on architecture in Medieval Armenia, especially civil structures.

Two small churches adjoin S. N'shan gavit: On the southwestern side of the gavit is **S. Grigor** (1025), a rectangular plan with an inscribed cross and a barrel vault supporting the gabled roof. Its outside walls are decorated with double columns and a pointed arch.

On the Northwestern side of the gavit is the **S. Astvatsatsin** or Kusanats anapat (nunnery). The church is also known as the "Khatunashen" for Lady Khatun, the daughter of Prince Hassan Tesumian, who had it built in the 13th century. The church has a semicircular cross plan interior built from rectangular outer walls. The church has more dynamic proportions, the higher octahedral cupola decorated with trefoil ("three leaved") arches. The nunnery is not completely unique in Armenian monasteries, nor is it completely common.

Adjoining the North walls of S. N'shan are the 11th c. **Book depository & gallery**, with a sunken floor and a flat open dome and vaulted roofing. The original depository had a round wooden roof resting on internal pillars. The stone roof resting on cross arches was built between 1258 and 1262 was rebuilt in 1273. The cross arches make the room appear much higher than it actually is, as does the eight-sided tent roof with central skylight.

The depository was considered one of the best in the country during the Middle Ages, the monastery dedicated to collecting every known writing in Armenian.



The gallery has the great **Annaprkich Khachkar of 1273**, a gorgeous representation of the crucifixion with hues of colors in the stone. The realistic depiction of the Christ figure and angels was revolutionary at the time, predating the Italian renaissance by a hundred years. Others in the gallery include fragments and two 9th c. khachkars clearly showing the tree of life under the cross.



The impressive **Hamazasp gavit** (1257) with an adjacent chapel, is just above the depository gallery. From an engineering standpoint is remarkable, it being the largest gavit in Armenia, and surviving numerous earthquakes with little damage. It is rectangular in plan with four identical abutments and columns supporting sectioned vaulting leading to the central octahedral open dome. The ceiling is divided into nine panels

with a central skylight. The building is squat, the roof ending at a slop in the hills. There is a small annex in the eastern side with a chapel.

Off the northwest corner of the Hamazasp, against the walls is the **sepulchre of the Ukanian family** (early 8th c.), three large rectangular memorial chapels side by side. These also serve as pedestals for khachkars, which later was transformed by replacing the chapel with pedestals with deep niches. The two **khachkars** here were carved between 1211 and 1220, attributed to Master Vahram and among the greatest in Armenia, their intricate designs and mammoth sizes meant to immortalize the philanthropy of their donors (a kind of calling card for heaven by the rich and powerful).

The 13th c. **Refectory** at Haghpat is better preserved than at Sanahin, made of two square rooms divided by massive pillars and cross arches supporting the vaulted ceiling.

The **Bell Tower**, along with that at Sanahin, is the earliest such structure in Armenia, the one at Haghpat one of the best-preserved. Built by order of Prelate Hamazasp in 1245, the three-story structure is cross-shaped on its first story, rectangular with angles corners on the second floor, the transition between the two made of facing decorated with trefoils and crowned with triangular gables. The belfry with seven facets on its drum tops the whole thing.

There is a small **chapel** outside the monastery walls to the SW of the SW turret.

Another **chapel** is 500 meters above the complex in the middle of a cemetery, a hermitage dedicated to the Virgin. It is cruciform with a dome on an octagonal drum decorated with small trefoil arches.

The village itself receives little benefit from tourists and remains impoverished, with the majority of its residents keeping livestock and growing vegetables for food. Others gather berries (mainly blackberries and Cornelian cherry dogwood) from the nearby forests and sell them. Water is gathered from the numerous mountain springs, which are scattered in abundance throughout the area.

Camping on the mountainside outside the village, it is possible to beg an overnight, but pay (5000 AMD for B&B is fair). Food and Drink at village

kiosks and cafe, sometimes roadside BBQ on the way in.

➡ Backtrack to the highway, then continue E about 9.3 km to a bridge that crosses to the Left bank of the Debed River to some industrial buildings, from there go NE along the river about 200 m to the village road, turn L, then R uphill and take L fork on a twisting run into the Akhtala river gorge to the village of **AKHTALA** (DD 40.15193 x 44.76380) 🏠 🏰 🗺️

🚩 **AKHTALA - ԱԿԻՏԱԼԱ** 📍 (elev. 1779m, pop. 58289) is home to perhaps Armenia's most spectacular church, the great 12th-13th c cathedral at Akhtala.

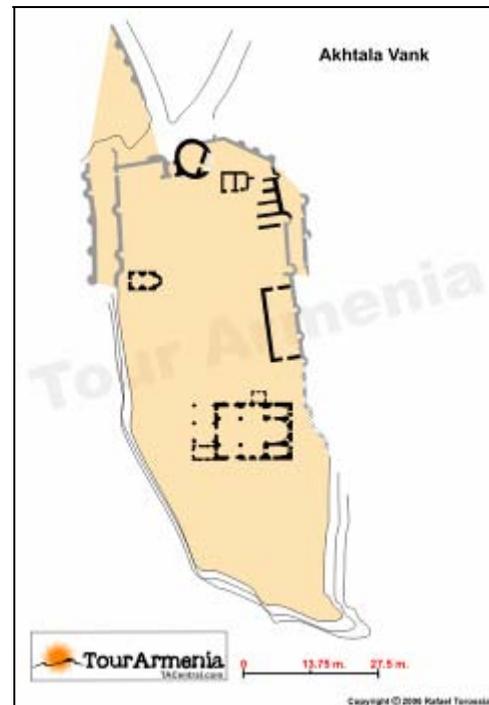
The village lies on the Akhtala river basin and up the foothills of Mt. Karakatar (1269 m). You can spot the vank from the highway by looking for the yellowish earthen dam that is set uphill where the copper mine cleans its metal deposits. Right above is the vank. To get to the vank, continue uphill and as you climb the village road and near the copper cleaning lake, take the R fork at the bridge that seems to lead to the vank, and it will lead you to the fortress walls and entrance.



The 13th c. monastery (friary) of Akhtala sits on a cliff protected by thick walls with tall pointed archways. This detail, like the style of the décor is a hallmark of the Georgian Chalcedonian style, to which this monastery was dedicated.

Built during the Kiurikian dynasty, the fortress takes advantage of its location's natural defenses, built as it is on a cliff with sheer drops on three sides. In this, the fortress plan is like that at Lori Berd and Ani, it being –along with Lori Berd, Kayan

Berd and others—the primary defense of the Tashir-Dzoraget kingdom in the Northeast.



The fortress was almost certainly built on Bronze and Iron Age fortresses. Artifacts from the Iron Age have been found in the area and the plentiful copper ore in the mountains was known to be a primary source of metal for the Ararat valley. Akhtala is considered by historians to be the “Pghendzahank” (Copper Mine) of North Armenia. It was also referred to as Agarak.

The monastery was the focus of religious turmoil as the center of Georgian Chalcedonianism in northern Armenia, surviving Zakareh and Ivaneh' Zakarian's attempts to forcibly unite the Armenian Monophysite and the Georgian Chalcedonian Churches, unsuccessfully. In the 18th c. King Heracles II of Georgia force-marched Greek miners to work the copper ore. You can find their ‘signatures’ on monastery walls.

Surviving Mongol, Seljuk and Turkish attacks the monastery succumbed to fighting in the 19th c., the monastery and the fort sustaining heavy

damage. It remains as a village shrine and one of Armenia's best intact examples of its great fresco era.



Complex

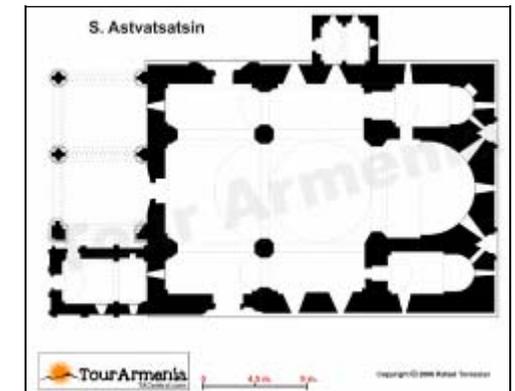
The monastery is inside of a fortress, its date uncertain, but considered either 10th c. or shortly thereafter. The convent buildings consist of three churches, a bell tower, galleries and friary. The main entry is on the N with a large hall and vaulted ceiling.

Aside from its stunning location, the **monastery** is important for having relatively intact fresco paintings on the inside walls of the main church, and the detail given to the design.



The primary church, **S. Astvatsatsin**, built for Ivaneh Zakarian / Ivaneh Atabekian in the 12-13th cc was uniquely designed in an “engraved-cross” form with a high dome. It was built using locally cut basalt. The original dome collapsed in an 18th c. earthquake and was replaced with the current

metal roof in 1938. The vestibules on the eastern apse have vaulted ceilings, a hallmark of the Chalcedonian Georgian style. A small room was added to the north, entry from the outside.



The grandeur of the original must be imagined, but the walls do not, they show the elegance and wealth of this monastery, covered as they are with beguiling 13th c. **frescos** of saints and sinners; the Final Judgment, enthroned Virgin and saints. On the eastern apse is one of S. Grigor Lusavorich, founder of the Armenian church. The iconography and color are hallmarks of the Georgian school of the 13th c., when these were done.



The west front has a portico formed by two arch spans, in its south is the second church, a small **chapel** with a vaulted roof. This small building, probably built in the 13th c., has blind arches resting on semi-circular columns.

To the N of the church are the remains of the **Friary**, a two story building that used part of the fortifications for its eastern wall, and a wooden roof. Some of the walls remains, enough to show the size of this dwelling, which included a community room and dormitory style sleeping chambers. The Friary had an entrance to a tunnel, leading to the river gorge.

Near the main church are the remains of a **single nave church** partially enclosed by a ditch. It had a semicircular apse protruding from the eastern wall, common beginning in the 5th-6th cc



The 13th c. **bell tower**, a small square construction on two levels stands at the main entrance to the fortress. The original wooden structure was removed.

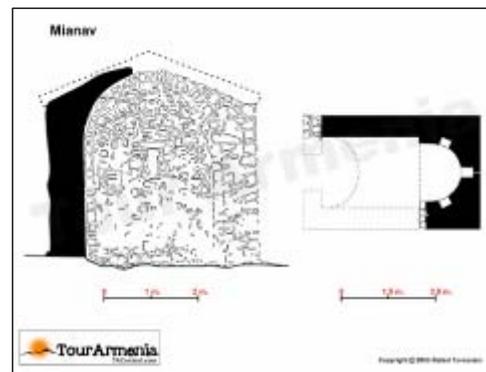
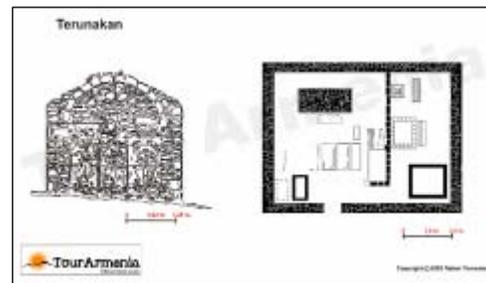
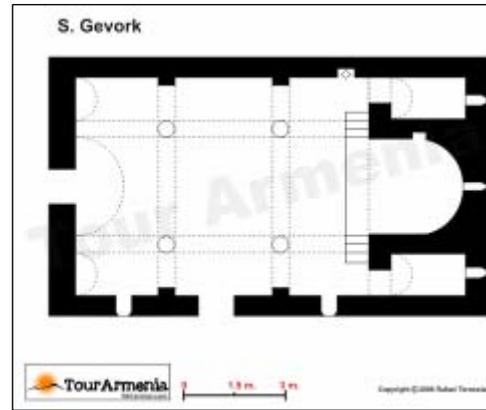
Akhtala was a major defensive and spiritual center, as the numerous 10th-13th cc fortifications, churches and chapels in the village show. On your way back to the highway you will see on your right the monastery of **S. Yerordutiun** (Holy Trinity) (DD 41.14984 x 44.77737), two inter-connected churches, a chapel, gallery hall and subterranean rooms.

Others are the **Arakelotz** (Apostolic) **Gevorg Church**, and a 13th c. **spring monument**, built on a Vishap stone from the Bronze Age, a pair of hall churches and the **Barseghian chapel**.

NW of the main complex is a **Russian chapel**, built at the end of the 19th c.

Over on the left as you exit the monastery are ruins of another **medieval fortress**, with a grouping of **caves** in the cliff sides.

Iron Age cemetery. Near the village is a large



Early Iron Age cemetery, discovered in 1887 by Frenchman J. De Morgan. He uncovered 210 shaft

graves and iron and bronze weapons dating to the Urartian period (8th-6th cc BCE).

The village still has a few Greek families, descents of the miners brought to Akhtala in the 18th c. The **Greek church** is at the upper end of the village. There are still a number of copper mines in the area, one of which reopened in 2001, though miners are not paid regularly and are often on strike.

Camping in the village and nearby forest. **Overnight** in the village entirely possible (5000 AMD for B&B). **Food** at kiosks on the highway and at the Debed Restaurant, located in some Dimiks on the side of the road (1500-2000 AMD).

➔ From Akhtala, continue on the potted main village road NW as it winds through the Akhtala river canyon about 4.8 km to (**Shamlugh**, DD 41.1680556 x 44.7075) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: At (**Shamlugh - Շամլուղ**, elev. 1102m, pop. 7858) you are at the heart of the copper age in Armenia, the area around you has been mined for more than 5000 years. Shamlugh now is a gritty mining center in the middle of old growth forests. It had the largest copper mine in the Soviet Union, which has recently been revived, though much of it remains (thankfully) dormant. Logging (illegal and otherwise) is another sad example of the "bardic" (chaos) in Armenia, the government not even trying to hide their wholesale destruction of the environment.

Shamlugh is also the location of a major archeological find, a **Bronze Age/ Iron Age cemetery**, where dozens of shaft graves were uncovered, shedding light on the inhabitants. Skeletons were set in the fetal position, their head and arms facing the west, or the setting sun. Objects buried with the bodies included stone jewelry, bronze and copper figures, plate and jewelry, and the fragments of pots and urns that held wine and food for the journey to the afterlife. There is also a 13th c. cross monument.

Camping in the forests, but be sure you do not interfere with mining or logging operations.

ALTERNATE ROUTE TO JILIZA: From Shamlugh there is a rutted path that traverses treacherous hills and gullies W about 2.3 km where it joins a N/S rutted path that goes N about 7 km to the Georgian towns of Burdazori, Gulbari and Tsoji

(3.5 km), from where you can travel W about 6.6 km to Khokhmedi and down SW about 2 km to the Armenian monasteries at Jiliza.

➔ Backtrack to Akhtala then take the Left bank potted mountain road E and NE (past Pokr Airum) about 4.2 km to (**Mets Airum**, DD 41.1716667 x 44.8191667) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Mets Airum - Մեծ Այրում** elev. 662m, pop. 5762) about 4.5 km NW from here is the 1612 shrine to a martyr of the Persian resistance, but the reason to stop are the rolling hills, forests and the farm-fresh foods and clean air.

Camping on the hillside or by the river.

➔ From Akhtala take the Georgian Highway N about 4.7 km to the turnoff for **SHNOGH** (DD 41.1477778 x 44.8377778) 🏠

🏠 **SHNOGH – ՇՆՈՂ** 🏠 (elev. 784m, pop. 5281) The name either comes from the Armenian words "shen hogh" (fertile soil) hence "shnogh", or a corruption of the word "shinogh" (builder), locals are divided on the subject. Shnogh's history goes back to the copper, molybdenum and trace minerals mines in the area worked from the Copper Age.



There is a very nice, small **ethnographic museum** upstairs of the village hall, central square (10-5, ask at the Village Office for key if closed), with artifacts from each period of its history sitting in order on rows of display tables. Note the exquisite wing fragments form a 13th c cross in the display case on the near wall, and next to it a piece of glazed ceramic from the Iron Age.

You can touch most everything there, which is a little scary but also endearing.



There are two ruined churches at Shnogh, **S. Gevorg**, built in 1893 and **S. Sarkis**, built one year later. Just E is the castle and the 1222 Terunakan khachkar shrine, with a number of khachkars inscribed on the walls.



The top of the village on a promontory above the Debed River is the site for the once standing **Kaitson Castle/Fortress**, probably founded in the 9th c. on the remains of Bronze and Iron Age cyclopean forts. There are no remaining walls, but the village district (also called Kaitson Berd) was built from the stones harvested by this massive fort. The fortress was once impregnable, and was chronicled by David Korairetsi (12th c.), Vartan Areveltsi (13th c.) and others, noting it was one of the most striking castles of its day, a key defense of the Northern frontier. If he is still around ask for Sergei, who will show you where the main gates once lay and the configuration of

the walls. His backyard is also worth seeing: the entire Debed River Gorge.

Numerous bronze and copper artifacts from the 8th c. BCE have been found in the castle, some on display at the ethnographic museum in the village. Some locals promise to take visitors to sites where they say there are still historic artifacts, but beware, the treasures you might find are the patrimony of Armenia, and protected by law from illegal export.

Camping outside the village, in the castle area, and on the riverbed. **Overnight** at village home possible, (5000 AMD for B&B).

➤ Continue S on the road below Shnogh about 3.8 km to (**Teghut**, DD 41.1180556 x 44.8458333) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Teghut - Թեղիս** elev. 823m, pop. 4933) has a 13th c. Monastery hermitage, 10-17th c. churches, and a 13- 14th c. Vartan Zoravar monument.

Teghut is an excellent spot for hiking the forests and hills of Mt. Archi-Glugh Khorkhotan and Chatin, and east into Tavush. The walk up the dirt track E of the village to Ms. Samehrk (1263.6 m. – 3.2 km) and Zigatar (1846.3 m. – 5.5 km to right (E) fork, another 4.5 km to circle south of the mount and surmount). The forests are remote with medium to difficult hiking. Guide recommended (for mountain guides contact Zhanna in Yerevan at Tel. +(374-10) 27 87 28 / 27 40 12)

Teghut is also the focus of a major ecological scandal, the government ministers who control the mining operation preparing to clear cut 600 hectares (2000 acres) of pristine forest so they can strip mine for copper. [Hetq news story \(www.hetq.am/eng/ecology/0511-antar-1.html\)](http://www.hetq.am/eng/ecology/0511-antar-1.html)

➤ Backtrack to the Georgian Highway and continue N about 3.6 km to Karakop and the Chochkan turn to the L over the bridge, then R along the RR tracks then uphill and L at the top. From the bridge it is about 6 km to (**Chochkan**, DD 41.186328 x 44.831094) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Chochkan - Ճոճկան** elev. 698m, pop. 5762) was the estate of Count Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov (1825? - 1888), a Russian statesman, General of the Cavalry, Adjutant General of the Svita, and son of an Armenian merchant. Loris-Melikov was born at

Tiflis in 1825 or 1826, and educated in St Petersburg, first in the Lazarev School of Oriental Languages, and afterwards in the Guards' Cadet Institute.

He quickly rose in the ranks of the Imperial army and during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-88 he commanded a corps that took Ardahan and Kars, for which he received the title of Count. His success as governor of the Lower Volga and in combating the Nihilists and Anarchist, in central Russia, and his success in dealing with revolutionary unrest after the attempted assassination of the Tsar by reforming the corrupt administrative and economic causes of the unrest led to his appointment as Minister of the Interior with extraordinary powers. He was unable to put his plans into force; the day after the tsar signed the first decree of reform, he was assassinated, and his son, Alexander III began a program of harsh repression. Count Loris-Melikov immediately resigned and lived in retirement until his death at Nice on 22 December 1888.

*The village has the **estate church** built for the Count's mother and about 5 km distant and a steep hike up a nearby mountain the ruins of the 17th c. **Shpotavank church**.*

Camping in the area. Overnight in a village home (5000 AMD)

➤ END OF TRIP 2.



TRIP 3: NORTHWEST: STEPANAVAN ▲
VANADZOR – (Kamakatar) – **PUSHKIN PASS** –
 (Gargar) – (Pushkino) – **GIULAGARAK** –
 (Hobardzi) – (Vardablur) – **KURTAN** –
AMRAKITS – **STEPANAVAN** – **LORI BERD** –
 (Lejan) – (Agarak) – (Yaghdan)– (Dzoraget
 Canyon) – **STEPANAVAN** – (Armanis) –
 (Katnaghpiur)

This route goes through the Pushkin pass to the Stepanavan valley and beyond. En route it passes Armenia's best preserved botanical garden, the Dendro Preserve, as well as historic sites at Lori Berd, the historic capital of the region and a number of Bronze Age and early Christian ruins, on its way to Stepanavan and the wild regions of Tashir. It is also a region of dairy farms and alpine grasslands, surrounded by a mountainous landscape.

One of the most idyllic places in the country,

welcomingly cool even in July, near Tashir there is a stunning waterfall on the Lalvar river and at Stepanavan you will find the endangered Armenian water lily.



Stay: Overnight in Vanadzor, Stepanavan, Amrakits, village homes (Metsavan, Tashir). Camping at Gargar, Giulagarak, Vardablur, Agarak, Katnaghpiur and on any mountain range away from the villages. Villagers will generally allow you to camp, but ask first.

Eat: Roadside Khorovatz stands along the highway, Stepanavan and Tashir cafes.

Springs: Pushkin Pass, Gargar, Pushkino, Hobardzi, Vardablur, Kurtan, Lori Berd, Lejan, Stepanavan, Agarak, Dzoraget Canyon, Katnaghpiur.

☞ Take the Spitak Highway W about 4.4 km (opposite Darpas) then turn N on the Stepanavan Highway and go about 1.7 km and on the right, on

a tall hill you will see the small (Kamakatar **Matur** DD 40.84962 x 44.44181)



SIDE TRIP: (Kamakatar - Կամակատար "Katar's Wish") is named for the heroine of a local legend, 14 year old Katar who was found on top of the hill praying in the middle of the night by her frantic father. She made her father promise he would bury her at that same spot when she died, which she did that same night. The heads of the surrounding villages (Bazum, Darbas, Ghshla) realized she was blessed by God and decided to build the 13th chapel at the site, interring her underneath.

The building is actually the latest incarnation of a Pagan temple to a deity perhaps much like the 13th c Katar. Near the chapel are a row of saplings bedecked with colored cloth (the fabled "burning bushes" found throughout Armenia, the cloth taken from personal clothing and tied on for good luck). When we visited there was a line of locals trudging uphill to pray and bless their matagh offerings. A difficult hike, the road can be mounted by a Niva, and the views are spectacular.

☞ Continue N on the Highway about 5.5 km, past Bazum (.5 km) and Aznavdor turn road to **PUSHKIN PASS** 🏠 🏕️

☘ **PUSHKIN PASS** – ՊՈՒՇԿԻՆԻ ԷՔՍՊՐՍՆՆԱԿ (2037m) is named after the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin, considered his country's greatest poet and the founder of modern Russian literature. Pushkin traveled the Caucasus during the Russian Imperial period (1829), when Russians were claiming Armenian lands under Turkish control. His 1836 travelogue, "Journey to Arzum (Erzerum)", mentions his visit, and a chance encounter in a mountain pass from Stepanavan, when he met the dead body of another well-known Russian writer, Griboyedov that was being transported from Iran to Russia. The passage was named after him in return.

There is a 900m tunnel that cuts through the mountain on the main highway, but if you have the time (and a jeep, 6.8 km, 1 hour) take the more scenic original road from the other side (about 250m past the tunnel on the right) that surmounts the pass in a climb with a lot of switchbacks and stunning views from the top. It is closed to through traffic. Via the tunnel, the landscape immediately changes as grasslands on the Vanadzor side give way to forested hills and crisp, clean air. The view of the Stepanavan valley begins 3.5 km after the N end of the tunnel.

The pass is the focus of Armenia's first wind farm, four stations on the top of the pass, each with blades 24-meters in length, weighing 3.5 tons. The wind turbines are expected to secure Vanadzor's energy needs once they are operational.



As you descend from the pass, you will pass a "Burning Bush" tree festooned with cloth stripes torn from clothing work by by-passers wanting good luck. Find it, tear off a bit of your own clothing and tie it on for good luck on the trip ahead.



About 4 km past the tunnel, on the right, opposite the **Pushkin Meets Griboyedov Monument**, a neat little **summer camp** operates in the river valley, with tents and a central commissary. 2000-5000 AMD.

Food/Drink along highway.

➔ From the N end of the tunnel it is about 5.5 km to (**Gargar**) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Gargar** - **Գարգար** - formerly **Gerger**) has a ruined church and a S. Amnaprkich shrine (black tufa with white basalt patterns embedded in the walls. There is some thought that medieval inhabitants were descended from Georgian tribe, and in the History of the Armenians, by Movses Khorenatsi, Gargar is mentioned as an offspring of the mythical Arran (khor, 11,8), the eponymous ancestor of the Arranians, inhabitants of old Albania, on the lower flow of the Kura. Gargar is in the shadow of the Chogijaj, Ajasar, Klor Tala and Javot Jurd mountains, looming above it and the villages of Giulagarak and Amrakits. In this area, each mountain has its legends and tales, preserved by villagers and elders in song and oral tradition.

Of one, "The hunters of Lalvar", heroes were renowned for their bravery, honesty, and respect for nature. They never took more than was needed, maintaining a balance between man and the natural surroundings. Farming is based on this principal, with some success considering the incredible fruits and vegetables available here. Here is where you begin to see a distinctly local way of advertising: **loaves of bread** sitting on chairs and crates by the side of the road. The fresh stud is in the house, stop and someone will come out to sell.

Camping on the riverbed.

➔ Take NW road about .6 km to (**Pushkino**, DD 40.9583333 x 44.4088889)

SIDE TRIP: (**Pushkino** – **Պուշկին** - till 1937 **Gargar Rus**, elev. 1505m, pop. 3920) is a Russian village inhabited by Molokons, with pretty wooden trim and reluctant, but ultimately winnable hospitality, if you know Russian, a place to catch up on local lore and Molokon

lifestyle. See Trip 6 for details about the Molokons.

➔ Backtrack to Gargar and go NE about 1.8 km to **Giulagarak** (DD 40.96632 x 44.47050) 🏰 🏰

🏰 **GIULAGARAK - ԳՅՈՒԼԱԳԱՐԱԿ** 🏰 ("Garden of Roses," from the Turkish word "Giul," "rose," elev. 1351m, pop. 3451) is at a fork in the highway. Going E you pass the remaining structure of a reputed 1874 church with 4th c BCE column bases nearby, showing a much older beginning.

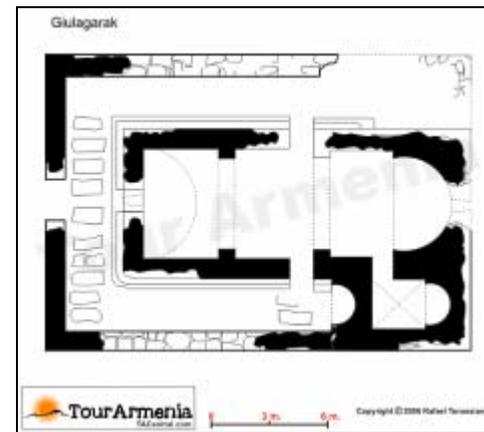
About 200 m past the church, a potted paved road goes S towards the hills, and passes the rebuilt 6th c. single nave basilica **Thormak** (DD 40.94622 x 44.47236).



The church has a gallery, actually a feature of 5th c. churches so unique here. Galleries on basilicas were reserved for sinners seeking repentance, dictated in canons by S. Grigor Lousavoritch, adopted before the council of Nicaea (325), where he spoke about the need for repentance outside the church walls. Like its cousins at Khurthan and Gtevank, situated only about 6 km from each other and built in the same period, Thormak was built from finely cut basalt blocks, its main hall terminating on the east in a semicircular apse with a horseshoe-shaped arch.

The hall is twice as high as it is wide, the windows elevated high from the floor due to an annex on three sides, adding to the impression of a soaring height. Vaulting is supported on flying arches thrust against pilasters. Doors are on the western and southern walls. What has survived is the western part of the annex with an entrance arch

and northern parts. Cornices, window casings and doorframe arches are decorated with horseshoe-shaped miniature arches of considerable thickness.



The road continues past the **Hekiat (FairyTale) Khorovatz restaurant** before ending in a pine-tree grove where the children's health resort, **Sojut** lies (pine flower dust having a medicinal effect on children with lung problems) as well as the little botanical jewel, **Stepanavan Dendro Park (SDPK)**.



Established in 1933, the inspiration for the arboretum in the heart of an indigenous forest came from an engineer-forester Edmon Leonovich, who introduced new trees into natural forest glades and clearings and left the main forest-forming species, the Siberian pine (Pinus sibirica), as a natural backdrop. The arboretum is 35 ha in total of which 17.5 ha consist of natural forest and

15 ha of ornamental trees. Leonovich is buried in the park, his son is the current director and has maintained the site in excellent condition.

The park consists of ornamental plantings with avenues of Lime (Tilia cordata), and wild sourced specimens of Juglans, Malus, Populus and Pyrus. The variety of plants that have found a home in the arboretum range from Magnolia to larch Larix decidua, from cypress to Siberian pine, from Cryptomeria to Sequoiadendron. The native species found growing naturally in this region include hornbeam Carpinus caucasica, lime Tilia caucasica, T. cordata, beech Fagus orientalis, elm Ulmus elliptica, U. scabra, U. foliacea, oak Quercus macranthera, Q. iberica, Q. longipes, pine Pinus harmata and pear Pyrus communis. This is crown jewel of Armenia's ecological movement and a must see site.



Outside the gates locals sell Pine pollen (Shiski Meghe) for about 2500 AMD. Considered a natural healtant for stuffed nose.

Overnight at the Sojut Sanatorium (next to Dendro Park, Tel: 093-40-34-32), with dormitory style rooms and 3 meals a day in the forested area for 4000 AMD per person. **Camping** on Sanitarium grounds and in the forest possible (ask). **Food** at the restaurant at the Highway turnoff for Giulagarak, 3000 AMD.

➔ Go back to Giulagarak, then take an E village road about 1.9 km then S about 100 m to (**Hobardzi**, DD 40.96319 x 44.49330)

SIDE TRIP: (**Hobardzi** - **Հոբարձի** pop. 828) 🏰 is an old village, and despite of some modern conveniences, locals still prefer horse drawn carts as the main form of transportation.

Considering the potted road, not a bad idea. The **6-7th c. church**, is a mirror image in its plan to Jgrashen church (see Vardablur), both made at the same time. The church is decorated with miniature horseshoe arches, the side facades of the main church have pediments, and, as with Kurtan and Thormak, a horizontal band runs along the pediment in a semicircle around the window top of the west façade.

A sad legacy of the Soviet days, the church was used as warehouse to store wheat, which created an overly moist atmosphere that leached salt into the walls and weakened them. There are still traces of the old wooden roof built in 1861 and the red clay tiles that were used in the early 20th c. Villager await the proverbial outside assistance to rebuild what is theirs to take care of.



➡ Go back to the Giulagarak road, then E about .2 km to **(Vardablur, DD 40.9708333 x 44.5088889)** 📍

SIDE TRIP: **(Vardablur - Վարդաբլուր** elev. 1440m, pop. 3564) has two interesting sites, both requiring Nivas, hiking boots and some nerves of steel. Going into the Center of the village, a road turns right to the fish ponds and a bridge that carries you S of the village about 1 km to a fork in the path, the left one going uphill another 2 km to the top of the mountain at 1568 m. and the **S. Sarkis Monastery**. Ask for directions, people will guide you. The monastery fortress is mostly in ruins but the views are spectacular and it is a point of pilgrimage, like so many abandoned churches and monasteries in Armenia, pieces of colored cloths attached to "burning bushes" and signs of

pre-Christian worship in the foundations and nearby spring.



On its E end, as you leave the village, at the village limits sign, turn left onto a dirt path that goes into the open fields of vegetable. Follow that to the electric power line tower, then L to the next power line tower and then R to just before the rim of the Dzoraget River gorge (Watch out for it! No signs or barriers to stop your fall!) and head W as best you can to the ruins of the magnificent 6/7th c. **Jgrashen church** where the 19th-20th cc composer Komitas first sang his famous "Lori Horovel."

Jgrashen is a long, high church with a semicircular apse, divided by two pairs of pilasters and flying arches. It is run around on three sides with an annex, its side porticoes having apses on the east end. A sacrificial altar with an apse is accentuated on the east side of the Northern part of the annex. The annex is in ruins, stone corbels are all that remain in the walls. The cornice is decorated with miniature horseshoe shaped arches, side facades have pediments.

Walk over to the gorge from the church and you have one of the most magnificent views in Armenia of the Dzoraget canyon, unspoiled by civilization save a power line and a house or two in the far distance. The canon is over 200 m deep at this point and water falls crash into the river far below, the view is more than 1 km long at this point.

Camping by the mountain church.



➡ Backtrack to the road, turn L (E) and immediately you will see on your right the ruins of the small 5th c church at **KURTAN (DD 40.95522 x 44.56506)** 📍

📍 **KURTAN - ԿՈՒՐՏԱՆ** ▲ (elev. 1108m, pop. 3773) Kurtan is part of the most impressive assembly of Medieval structures in on the Dzoraget River, the collection stretching between the village and Hnevank to the E. The village has multiple churches and monasteries from the 5th c. forward and before that the area was host to Urartian strongholds, Iron Age fortresses and Bronze Age settlements.



The first structure you meet, outside the village on the W is the small ruined **5th c. single-nave church**. The foundations are distinctly pre-Christian. Look for the stele, once a vishap stone from pagan times.

Lori Tradition and Culture Museum was founded in 1989 as a branch of the National Museum of Ethnography, became independent in 1995 and since 1997 operates as Kurtan community museum. The two (archaeological and ethnographic) collections of the museum contain about 800 items including archaeological finds and objects characteristics of the traditions and culture of the region. Hours are 10-5, but it depends on the availability of the curators, a husband and wife team who were at a funeral when we came visiting. They live about 100m down the street on the left, at house No. 4-6. Looks promising though, especially if you've bounced through the trip so far and want to get up and walk around a bit.

About 400m past the museum on the same street is the partially restored **6th basilica S. Astvatsatsin**. S. Astvatsatsin is similar in design to the basilicas at Gtevant and Thormak in Giulagarak, evenly spaced at 3-4 kilometers from each other. All were built from finely cut basalt blocks in the same period, at a time of great fervor in the region, which was one of the last to fully convert to Christianity, the basilicas were built on the tops of pre-Christian shrines or temples, incorporating animist design motifs: They "consecrated" pagan sacrificial altars by moving their orientation from West (Setting sun) to East (the rising sun, the place of resurrection), thereby enforcing the idea that while the old religion focused on death and the netherworld, the new belief looked to the resurrection and the eternal life. Even the termination of their nave in a horseshoe shaped arch, visually reinforced this idea, the horseshoe shape and its decoration symbolizing the rising sun.

The halls were twice as high as they are wide, with windows elevated to the second story due to annexes running around the hall on three sides, reinforcing the feeling of lift and lightness for an obviously heavy construction. Vaulted ceilings were held up by flying arches thrust against pilasters. Like its cousins, S. Astvatsatsin had a chapel with an apse on the southern side, and still has the stone cantilevers on the walls that supported the roofing of the annex vault. The horizontal band running along the pediment around the top of the window in the western façade and transforming itself into a casing is a rare feature of pediments.

The halls were thought to have had frescos, lost in the Iconoclastic phase that swept the country shortly thereafter.

A large prehistoric settlement was found on the elevated terrace of the Ghergherchai River west of Kurtan village. Structures and pottery found there indicated this was a fortified settlement from Bronze and Early Iron Ages. 20 m thick lake deposits from the Early Quaternary era are nearby.

Alternate Route To Hnevank And Dzoraget: Continue E about 7 km on the village road and after a series of switchbacks you reach the outskirts of Dzoragiugh village and a left fork into the River gorge and Hnevank. From Continue on the upper road past Dzoragiugh and in about 3.1 km you reach the Alaverdi Highway and Dzoraget.

Camping on the river.

↻ *Backtrack to Giulagarak then N about 2.2 km to AMRAKITS (DD 40.99730 x 44.43204)* 📍 🗺️



✠ **AMRAKITS (KIROV) - Ամրակից** ▲ (before Kirov, elev. 1392m, pop. 6736), just SE of Stepanavan, has a remarkable **1789 Russian Zham**, built by Old Believers forced into exile by Catherine the Great. Settling in Lori mars, where they received a warm reception, they built the magnificent church that towers over the village and is seen from the highway as you approach the village. There are two ways to the church, from the E and N ends of the village off of the Hwy.

The Molokons are gone, but the church remains, marker of previous times. The church is compact in size, but twice the height of its width, with 5 onion domes and thick plastered walls. It badly needs

refurbishment; perhaps the new Russian Utility will take pity and give it rebirth.



Amrakis is also the home of the slightly worn **Motel Lori** (Tel. +374-056-2-20-05, e-mail: stepcenter@infocom.am). A little high with SGL/DBL at 7000/10,000 AMD each. Suites can house up to 6 people each. Amenities include sauna, billiards and optional horseback riding. Pretty view of the Dzoraget River and Lori Berd.

Overnight at Motel Lori. **Food** at Motel Lori and roadside stands on the highway.

↻ *Continue about 2.3 km to Stepanavan* 📍 🗺️

STEPANAVAN ▲
(DD 41.075 x 44.3866667)
[Map](#) (on page 46)

✠ **STEPANAVAN - ՍՏԵՓԱՆԱՎԱՆ** (till 1923 Jalaloghlu, elev. 1461m, pop. 11411) is situated on the right and left banks of Dzoraget River, the second largest town in Lori marz based on the population (25,500 people).

Background. Prehistoric sites in Stepanavan and Lori Berd date back to the Stone Age, with Bronze Age belts depicting riders on horses showing a domestic horse breeding in the area since at least the 3rd m BCE. The design closely resembles a Gueghamian rock-carved picture of horses, confirming widespread horse breeding in Armenia in the 2nd-1st m. The present Town of Stepanavan and adjacent area was a part of Tashir Province in Artashes (Artaxes / Artashasid), later in the Arshakuni (Arshak / Arshakuniats) Kingdom. In the 385 division of Armenia, Tashir Province and

Stepanavan became an Armenian principality. Beginning in the 9th century, Shirak's Bagratunis governed the area and joined several adjacent provinces together to create the Tashir-Dzoraget or Lori Kingdom under the Kiurikians. The greatest period of the 'Kiurikian Kingdom' was from 980 to 1048 during the reign of Davit "Anhogh" ("Landless") and after him Kiurikeh A (Giurgen), when the area was expanded at the expense of Gandzak and the Tbilisi Provinces. The kingdom stretched along the Pambak and Debed watersheds (present Lori marz) with its center at Lori Berd.

In medieval times, Stepanavan was the manor of Zakarian dynasty. It also served as a summer place for Armenian kings, Lori Berd being a favorite Summer home for the Armenian King Ashot Yerkat (the Iron).

The town was one of the districts of Lori Fortress, chronicles showing that by the end of 13th Century, a branch of the Prince Artsakh Khachenitc Hassan Jalalal Dola and 110 families inhabited the town plateau. The residential area was named Jalaloghli, after the Jalal Dynasty, when it was officially founded in 1604 by Armenian refugees, running from the Persian sovereign Shah Abass during his Armenian campaign. The Armenian writer Hovhanes Tumanian, had his primary education in Stepanavan, writing about the area in later life. It held its name for 700 years until 1923, when it was renamed in honor of a Bolshevik Armenian, and became the administrative center of the region. The 1988 earthquake caused significant damage to the town, and new housing has been slow but ongoing. Development is on the left bank of the Dzoraget River connecting the new districts with the town over a bridge at a height of 200 m from the river floor.



The area's moderate, humid climate, snowy winters and cool summers with sunny days, lack of polluting industries, forests and pine-tree groves combine to create an atmosphere literally saturated with oxygen, the climate considered the most healthy in Armenia.

The town was famous for its cheese, something that is on the rebound. The area used to produce 20 types of cheese, and provided the Soviet Union with well-known Lori's oil and Armenian "Swiss" cheese. By all means, if you find some, buy it! It is delicious, as is the extraordinary village yogurt. This is part of Armenia's dairy land, do as the locals do—eat!

Information
The excellent **Stepanavan Information Center**, 11 Million p. Tel: 22-158, 21-837, is run by a group of young enterprising Stepanavantsis who 'got tired of waiting for the parents to fix things' and decided to start on their own. They began with the information center, which has a computer room (Internet is off and on depending on the Wi Fi connection), a café, B&B and guide service, as well as dispense maps and information for local travelers. Ever wanted to drive a Russian Niva in the countryside? These are the folks who can arrange it for you, as well as meeting local villages, sampling crafts and foods, and exploring nature. Open from 10 until 23.00+



Sights. The town itself has a number of pretty **19th century buildings**, their wood and stone décor a welcome relief to the overbearing tufa used by other buildings.

The town square boasts a **statue of Stepan Shahumian**, an Armenian Communist who led the

Baku insurrection in 1920 and was killed there. Founded in 1923 in the paternal house of Shahumian's wife Ekaterina Der-Grigorian, where the revolutionary created the first Marxist club in Armenia.

Stepan Shahumian House Museum, (4 Njdeh p. at the head of Stepanavan Square) is dedicated to In 1973, the house was preserved in a new building erected for the purpose. Artifacts include his papers and pictures of his life. Upstairs is the **local museum collection**, which has been renamed as a **Culture and Recreation Center**. The house-museum collection has about 800 items including personal belonging of the revolutionary, household items, documents, etc.

In fact, the most notable thing about Stepanavan may be its communist roots, known (notoriously so by foreign Armenians) as the birthplace of Communism in Armenia. One sight to look for is the **Printing House**, where the Stepanavan committee of the communist party has been working out in one of the inner rooms.

First meeting in a **local cave** (now called the **Communist Caves**, reached by descending some steep aging steps into the Dzoraget River cliffs, at the end of Arevelian p. off of Baghramian p.), the leaders who created the first Marxist group in Armenia in 1899 began meeting here secretly, along with Shahumian. Even after Soviet independence, the town refused to rename itself, insisting its socialist roots were too deep to discard its history so lightly. Sticking to its roots, there are two political groups in the town, communists and leftist Dashnaks.



Churches

The Race to Beat the Moon, or "Blue Light becomes thee, Lily"

It was already 8 p.m. and we were still trying to get away from the "few bits" spread out before us and the innumerable toasts flying fast and furious around the table at the Anahit Pensionat. I kept glancing at my watch helplessly watching the seconds tick away into minutes into hours, the afternoon sun sinking into evening. My chance to visit the water lilies this year was waning away

There are only two known lakes in the Caucasus where these flowers survive, both near Stepanavan, and they put on a spectacular display at the height of summer, when Armenia's other flora begin to brown and go to seed. Part of the adventure is to make the long trek over mountain terrain to the lonely hills where they thrive.

But to reach those hills we have to leave now! Finally our hosts let us go, but only after deciding to lead us to the lake, despite not having a clue where it is or my warnings of just how difficult the terrain is (none of them has anything like the trusty Lada I use which we have dubbed "Ashot's Jeep" for its owner and ability to climb just about any mountain or ford any stream. They race off in their 'new' European cars, only to come to a screeching halt when we hit the first turn off, a rocky, windy road into the Netherlands with no hope of a tow truck in sight. They beg off, their turbo-charged 4x4s purring for the asphalt road behind. And off we go in our little Lada, bumping along the rocky road racing to make it over the mountain before the fading sun leaves us in the dark. Truth be told, we were running on blind faith and testosterone now, we knew we would never make it before dark, but at least, we said, we could take a moonlight swim in the lake, playing Marc Anthony to the Water Lily's Cleopatra.

After several detours, rushing streams requiring improvised bridges and driving blind into the sinking sunlight through meadow grass as tall as the car, we find the lake in the dark, glistening under a half moon, thousands of white and green buds peak out from their huge green leaves floating in the lake, their fragile beauty brimming in the green cracks of their oblong buds, awaiting daylight. We stared at the haunting sight, vowing to make another race, this time to beat the morning sun to the lake in time for dawn.

Inside the town are two small churches: **Avetaranakan** on Durian p. and **S. Sarkis** on Yegeghetakan p. The small 11th c. **S. Nshan** basilica is on a hill W of town, off of S. Nshen p. and has spectacular views of the river. There is also a ruined **5th-6th cc Amnaprkitch** basilica on a hill about 3 km NW of the town.



The Armenian Water Lily In late July and August, along the highway going N to Tashir you will find a number of small ponds full of water flowers with masses of small bright yellow flowers. But the prize is the white Armenian water lily, which has only two known native habitats remaining, both in the region. One lake is 7 ha. And 200 m deep, the other, smaller one is about 1 ha. in size. You need a

guide and a jeep to see them (and supervision, the species is endangered). Call Prof. Nora Gabrielian at the Botanic Institute in Yerevan to arrange one (Tel. Yerevan: 61-42-41), or check at the

Stepanavan Info Center if you're lucky you might get to hire Prof. Gabriellian herself, a renowned Botanist and the world's expert on Armenian endemic species.

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 256
 Long Distance: 0256 + local number
 From abroad: +(374) 256 + local number
 Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell
 International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + local number
 Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0256) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 256 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Bus, Minivan

Buses stop at Stepanavan on routes from Georgia (Tbilisi), Tashir, Vanadzor and Yerevan. The bus station (aftokaiyeran) is located at the central square.

Yerevan buses run daily between the Yerevan Aftokaiyeran on Admiral Isahaakov p. and the Stepanavan aftokaiyeran. One bus a day at 1000 AMD.

Vanadzor bus runs daily between the Vanadzor and Stepanavan aftokaiyerans. (400 AMD) on its way to Akhalkalaki & Tashir.

Other buses run daily to **Alaverdi** (600 AMD), **Kurtan** (250 AMD), **Katnaghbiur** (400 AMD), **Urut** (150), **Sverdlov** (200), **Privolnoe** (300) and **Lori Berd, Lejan, Agarak** (150 AMD).

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) connect Stepanavan with **Tashir** (150 AMD), **Vanadzor** (500 AMD), **Giumri** (800 AMD) and **Yerevan** (1500 AMD). Marshrutni taxis are at the bus station. Minivans wait until they are full before leaving and can pack 'em in on a busy day.

Minivans also run to **Tbilisi** (3500 AMD) and **Giumri** (1200 AMD) From Tbilisi you can catch a separate bus, train or minivan to Batumi (around \$10, \$10, \$20).

By Taxi

Yerevan-Stepanavan

From Yerevan, taxis to Stepanavan are located in the parking lot beside **Kino Hairenik (Kino Rossiya)** at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi Pghs. Taxis normally charge 20000 AMD for up to four passengers, though be prepared to bargain. Be sure the price is for the car (mekenaiyov gineh) or per person (mart) before agreeing. It should be for the car. You can also order a taxi by phone. The going rate is 15,000 AMD. Most Yerevan taxi services provide this service, but we called Kalina (tel 010-555-333). Note even the best can go bad overnight, ask around when you arrive for best taxi service.

From Stepanavan, taxis to Yerevan are at the **Aftokaiyeran** (bus station) or as you catch them in town. Bargaining is harder the later in the day, when chances of finding a return passenger is more remote.

Vanadzor-Stepanavan taxis run on order, around \$10.

Georgia-Giumri taxis run on order, around \$30 each way to Tbilisi.

By Car

Stepanavan is located on the A328 Highway, 136 km north of Yerevan, 28 kilometers north of Vanadzor, 45 km north of Spitak, 18 km south of Tashir and 33 kilometers south of the Georgian border at Guguti. The A328 is in good condition, easily traveled from Yerevan in 3.5 hours in a soviet vehicle, 3 hours if you like your drive nerve-wracking. Petrol stations and rest stops/kebab

stands proliferate the southern end of the highway (Vanadzor, Spitak, Pushkin Pass).



AROUND

On foot is the best way to savor the city's unique atmosphere and hospitality. It is a small city, the center can be crossed in 10 minutes.

Taxis There are few taxis in town, hail them on Shahumian Street. Rate is 500 AMD in town. You can also use these to tour the region, Lori Berd is 1000 AMD, others are as pre-arranged. 100 AMD / km is fair, extra for waiting. A full day's trip to region and back should cost around \$20-30. Taxis to Tbilisi (\$50) and Yerevan (\$35) are possible, but need time for driver to organize. Cheaper to take the minivan to Vanadzor (3500 AMD) and take train or minivan/bus/taxi from there.

TOUR AGENCIES, GUIDES

Aerostar and **Yerkir Travel** have offices in town, both are primarily ticket agents, but they can find a guide and arrange transport. Also see **Stepanavan Information Center**, 11 Million p. and for a local guide, call **Sako** (093) 85-07-73, who does other business, but if free will prove to be one your most personable and informative guides. He loves his city and his region and knows where just about everything is (he can get you to the Water Lilies if you forget to arrange ahead of time).

Adventure, Nature Tours. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#).

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

Fire – 101
Police – 102
Ambulance service – 103
Rescue Hot Line - 118
Gas emergency service – 104
Trunk Line – 107
Telephone directory information – 109

Post, phone, telegraphs

The *Central Post Office* is at 3 Million p. [See HayPost site for list](#). The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Armentel is at 3 Million p. (tel. 22112)

Internet

Stepanavan Information Center, 11 Million p. access at 500 AMD an hour, when the WiFi connection with Arminco works.

Arminco has a rep and connection at the Central Library (tel. In Vanadzor +322-42622), email: krnadamyam@yahoo.com.

Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks, exchange at banks, hotel and exchange points throughout the town.

ACBA Bank, 11 Million, tel. 37456.
ARDSHININVESTBANK, 11 Million, tel. 22695
ARMECONOMBANK, 11 Million, tel. 23014.

Film

Shops in town sell film and batteries, the batteries in the regions are normally useless for anything more than a travel alarm clock, bring plenty from home or buy in Yerevan.

Fitness

The Gym, Health Center is on Antqrian p., tel: 22-183, with fitness equipment and sauna.

Hospital, Clinic, Dental

The *hospital* phone is (tel. 2 2228)
The *polyclinic* phone is (tel. 22132)
Dental Polyclinic phone is (tel. 22132)

Apotekas in town, ask at your overnight for recommendation.

OVERNIGHT

Hotel Lori (tel. 0256 22323, 22457, 091 345193), 11 G. Nzhdeh has rooms at SGL/ DBL/STE at 15,000/20,000 AMD (breakfast included). The hotel is run by the "Veratsnund " Charity Foundation. Rooms are basic, clean, staff is friendly and helpful, offering to help with optional guides and transport.



SW of town are two **summer resorts** near a forest, the Vahagn and the Anahit.

Anahit Pensionat (Retreat) (tel. 22578, 433843), 1 Antaraiyin p. is a worn around the ears, but for price it's great with Hot, cold water, bathing facilities, TV set, phone. The complex has Tennis, billiard, swimming pool, playground. 3 meals a day are included in the prices for DBL at 4500 AMD per person and LUX (6 persons) /COTTAGE (3-4 persons) at 12,000 AMD. The director Levon has revamped up the Sauna with some stunning stone work (5000 AMD per hour) and is in the process of completing an equally stunning restaurant made from local stones and wood.

Vahagn Pensionat does not have hot water, but starts at only 4500 AMD. Vahagn is closed in the off-season.

Motel Lori (tel. (256) 22005, 23127), E-mail: stepcenter@infocom.am has rooms with cold, hot water, TV. Motel has restaurant, sauna and billiards. SGL/DBL/TRP at 7000/10000/15000 AMD.

B&B

Armine Kalashian B&B, 11 Million p, Tel: 22-794, 091-21-38-37, e-mail armine5@yahoo.com, is run by the director of the Stepanavan Information Center, with rooms and breakfast in a modern/funky traditional style at 6000/7000 AMD.

DZORAP B&B (Tel in Yerevan +374 10 220138, or ask once you are in town) is situated on the right bank of the river Dzoraget, 600m from the town center and 100m from the main road. There are six bedrooms, baths and main living areas. The lodging is surrounded with an open-air balcony, and has a garden with fountain. SGL/DBL at 4500/6800 AMD.

"Ruzan Marikian" B&B, 6th house, 6th p, 4th micro region, Tel: 22-196, 091-74-50-39, has two rooms for guests. One room has SGL/DBL at 6000/12,000 AMD, the other at 7,500/15,000 AMD.

"Silva Zohrabian" B&B, 7th house, 4th micro region, Tel: 23-300, 093-33-87-04, is in a modern building off the road to Lori Berd, with a pretty garden and several rooms to let. Prices from 6000 AMD per person.

Overnight in town is a distinct possibility in Stepanavan, the locals are accustomed to tourists during the Soviet Days and sorely lacking in them now. Ask around and you will have your pick of several rooms or apartments to choose from. 3000-5000 AMD a night and breakfast is fair.

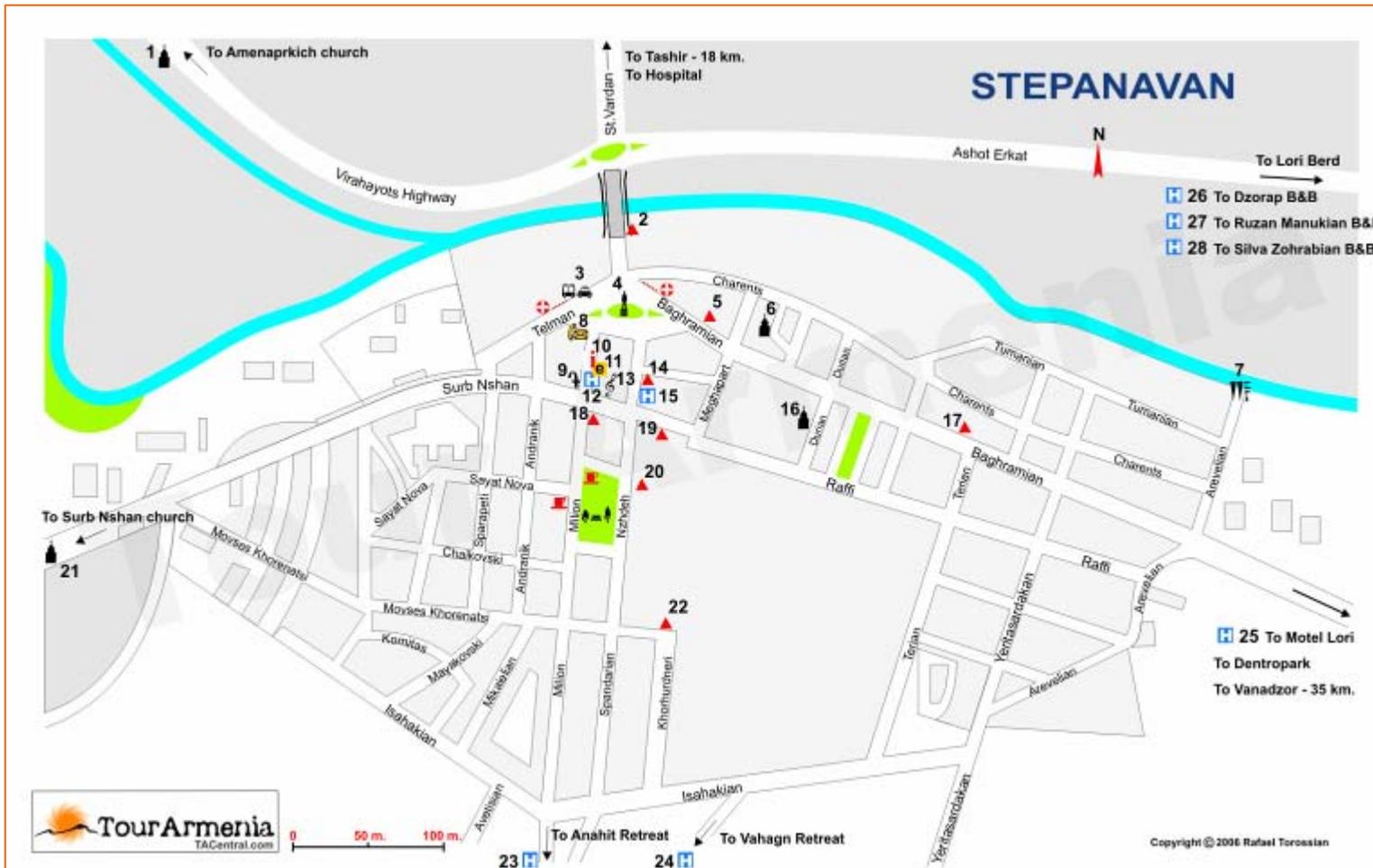
FOOD AND DRINK

Stepanavan has several cafes and bistros, all on the town square or along Nzhdeh and Million pts.



Listings

50/50 Bar, Nzhdeh p. at cone below Lori Hotel, serves Armenian and Russian food in a dining area with separate compartments. 2500-4500 AMD for full meal.



▲ FOOD & DRINK

- 14. 50/50
- 2. Café on the Bridge
- 18. Kilikia
- 20. Market
- 17. Trio

☕ OUTDOOR CAFE

🚌 BUSES - MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

- 3. Aftokaiyan

🏛️ MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY

- 11. Stepan Shahumian House Museum

🏛️ MONUMENTS - SITES

- 4 Stepan Shahumian Monument
- 7. Communist Caves

🏛️ CHURCHES

- 21. S. Nshan
- 1. Amnaprkich
- 16. Avetaranakan
- 6. S. Sarkis

🎭 THEATRES, MUSIC

- 13. Culture Center

🛍️ SHOPS, SHUKA

📧 INTERNET, PHONE, POST

- 10, 11. Stepanavan Info Center

🏛️ GOVT. OFFICES

- Stepanavan Mayor's Office

🏧 BANK, ATM

- 9. Ardshinvestbank
- 9. Armeconombank

🏠 APOTEKAS

🏥 CLINICS - HOSPITALS

🌳 PARKS

🚻 PUBLIC TOILET

STEPANAVAN MAP KEY

🏠 OVERNIGHT

- 12. Armine's B&B
- 15. Lori Hotel
- 23. Anahit Pensionat (Retreat)
- 24. Vahagn Pensionat (Retreat)
- 25. Motel Lori
- 26. Dzorap B&B
- 27. Ruzanna Marikian B&B
- 28. Silva Zohrabian B&B

Café on the Bridge. On the bridge (duh), combines café food (sandwiches, snacks) and a shop on a narrow bridge into a unique venue with limited menu but spectacular vies of the gorge. 500-2000 AMD for simple meal.

Kilikia Bar. Nshan and Million pts. Next to the former Kino tun (cinema), this favorite haunt of Communist Party big wigs serves khorovatz and Kilikia beer in an atmospheric space. Very reasonable at around 2500 AMD for meal with a few beers.

Market. Nshan and Million pts. serves an upscale clientele with Armenian and Russian food and is a popular spot for weddings and birthday celebrations. 4000-5000+ AMD for full meal without drinks.

Trio. Baghramian p. is a local joint serving basic food (and reputedly great French fries). 500-2500 AMD for sandwich/meal.

✂ **BRONZE AGE TOMBS, LORI BERD**

➡ From Stepanavan, cross the Dzoraget bridge over the river and take the E road at the roundabout. Proceed E and go past the housing on the left. Soon you will see some rocks piled up on both sides of the road. This are the **Lori Berd Bronze Age Shaft Tombs** (DD 41.01532 x 44.40273).



✂ **FIELD OF BRONZE AGE SHAFT TOMBS.** The field on both sides of the road is full of large Bronze Age chamber graves, built from large boulders. Artifacts unearthed here include the bronze age belt with horse riders, confirming horse breeding in the area at that time. There were also horse graves uncovered, either buried near their owners (as some cultures buried servants and close relatives) or a worship of the majestic beast. Chariots were also uncovered, similar to those used in the western Near East, indicating a very early use of the vehicle, and one remarkable for this mountainous area.

➡ Continue E about 1.6 km to Lori Berd village, where a road in the village angles SE in the village, ending about 1.5 km later at the fortress of **Lori Berd** (DD 41.00406 x 44.42918) 🏰

✂ **LORI BERD - ԼՈՐԻ ԲԵՐԴ** ▲ (also known as Lori, elev. 1403m, pop. 13988) is perched on the Dzoraget River, a spectacular ruin, hallmark of a much richer age.

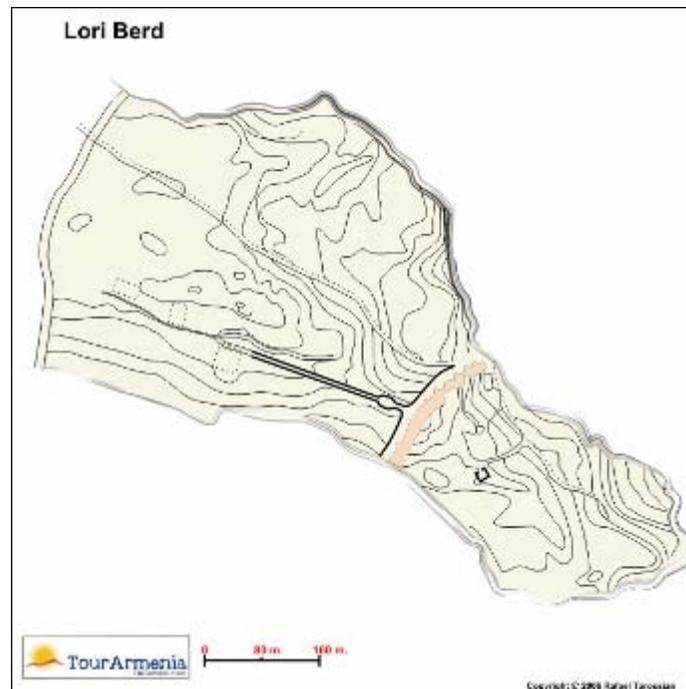


History. Lori Berd was settled during the Bronze Age, its natural fortifications and access to water and mineral resources developing its importance to regional alliances and conquerors. In the 10th c. the Bagratunis enlarged their lands to include Lori, renewing the lands of Tashir-Dzoraget with its capital Lori Berd. The area became known as 'Kingdom of Albania', ruled by junior branch of Bagratunis, the Kiurikians. Its capital was originally Shamshvile, later Lori Berd. The kingdom was founded by the son of Ashot III, Gurgen I (or Kiurikheh I) in 1079. Ashot had rebelled against his brother conquering the land of Tashir-Dzoraget, bequeathing it to his son. Gurgen (Kiurikheh) built a formidable bastion, and capitalized on the trade routes of the region, enriching his kingdom and his people.

After the fall of Ani and the end of the Bagratuni suzerainty, Lori was freed by the Georgian King David (the Builder), founding the Orbelian branch of the Georgian royal family. Related to the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty by marriage, when the Ani kingdom fell, they quickly usurped the eastern regions of Gugark, Lori and Tavush. Lori was then given as a gift to the Armenian prince Sarkis (Zakareh) Zakarian by King Giorgi III and his daughter Queen Tamara. The Mongols destroyed much of the fortress in 1238, while under the reign of Zakareh's son Shahnshah. Later invasions by Seljuks, Timur and Ottomans devastated the fortress, and the surrounding town was gradually deserted, inhabitants forming the village of Lori nearby.

Complex. The site is enormous, the surviving walls surmounting the high plains above the deep river gorges below, once enclosing a large medieval city. It is no wonder the inhabitants

thought their city impregnable, which led to their



Inside the fortress walls are the ruins of **two baths**, dating to the 11th-13th centuries, a time when the berd and the surrounding area flourished. The baths still show some of the waterworks and heating pipes used in the thermal baths, a medieval version of the more ancient Roman baths found at Garni. The only surviving **church** stands inside the fortress, a domed cross church in six sections. Note the khachkar

out front, on the left. At the bottom is a crest for the Kiurikheh Princely family, a king over a loin and eagle. The crest survives as that for Stepanavan. doom to the first invasion by Emir Kizil in 1105. The **fortress** is built in a triangular formation, much like the fortifications of Ani, impregnable thanks to its **ramparts**, which were built between the canyons of Dzoraget and Miskhana rivers. The **walls** are built from semi-cultivated basalt. On the northern end of the ramparts, near the Miskhana canyon, is the only **entrance to the citadel**, which had two sets of gates, over a moat. Only the outer remains. Two main defensive walls ran along the ridge of the ravines, over 20 m tall and half as thick, with a series of towers at strategic points. In some places the walls are more than 20 m thick. The fortress had a secret **water passage** (juri tchamba – water road), connecting with the Miskhana canyon. Inside this triangular formation lay the city, the outlying houses situated on the Amrakits and Kendagegh plateaus. Connected to Lori Berd by two bridges, one of which remains.



Roads connecting with Lori Berd cross **medieval bridges** over the Dzoraget and Miskhana, one of which remains standing on Miskhana.

Bronze Age grave shafts have been uncovered in the same area, a bronze figurine of a sun god wrestling with a monstrous dog was uncovered, similar to that found in Shirak marz at Shirakavan, confirming a connection with the early Pontic culture on the Black Sea, even showing some cross-influences. This is the culture that gave rise to the myths of Heracles (Hercules) and the Golden Fleece, some saying these myths originating in the mountains of Armenia.

➡ Backtrack to Lori Berd village, where the road east angles N before it forks. Take the NE fork about 2.3 km to (**Lejan**, DD 41.0302778 x 44.4419444) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Lejan - Լեյան** elev. 1521m, pop. 9391) has a 19th c. church built on 5th c. foundations, probably that built over a pre Christian temple. The single nave church shows the influence of 5th c. structures, built on a stele and reversing the altar from West to East. Lejan hosted the 1907 conference of Borchalu Bolsheviks. Until 1918, Lori N of the Pushkin Pass was a part of the Borchalu region in the Tbilisi administered sector of the Russian Empire, possessing its own coat of arms. The region was also a hotbed of Communist resistance, the Red Army welcomed during their two invasions of the country.

➡ From Lejan, there is a rutted road leading S about 1.3 km to (**Agarak**, DD 41.0105556 x 44.4675) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Agarak - Ագարակ** elev. 1340m, pop. 3504) is an old village, and has the 5-6th c. S. Astvatsatsin church (ruins), a 17-18th c. church, and a 10-11th cc water shrine, probably built on top of a prehistoric vishap stone. The village has a copper-molybdenum processing plant, now closed, locals depending on farming for their livelihood.

Camping on the mountain side.

➡ In Agarak the road loops north before cutting S outside of the village following the contours of the Lori Canal and crossing the Mendzor River and continuing about 2.4 km to (**Yaghdan**, DD 41.091667 x 44.5083333)

SIDE TRIP: Near (**Yaghdan - Յաղղան** ▲ before Yeghitank, elev. 2211m, pop. 4357) is a medieval bridge nearby as well as the 13-14th cc Karmir Khach church. Yaghdan is a Greek village, along with nearby Koghges and at Hankavan, as well as in Stepanavan, Alaverdi, Akhtala, Shamlugh and other towns. Inhabitants of Yaghdan speak Greek, Russian and Armenian, immigrating during WW I. Their Greek is Pontic, or Old Greek, the dialect of Homer and Plato. If you can, sample/buy some of their local Greek foods, a real treat.

Greek Armenians
Historically, Greeks and Greek culture permeated the Armenian highland from the iron age, when Strabo recorded the march of the 10,000 through the Armenian heartland and Alexander marched along the southern frontiers.

The Greeks in Armenia are called Pontic Greeks. Pontus means "sea" in Greek and is located in the south-eastern littoral of the Black Sea. Its connection with Hellenism stretches back to pre-historic times to the legends of Jason and the Argonauts quest for the Golden Fleece and to Heracles obtaining the Amazon Queen's girdle. The Pontians are a distinct Greek people with their own dialect, dances, songs and theatre. Intermingling and influencing each other, both ancestral Greeks and Armenians shaped Anatolia and the Near East immeasurably.

The Greek community in Armenia dates back to the Greek War of Independence, when Greeks living in Anatolia were persecuted by Ottomans. The persecutions became mass slaughter during the Russo-Turkish-Persian War of 1827-1828, and large communities immigrated to Eastern Armenia in its wake. Further immigration continued during the Armenian, and then the Greek, genocides of 1915-1921.

Greeks share a common tragedy (their genocides) and a common enemy (Turkey), which forged close ties in the ensuing century. In fact, the Greek genocide is often lock-step with the Armenian holocaust, both singled out for extermination for being Christians, beginning with the alliance between Germany and the Sultan after the Treaty of Berlin 1878.

Settling in rural villages and mining towns, Greeks found tolerance in Armenia, where they built their own schools and spoke their language along with Armenian and Russian.

Many of the young have immigrated back to Greece since the collapse of the Soviet Union, where they find work, but also feel ostracized in a society that speaks modern Greek.

The main areas of Greek residence in Armenia are the canyon of Alaverdi and the Lori Highland, as well as Yerevan, the capital, the cities Noyemberian and Giumri. Greek communities can be found at Hankavan, Alaverdi and Arzni.

➡ From Yaghdan, start S towards Koghges (2 km) and just before the bridge take the dirt road into the (**Dzoraget Canyon**)

SIDE TRIP: (**Dzoraget Canyon - Զորագետնի ճոր**) Just outside the village on the left bank of the Dzoraget canyon you can see 5 cromlechs, and a stone compass. There are 10 carved pictograms on the surfaces of the stone compass, in linear script, and dating back to 2nd - 1st Millennium BC.

There is also a medieval cemetery in the river gorge with a tomb monument for a Prince Tutik (d. 1241), who died in the turbulent times of the Zakarian period. The Zakarians were overlords (nakharars) of all of Northwestern Historic Armenia in the late 12th c. to 1260. The Zakarians gained most of present day Armenia by grant from the Georgian Orbelian Kings, for military service in routing Seljuk attacks. Their founders Zakareh and Ivaneh are featured on the walls of the magnificent Harichavank in Shirak. Zakareh assumed possession of the Northern regions, including the current Lori and Aragatsotn marz, with his capital in Ani. He and his son Shahنشah began a new era in Armenia, a Silver Age that expanded Lori Berd and Lori province with churches, monasteries and centers of learning. Lieges to the Zakarians were old nakharar families like the Pahlavunis, Artsrunis, Mamikonians as well as new (the Vachutians). New trade with the Italians at Venice and Asia brought enormous wealth to this region, the river valley you are in benefiting from the spice and goods on its way to Cilicia and Lebanon. Prince Tuteh died in a tumultuous time of the reign, at the end of the age of chivalry in Georgia and Armenia, when Mongols began a systematic conquering of the Caucasus. The Orbelian kings in Georgia retreated in the face of the Mongols, leaving the Zakarians to fend for themselves. We are not sure how Tuteh died, he may have been part of the defenses of the area or he may have—like many of his

cousins—already bowed to the overwhelming might of the Mongols who destroyed Lori in 1238, and fought for them as they took Western Armenia. It seems plausible he died defending his lands (or in bed next to his favorite wench—you decide).

➡ Backtrack to Stepanavan, crossing the bridge, then take the village road W (behind the culture center) about 4 km to (**Armanis**, DD 41.080556 x 44.3291667)

SIDE TRIP: (**Armanis - Արմանիս** elev. 1625m, pop. 6708) nearby is a scenic view of Stepanavan and a shrine.

➡ Continue W about 3.3 km to Urarsar (Russian village), cross the bridge and pass through the village, then continue W another 5.4 km to (**Katnaghpiur**) 🏰 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Katnaghpiur - Կաթնաղբյուր** pop. 526) has a spring, considered sacred from time immemorial. Look for traces of a vishap stone, there are fragments in the area.

A **rock-shelter** was found in the area, in the lower end of the Metsaru River canyon, on its left bank, 40 m above the riverbed. On the floor of the shelter, a retouched fragment of an obsidian blade was found, along with fragments of bones and medieval pottery.

Camping outside the village and in the Mt. Urasar foothills. **Springs** nearby.

➡ END OF TRIP 3.



TRIP 4: TASHIR ▲

STEPANAVAN – *Right* **Route:** (Dorband/Sverdlov) – (Privolnoye) – (Gaili Dur Pass) – **JILIZA** – **KHUCHAPIVANK** – **KHORAKERT** – (Sarchapet) – Join Left Route

Left Route: **STEPANAVAN** – **TASHIR** – (Norashen) – Join Right Route

Right Route: **NORASHEN** – (Gogavan) – **METSAVAN** – (Dziunashogh/Lori Reservoir) – (Paghaghbiur) – **TASHIR** – (Noramut) – (Blagodarnoye) – (Katnarat) – (Tashir) – (Novoseltsovo)

Though this trip covers the Tashir mountain plateau, a gently rolling area between tall mountain ranges, most sights are on unpaved, rutted roads. Aside from Tashir, Norashen, Metsavan and Blagodarnoye, others are not advised unless you have a jeep or off road vehicle. It is well worth the bumps and grinds, since the trip covers stunning mountain vistas and wild terrain. The route climbs Lori's northwest, exploring Old Armenian, Greek and Russian farming communities with great flower-watching, birding, hiking and camping opportunities.

There are two routes, requiring two days to do both or make all stops: the right (R) takes a mountain road to Privolnoye, the Gaili Dur Pass and the Georgian entrance to the fabulous forested monastery at Jiliza (the other, from Alaverdi, is subject to mud slides and may be impassable). The Georgian border is open (Americans do not need visa, thought the news may not have reached this remote outpost and others should offer to 'buy' one). Jiliza is rarely if ever visited, giving you a feeling of having it all to yourself.

The left (L) route follows the main highway to Tashir and north, visiting the hauntingly beautiful set of churches at Metsavan, the Lori reservoir, plus deserted medieval castles, spelunking chances in caves at Noramut, an archeological museum at Norashen, the Russian village at Blagodarnoye and the horse breeding center and mountain trail at Katnarat.



Stay: Overnight in Stepanavan, Vanadzor, Tashir or village home if you don't mind the rustic amenities. Camping at Lori reservoir, Noramut (caving) and on any mountain range away from

the villages. Villagers will generally allow you to camp, but ask first.

Eat: Tashir, roadside stands on the Tashir Highway, village home.

Springs: Dorband/Sverdlov, Privolnoye, Jiliza, Sarchapet, Norashen, Gogavan, Metsavan, Dziunashogh, Noramut, Katnarat, Novoseltsovo.

☞ From Stepanavan center, go N on the Tashir Highway and just outside of town a road turns R (N) towards Privolnoye. Follow the Urut River past the Bavadzor turn-off (3 km) and Urut (2.3 km) another 2.2 km to (Dorband/Sverdlov, DD 41.0972222 x 44.4008333) 🏠

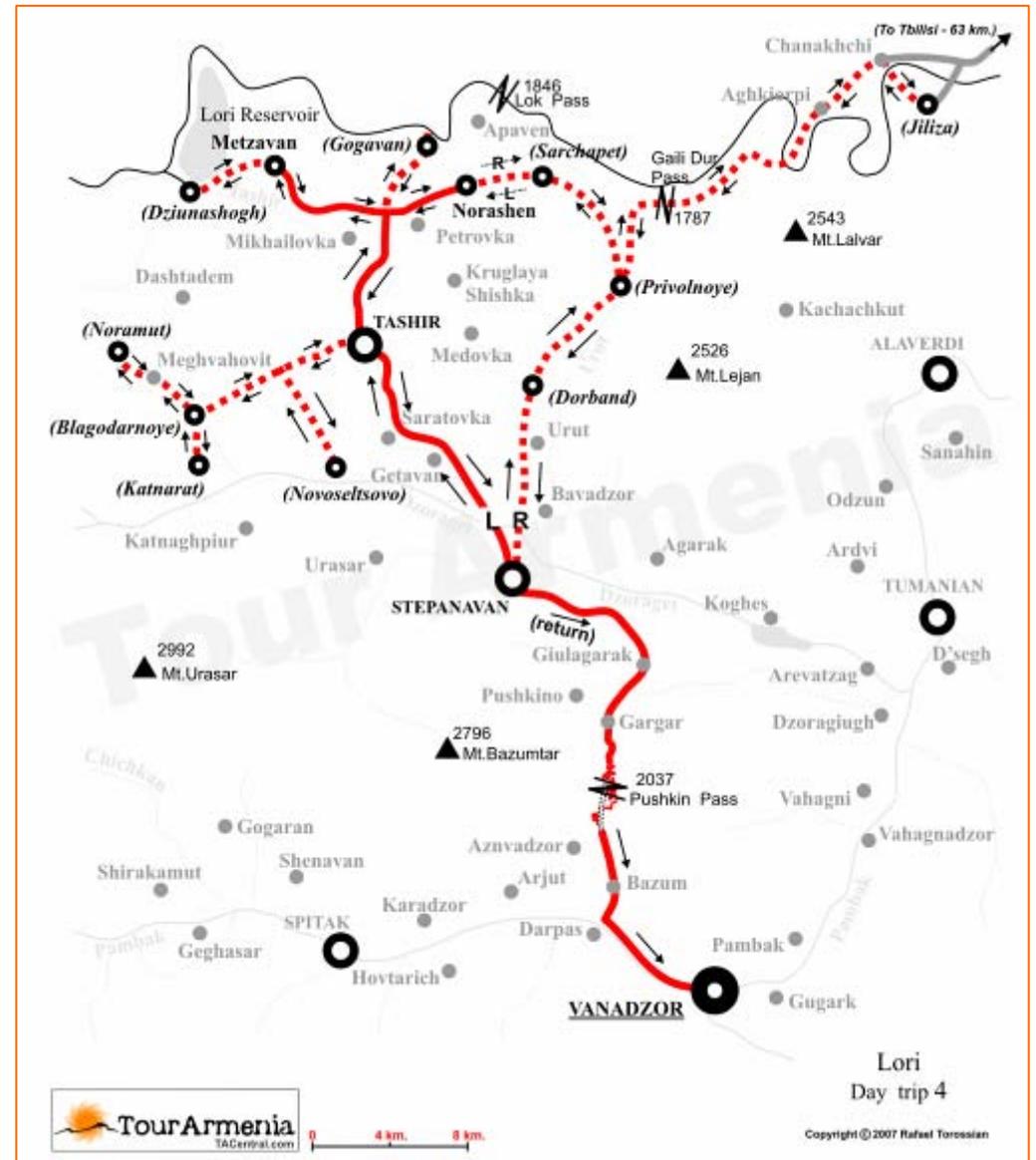
SIDE TRIP: (Dorband - *Պորբանդ / Սվերդլով* – till 2000 Sverdlov, till 1940 Haydarbek, elev. 1558m, pop. 4073) was named Sverdlov for the Bolshevik leader, Yaakov Sverdlov, the son of a Jewish engraver, born in Nizhni Novgorod in 1885. As a student he became involved in radical politics and in 1902 joined the Social Democratic Party, quickly becoming a supporter of the Bolshevik faction led by Vladimir Lenin. Sverdlov took part in the 1905 Revolution, deported to Siberia, escaped, was re-sentenced, attempted escape several times, one time nearly dying in icy water. He succeeded escape in 1912 and participated in the 1917 revolution, becoming a close advisor to Lenin and his heir apparent. He died of influenza in 1919.

The village is on a mountain rise, a pretty farming area. It boasts a jewel of a church, the 6-7th c. S. Gevorg church. The church is a single nave hall church, and lost both its annex and the apse during renovation at the close of the 19th century. It is distinguished by an uncommonly long central part, its hall being three times as long as it is wide, whereas in other churches of its kind this ration is within the range of 1.9 to 2.4. Its interior is evenly divided by four sets of massive T-shaped pilasters, bridged by flying arches and arcatures.

Camping along the Urut River.

☞ Cross the Urut River at Privolnoye and continue N about 6.2 km to (Privolnoye, 41.1461111 x 44.4425) 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (Privolnoye - *Պրիվոլնոյե* elev. 1622m, pop. 5582) has the 13th c. Khuchapi Vank.



Food Shop, kiosks and road side BBQ in the summer. Camping on the riverbed.

☞ In Privolnoye, there are two roads north: NE and NW; the NE road goes 5.6 to the twisting **Gaili Dur - Քայի Դուր (Լեւանք)** (Wolf Pass) (1787 m) then twists and winds by the border another 7.3 km into Georgia, then another 2.7 km or so to

Aghkiorpi and another 2.9 km to Chanakhchi (Armenian and Azeri inhabited villages) where a S muddy road (Jeeps only) goes back into Armenia for about 1.9 km to **JILIZA** 🏠 🏰

🌟 **JILIZA - ՋԻԼԻԶԱ** ▲ (DD 41.2155556 x 44.6702778, elev. 1031m, pop. 8012)

NOTE: This should be a primary stop on your trip, but owing to the difficult roads that are often impassable, it remains a side trip. If you can make this trip, at any means, do so, it is one of the remotest, most hauntingly beautiful monastery remains in Armenia.

Jiliza is the only Armenian village in the area, bordering the Marneuli region of Georgia. The region is populated by Armenian Villages that were integrated into Georgia during the Sovietization of the Caucasus. It sits in 11,000 hectares (30,000 acres) of forest land, much if it illegally cut for wood. Villagers received no or little electricity, the wood their own means of heating and cooking. Other old growth timber is cut for furniture workshops in Germany, France, Russia, Yerevan and Tbilisi.

There is 28 km Alaverdi-Jiliza road built in 1990 that takes 2-3 hours to climb, but it is rutted with mudslides every time it rains. Twice a week a Russian-made Ural military truck, adapted for transporting people, goes to Alaverdi and back. The village has 75 families (some are still Greek or of Greek extraction), little or no electricity, and its only means of communicating with the outside world a Georgian cell phone owned by the mayor Mher Vardanian, and radio communication on a two-way radio known as the "Atabekian's service" for its developer in Odzun.

Inside the village are a 13th c. ruined fort and shrine. Nearby are the Khorakert and Khuchapi monasteries.

🌟 **KHUCHAPIVANK** ▲ (Khuchap Monastery) is on the northern foot of M., Lalvar. This beautiful 12-13th c. Chalcedonian monastery sits within a forest clearing over a gorge, and is a complex of churches and service buildings, the largest church one of the tallest in Armenia at 18.6 m. The main church, situated at the southern end of the complex, is a domed cross form on an east-west orientation with a semicircular apse and altar at the eastern end. Parts of the northern walls are missing, but much remains intact. The church was a stretched domed basilica, with two galleries on

the north and south of the main building, now in ruins. The building is divided by flying arches and pilasters, the North and South naves featuring two-story apses. The dome is dodecahedral (twelve faces) with narrow windows between the columns. It rests on arches connecting with a pair of octahedral pillars and the edges of the main apse. The semicircular apse has three rectangular and a one circular window in its eastern wall. The church has three entries; the southern and western bordered by pairs of half-pillars and the northern narrow one with an arch tapering to a point. The decoration is decidedly ornamental, featuring animal imagery and geometric designs popular at the time. The walls are built of tufa and clapped with decorative felsite from Noyemberian.

There was a gavit on the western end of the church, but only fragments of its foundations remain.

There are several other structures indicated in the ruins, including a single nave hall church built from andesite and plastered over, with two outdoor galleries on the north and south, suggested by the arcatures in the walls of the main hall. Another single nave hall lies nearby, on the foundations of a pre-Christian temple, it being on a stele. Two multi-story buildings are indicated by their stonework only.

A Chalcedonian monastery, the inhabitants of Khuchapivank believed there were two natures of Christ, divine and physical embodied on one being. This was at odds with the monotheist belief of the Armenian Church, which believes Jesus could not be separated from God. The monastery fell to the destruction wreaked on it in the late 13th c. by Mongols, Tamurlane (Timur) and Seljuks.

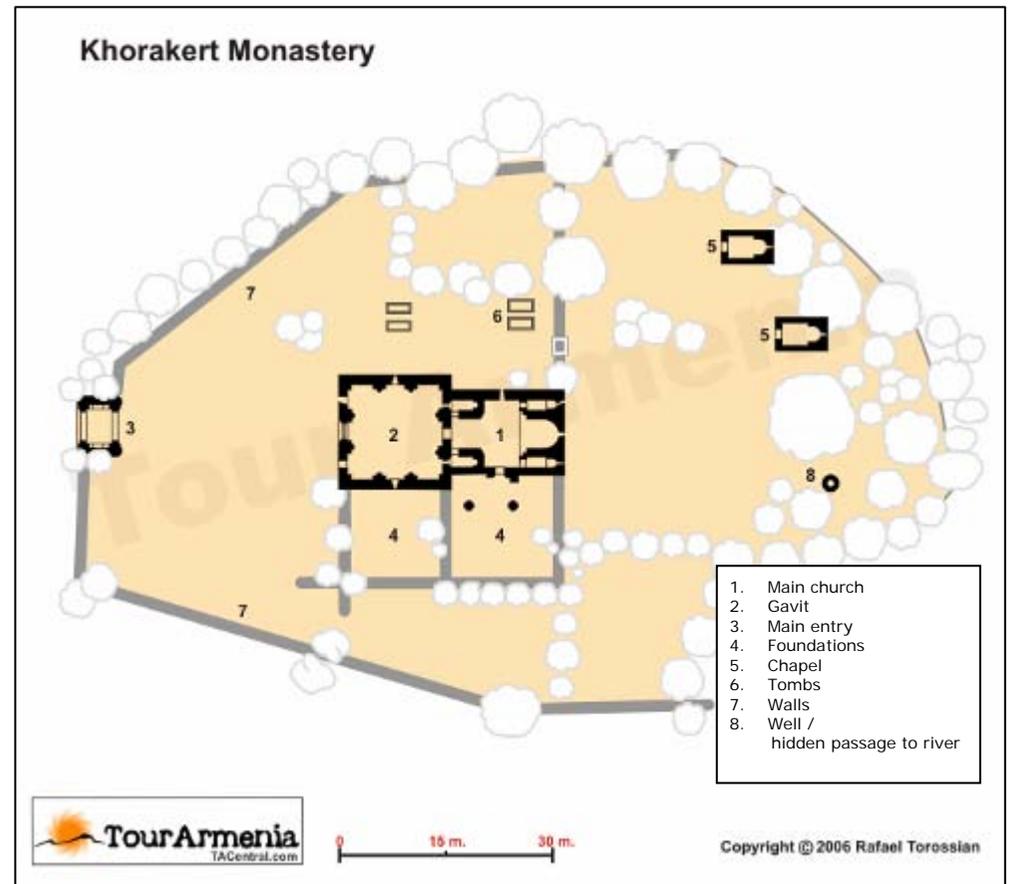
🌟 **KHORAKERT MONASTERY** ▲ On the way to Jiliza from Georgia, just below Chanakhchi and before Opreti, you will come close to the **Khorakert Monastery**, a religious complex on the northern slope of Mt. Lalvar and deep in the forest at 1300 m. The monastery is surrounded by the ruins of fortifications, some as thick as 5m and include the main church, a refectory, two small vaulted chapels with deep apses, as well as traces of foundations of civil buildings. South of the chapels, near the wall, amidst trees, there is a wall connected with a secret passage leading to a gorge.

The most striking part of the monastery today is its succumbing to nature: walls, archways and

entire facades are covered with lichen, vines and moss, the monastery seeming to have grown from the very earth it rests on. Huge crosses greet you at the church, fallen khachkars lie in the area. Gravestones lie not far from the main church, and a covered walkway to the gorge, the remains of a dining hall and shrines form a part of the once elaborate and elegant complex. Nestled in the mountain, near old growth forests in the remotest of places, it is hard to fathom the effort required to assemble this large place, let alone to maintain it during the 13th century. This was a major center for learning and royal patronage, 100 km from Tiflis and 120 km from the Zakarian capital Ani.

The **church** was built from the end of the 12th c. to the beginning of the 13th c, and looks like a

rectangle on the outside but in fact is cross-winged on the inside with annexes in the corners of the 'box.' Distinct from other churches it is slightly extended in length. It is a fantastically domed structure, the polygonal wall encloses several chapel, the vaulted entrance is spacious, with wide arched passageways decorate with half columns and ornamental carvings. The nucleus of the complex is this great church with its gavit, its roof exposed to twisting vines and bushes. The interior of the church has smooth walls on the longitudinal arms of the cross-form, their greater depth over the lateral arms of the hall extend the interior even more, bringing it closer to the interiors of Armenian domed basilicas. The interior decoration is modest with simple frames over doors, triangular niches on the eastern facades with



conches and small three quarter columns holding up the slightly pointed arches of the cupola.

The shape of the cupola is unique in world architecture. The drum is decahedral, unique in Armenian architecture, and pierced at the base by numerous narrow windows. The facets are made not from the walls, as was usual, but rather from the lower half of the drum, from hexahedral columns, three per facet. The columns themselves are unique, having identical capitals and bases, with beads and hexahedral plates. Spanned with trefoil and quatrefoil conches, the spaces between the columns serve as light windows, and on a bright day the light pouring into the church makes the inside of the cupola seem to soar, the passing clouds and sky a part of a moving fresco. The use of columns to support the dome is unheard of in churches up to this time. The inside of the cupola is also unique, its hemi-sphere made from three pairs of intersecting arches, which form a six-pointed star. The central hexagonal section is filled with stalactite-shaped ornaments, seeming to form another, more graceful hemi-sphere. This type of roofing was probably inspired by Khoranashat (1251), Arzakani 13th c.) or Markaravank (1207), but it is still unique in Armenian and world architecture.

The gavit (1257) with its triple nave construction is larger than the church, and is a rare example of a building rectangular in plan and roofed with a system of intersecting arches spanning the entire hall, creating the sense of a cupola. In this it is said to have a common source with medieval royal columned halls. It was surely used as a theological academy, built as it was during the renaissance of an Armenian culture that prized learning, by Stepanos, son of Hovhannes Varnetsi. What remains of this great feat are some of the main ribs and part of the lantern.

The monastery was restored in 1661 and 1710, but was already in ruins by the beginning of the 20th century.

Camping at both monasteries is allowed, in the forests be careful not to interfere with loggers. **Overnights** in village homes at Jiliza, Chanakhchi and Aghkiorpi.

↻ Backtrack to **Privolnoye** and take the NW road about 5.8 km as it arcs towards (**Sarchapet** DD 41.1991667 x 44.3852778) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: Near (**Sarchapet - Սարչապետ** elev. 1757m, pop. 6553) is an old ruined church and medieval fortress (12th-13th). Like so many mountain villages, Sarchapet has a sacred spot on a nearby mountain, this one on Mt. Lok (2140 m) to the north. The spot is on an old Vishap stone location. Sarchapet is the birthplace of the Armenian artist Zhora Barseghian (b. 1946), a contemporary artist who has done more than 3500 canvases and over than 32 monumental statues in different cities and districts.

Camping on the mountainside.

↻ From Sarchapet continue W/SW on the same road about 2.1 km to join the Left Route at **NORASHEN** (DD 41.1880556 x 44.3272222)

LEFT ROUTE:

↻ From **STEPANAVAN**, go N on the Tashir Highway past Getavan (5.9 km) then Saratovka (1.6 km) for another about 3.9 km to **TASHIR** (DD 41.1244444 x 44.2819444) 📍 🏠

🏠 **TASHIR - ՏԱՏԻՐ** 📍 (elev. 1523m, pop. 5538) is more of a large village than a town, its roofs boasting red clay tiles, and wooden porch frames hung with lace curtains. The whole effect is Russian, a legacy of its time as the former regional capital for the Russian Empire. The area is one of the locales for Catholic Armenians.

History. Tashir was included in the Urartian Empire in the 8th century, then a part of the Kingdoms of the Yervanduni (6th-2nd cc BCE) and the Artashesians (2nd-1st cc BCE). In 450-451 a prince of Tashir Vren Taghbatsi was campaign-in-arms of Vartan Mamikonian and took part in the Avarayr battle. Tashir was one of cultural centers of Armenia, at the beginning of 19th century becoming a part of the Russian Empire, when it was known as Vorontsovka, in honor of a Russian Viceroy. In 1935, the town was renamed Kalinino in honor of M. I. Kalinin, Chairman of the Soviet Presidium, and on independence Kalinino was renamed Tashir. In 2004 Tashir celebrated its 160th anniversary as an incorporated city.

The town has a **Palace of Culture, cinema,** and **cheese factories** (private).



The best **regional museum** in the area is (welcome surprise) the charming and accessible **Tashir # 1 School Museum**. The museum was created in 1984. Objects on display were found in the territory of the village of Metsavan by pupils and the history teacher. Items include a sewing-machine, iron, candle-sticks, kettles, gramophone, spoons and utensils, lamp, paper money and coins, women's jewelry, carpets. This place is kept with care both by teachers and pupils of the school.

The **Tashir cheese factory** used to produce 33% of the USSR's Swiss cheese. It doesn't produce that much anymore, but cheese is a staple of the area and easily bought in shops or even on the road, to go with the hot fresh bread hawked by leaning loaves on chairs and tables along the highway.

A new **S. Sargis church** is in the center. Another, church for catholic community, is a little bit further.

There are number of **fish ponds and water flower pools** in the area.

Practicalities
Area code: 254

Taxis are in the village center. 500 AMD in town, 100 AMD per km in the region. 2000 AMD to Stepanavan.

Overnight
The **Tashir Hotel** (town center) is run down, drab, closed to all but the most desperate. Hot water? Surely you jest!

Overnights in homes entirely possible, ask at the center, and smile. 5000 AMD for bed ad breakfast is fair.

Food and Drink
A **Khash joint** is in the center, cafes and khorovatz stands seasonally on the main road.

On the Stepanavan side of town is the "**Haikushanats**" *café*, located in a domik with Armenian food. 4000-5000 AMD for meal with drinks.

In the center is the "**Kuskin dom**" (*Cat's House*) with pretty good food at 4000-5000 AMD for meal with vodka.

Post, phone, telegraphs
The **Central Post Office** is at 22 Jahukian p. [See HayPost site for list \(www.haypost.am/EN/\)](http://www.haypost.am/EN/)

Additional phone services are around town. They advertise in front of their shops, sometimes with internet.

Armentel is at 6 Jahukian p. (tel. 22112)
The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Bank, Exchange
Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks, exchange at banks, hotel and exchange points throughout the town.

ARDSHININVESTBANK, 10-A, Kalinina, tel. 23990
UNIBANK, 3s Korenatsi, tel. 37410.

Shops, Film etc.
There are shops in the center and kiosks around town. Film is available in limited quantities, locally bought batteries are a waste of money.

Hospital, Clinic, Dental
The **hospital** phone is (tel. 22116)
The **polyclinic** phone is (tel. 22716)
An **Apoteka** is in the town center.

↻ From **TASHIR**, go N on the Georgia Highway 4.4 km (past the Mikhailovka turn off and Petrovka) then turn E and go about 3.5 km to **NORASHEN** (DD 41.1880556 x 44.3272222) 🏠

RIGHT ROUTE:

✂ **NORASHEN - ՆՈՐԱՇԵՆ** ▲ (formerly Bogdanovka elev. 1596m, pop. 5409), boasts a museum of archeology and local lore. Ask by the museum for a key and guide.

5 km S, on the N face of Mt. Siskialskaya is a **6-5th c. BC fort**, excavation of which produced weapons and figurines. The area is much older, as the **Pechka rock-shelter**, found in the limestone outcrops of the Somkhetian Ridge, near **Kruglaya-Shishka** attest. The rock shelter is on the left bank of the valley of a dry stream, 16 m above its bed. Some told. 14 Stone Age artifacts have been collected on the slope of the valley immediately beneath the rock-shelter.

Camping on the mountain side and by the river.

➡ Backtrack W to the Tashir Highway, then go N about 3.7 km to (**Gogavan** DD 41.2 x 44.3166667) 📍

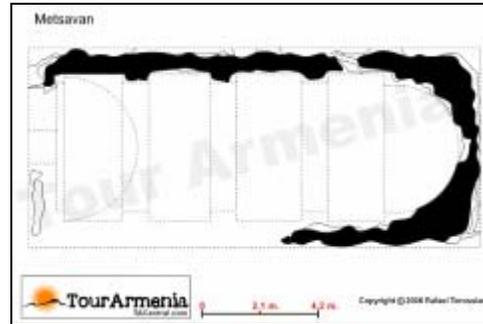
SIDE TRIP: (**Gogavan - Պոգավան** elev. 1606m, pop. 5409) is on the Georgian border, across from Guguti. The mountain road is terribly potted, but runs through some gorgeous old growth forests to Marneuli (61 km) then Tbilisi (29 km).

Food At the border at Gogavan there is a very good restaurant with Georgian and Armenian food at 2000-5000 AMD depending on your choice.

➡ From the Norashen / Georgia Highway intersection, go N about 1.2 km then W on the dirt road about 5.2 km to **METSAVAN** (DD 41.2016667 x 44.2288889) 📍

✂ **METSAVAN - ՄԵՏԱՎԱՆ** ▲ (Ghoshakilisa - "double church", then Shahnazar till 1978, elev. 1551m, pop. 5485), is in the foothills of Mt. Avakisar (1866 m) and has a 5-6th S. Hovhannes church (cemetery with ram shaped tombstones) and another from the 10th c.

There is a ruined fort nearby and a "Tevavor Khach" shrine on the crest of the mountain about 2 km from the border, abandoned to all but shepherds who have made the small shrine their winter homes. Seen in the summer fog, it is sight both eerie and beckoning.



Stone Age workshops (**Chakhmakhkar**) Field work conducted in the area in 2003 by archeologists from England and St. Petersburg uncovered remarkable evidence of Stone Age settlement. On the slopes of the Chakhmakhkar Mountain, east of Metsavan village, they found outcrops of medium quality flint, the entire south-western slope of this mountain littered with artifacts, made predominantly from local flint, including both Neanderthal and Post-Paleolithic tools. Results included Levallois cores, flakes and blades, prismatic cores, end-scrapers, small-size points, notched and combined tools, plus a few obsidian implements.

Overnight in village home doable, ask around, be prepared to pay 5000 AMD.

➡ From Metsavan continue W about 2.6 km to (**Dziunashogh**, DD 41.1794444 x 44.1811111) another 5.8 km to (**Paghakpiur**) 📍

SIDE TRIP: (**Dziunashogh - Զյունաշող / Լոռի ջրամբար** - till recently Kizilshafak elev. 1583m, pop. 5431) is at the base of Lori Reservoir, a man-made lake from the tributaries to the Tashir river. Good camping and exploration of the frontier.

(**Paghaghbiur - Պաղաղբյուր** pop. 369) Archeologists uncovered a stone age workshop on the banks of a small (200 by 300 m) lake of Atka (Ettik-Gel), west of Khurda-Jalal Mountain, at the altitude of 1,830 m.

Camping at both locations.

➡ Backtrack to Metsavan, then take the first (w) Southern route about 6.8 km to **Tashir**

➡ From Tashir, go SW on the Shirak Marz road (A304/H31) about 10 km to the Dashtadem intersection, then go another 200 m and turn N (following the Sevaberd River) past Maghahovit (1 km) for another 2.9 km to (**Noramut** DD 41.1 x 44.1166667) 📍

SIDE TRIP: (**Noramut - Նորամուտ** - till 1991 Gharaghala elev. 1760m, pop. 5643), has a field of Medieval graves, bridge, caves, and a ruined medieval fort. The village is on the foot of Mts. Gailakar and Ampasar, great trekking opportunities in one of the of most deserted places in Armenia.

See [Adventure Tour Operators](#) (p. 6) for caving guides.

Camping on the mountain and along Sevaberd River.

➡ Backtrack to the Shirak/Tashir Highway and cross over, then S 300 meters to (**Blagodarnoye** DD 41.0833333 x 44.1833333)

SIDE TRIP: (**Blagodarnoye - Բլագոդարնոյե** - before Kirilovka elev. 1583, pop. 4906) is a Russian village with good farm and dairy products. They are reluctant to visit with tourists, draw them out with a few words and a smile. One of the Molokan villages in the region.

➡ Take SW road about 2.5 km to (**Katnarat** DD 41.0883333 x 44.1794444) 📍

SIDE TRIP: (**Katnarat - Կաթնատա** elev. 1593m, pop. 5546) was founded in 1923 as a horse-breeding Sovkhoz (state-operated agricultural commune). The area was heavily damaged during the 1988 earthquake, rubble from the remains of destroyed houses litter the place. But some horses are still there, and it may be possible to get a horse ride in the area.

The mountains to the south and east Gogaran and Ampasar) and the Dzoraget river about 2 km south are good for hiking on the grassy Tashir uplands.

Camping on the mountain slope and by the river.

➡ Backtrack to the Tashir, head S on the Stepanavan Hwy road about 5.3 km toSaratovka, then about 3 km from Saratovka

center to (**Novoseltsovo** DD 41.0666667 x 44.2666667) 📍

SIDE TRIP: (**Novoseltsolvo - Նովոսելցովո** elev. 1504m, pop. 4866) is a Russian farming community with a picturesque view of the area's rolling hills, Russian homes and peat bogs.

➡ END OF TRIP 4.





TRIP 5: SOUTHWEST: SPITAK ▲
VANADZOR - (Nazarbekian Shrine) - (Hovtarich/Ghursali) - **SPITAK** - (Arevashogh / Arjut Pass) - **SHENAVAN** - (Sarahart) - (Gogaran) - (Shirakamut) - **GEGHASAR** - (Mets Parni) - (Hartagiugh) - (Khnkoiian) - (Spitak) - (Lernantsk / Spitak Pass) - **J'RASHEN** - (Lernavan / Pambak Pass)

The Southwest includes two main routes: West to Shirak Marz and South to Aragatsotn marz. The Western route passes stunning mountainscapes of grass and eagles, with mountain trekking, the caves at Katnajur and Geghasar, and the Shirakamut church complex. The S route passes Russian villages and farms (incredible veggies) to the dramatic Spitak and Pambak passes at Aragatsotn. Sadly, this is also the area that was devastated by the 1988 Spitak earthquake, with its epicenter at Shirakamut. In ruins for 13 years, the area is just now recovering with new housing, schools and infrastructure brought in by international agencies, the government unable or unwilling to dedicate resources. There is still much destruction, much pain and much poverty in the area, the other side of this majestic mountain steppe area.



Stay: Overnight in Vanadzor, village home if you don't mind the rustic amenities. Camping at Hovtarich, Arevashogh, Shenavan, Gogaran, Geghasar, Mets Parni, Khnkoiian, Lernantsk and on any mountain range away from the villages. Villagers will generally allow you to camp, but ask first.

Eat: Spitak, roadside stands on the highway, village home.

Springs: Nazarbekian Shrine, Hovtarich/Ghursali, Spitak, Arevashogh, Gogaran, Shirakamut, Mets Parni, Hartagiugh, Lernantsk, J'rashen, Lernavan.

➤ From Vanadzor, go W on the Spitak Highway about 2 km to (Nazarbekian Shrine)

SIDE TRIP: (Nazarbekian Shrine - Նազարբեկյանների դամբարան) has a small religious shrine in the ruins of a church, where a planned monument to the Battle of Vanadzor in May of 1918 is to be erected.

➤ Continue W on the Spitak Highway (A330/M7) about 5 km then S 1.9 km to (Hovtarich/Ghursali DD 40.8272222 x 44.3436111) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (Hovtarich - Հովտառիչ / Ղուրսալի - before Ghursali elev. 6082, pop. 6092) has the 7th c. basilica church of S.

Gevorg, under reconstruction. The village has a number of containers used as temporary shelters after the 1988 earthquake, plus new housing built by the Norwegian Refugee Council.

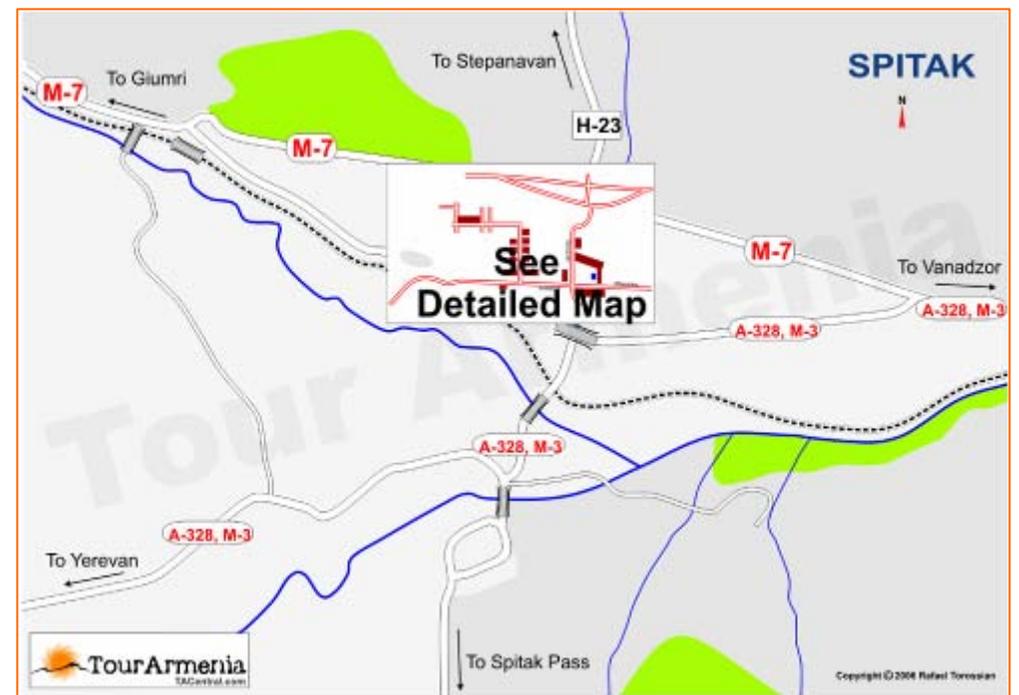
Camping on Mt. Spitak (2320 m)

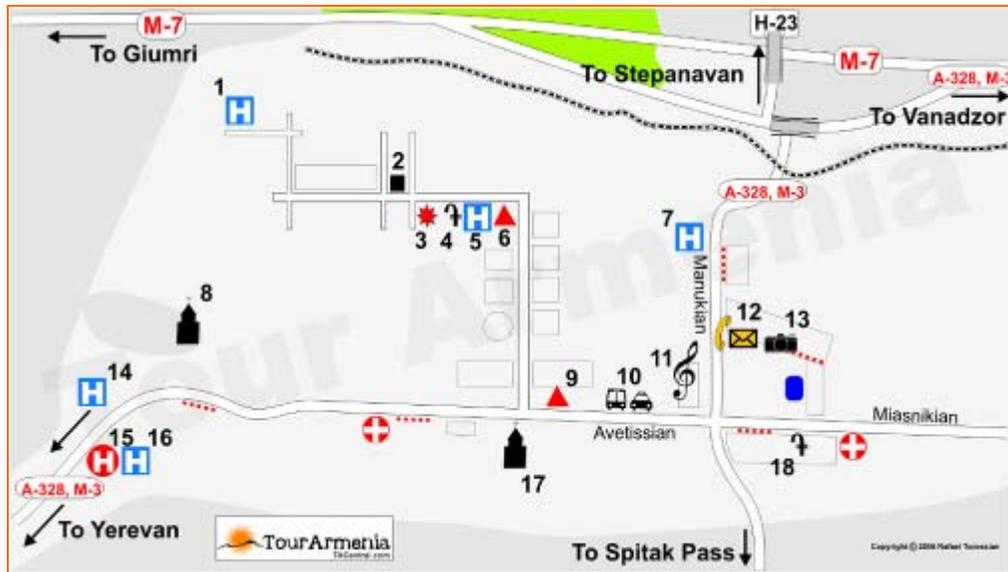
➤ Backtrack to the Spitak Highway then W about 3 km to **SPITAK** (DD 40.82990 x 44.26714) 🏠 📶

🏠 **SPITAK - ՍՊԻՏԱԿ** ▲ (till 1949 Hamamlu elev. 1893m, pop. 6000) is the namesake for the 1988 earthquake, measuring 6.8 on the Richter Scale, which devastated the area, destroying villages throughout western Lori, all of Spitak and much of Giumri. Around 16,000 people perished in Spitak as flimsy Soviet apartment buildings caved in on one another and the town's sugar processing plant imploded in a cloud of white icing sugar and concrete slabs.

All around you are new housing projects built by international agencies to house some of the 500,000 left homeless by the earthquake; the Italian, French, and Uzbek quarters, the Czech

School, the Italian hospital, the British Lord Byron School. Once a bustling industrial town, the bulk of the population is gone in search of work, in Russia or the west, their families living off their remittances. The youth have a hungry, determined look about them, seeing no future in Spitak; they mostly plan ways to leave themselves.





SPITAK MAP KEY

H OVERNIGHT

- 1. Motel Teriel
- 5. Motel/Restaurant
- 7. Spitak Hotel
- 14. YWCA (Italian Village)
- 16. Norwegian Red Cross

▲ FOOD & DRINK

- 6. Motel/Restaurant
- 9. Café Areg

🚌 BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

🏛 CHURCHES

- 8. Spitak Cemetery, Church
- 17. S. Harutunian

🎭 THEATRES, MUSIC

- 11. Culture Center

🛍 SHOPS, SHUKA

- 13. Kodak

📧 INTERNET, PHONE, POST

- 2. School (Internet)
- 12. Post Office

🏛 GOVT. OFFICES

- 3. Spitak Mayor's Office

🏦 BANK, ATM

- 4. Bank
- 18. Hayeconombank

🏪 APOTEKAS

🏥 CLINICS – HOSPITALS

As you drive W past the town center, you pass a monument to the 4000 Spitaktsis killed in the earthquake, and a large graveyard for the dead. Many of the monuments show the time 11:41 a.m. when the earthquake hit.

"I will never forget the smell of sugar mixed with blood. All these horribly injured people on the helicopters, covered with coagulating sweet liquid, the streets filled with sugar."

There is a church on the hill built from corrugated zinc sheets, hastily erected to accommodate the

mass of funerals after the earthquake, and in town, the **S. Harutunian church**, built on the foundations of the previous destroyed in Soviet times.

The new **Square** is a modern rendition of the old Soviet monumentalism that infested public areas in the Communist days, revived by the local oligarchs in search of new ways to spend money. It is big, and it ate a lot of money (public and donated) in the process.

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 255
 Long Distance: 0255 + local number
 From abroad: +(374) 255 + local number
 Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell
 International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + local number
 Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0255) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 255 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT AND AROUND

Transport

Spitak is on all major Bus, Minivan and G'natsk routes. Bus and minivans leave from the Bus station in the town center.

The Vanadzor **Bus** travels daily via Spitak to Yerevan (700 AMD) and Giumri (500 AMD). There are also buses to Tbilisi, Istanbul and Athens, leaving from Vanadzor (See [Vanadzor In and Out Section](#) on page 8)

There are numerous **minivans** (Marshrutni Taxis) from Spitak to Vanadzor (100 AMD), Giumri (300 AMD), Yerevan (700 AMD) and the near region (100-250 AMD). Leave when they are full, region minivans follow a morning/evening schedule.

The **G'natsk and Elektrichka** are near the Spitak Hotel. Elektrichka runs daily between Leninakan (Giumri, 200 AMD) and Kirovakan (Vanadzor, 100 AMD) to Airum (200 AMD) on rigorous morning and evening schedules. Ask when you arrive for the time. The G'natsk runs every day, in alternate directions, to Tbilisi (1200 AMD; connects to Batumi) and Yerevan (800 AMD)

COMMUNICATION, MONEY, ETC.

Communication

The **Central Post Office** is at 7 Suren Avetisyan p. See [HyePost \(HayPost\) site for list \(www.haypost.am/EN/abt_offices.html#lor\)](#).

Additional **phone services** are in town. They advertise in front of their shops.

Armentel is at the town square (tel. 22742)

The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Internet is at local schools and international agencies and schools in town (ask nicely and they may let you use it).

Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks, exchange at banks, hotel and exchange points throughout the town.

ARDSHININVESTBANK, 13 Torossian p., tel. 22458

HAYECONOMBANK, New Square

Film & Supplies can be bought at shops and kiosks throughout town.

A **Kodak shop** is in the new Square. A new **Mterk** is just N of the square.

OVERNIGHT

Spitak Hotel (\$15-30) between the Cultural Center and the Railroad tracks. Not great, but will do in a pinch.

The terrible **Motel Tariel**, at the end of Khnkoian (tel. 22304) has a number of rooms in domiks, all of them dirty with putrid toilets. Hold your nose when you enter. Dirt cheap with DBL/QUAD at 4000/5000 AMD.

YWCA Center in the Italian Village, normally caters to groups and volunteers but can put up the occasional guest (\$20).

Norwegian Hospital and houses also offer lodging in modern rooms for the drop in visitor, subject to availability (\$20).

FOOD

\$ = 2000 AMD or less
 \$\$ = 2000+ AMD

Eating out is not on many people's mind, it appears, we found one working café. People go to

Vanadzor or to one of the Restaurants/Motels in the region. Food can also be found at food shops, kiosks and the occasional roadside khorovatz stands along the road.

Café Areg, Avetissian p. opposite new church, has khorovatz, kebab, sandwiches in a small setting overlooking the new church. \$

The Spitak Restaurant/Motel is on the same street as the Mayor's Office. Reasonably priced food if you lay off the liquor. \$\$

There are kiosks and mterks on Avetissian and Manukian ps, and around the new Square.



CONTINUE TRIP 5

➤ From Spitak take N road about 3.7 km to (**Arevashogh** DD 40.8613889 x 44.2727778)

SIDE TRIP: (**Arevashogh - Արևաշող** - till 1978 Zigdamal elev. 1669m, pop. 5992) has a 19th c. church and a brand new S. Astvatsatsin in the village center. There is a ruined fortress nearby.

➤ From Arevashogh take the N rutted road (jeeps only) about 7.1 km to (**Arjut Pass**) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Arjut Pass - Արջոխի լեռնանցք** – 2559m) This is a terrible (and terribly pretty) road that switches back and forth as it surmounts Mt. Bazumtar and then continues on down another 8 km to Urasar and Stepanavan. Excellent **camping** on the way.

➤ From Arevashogh backtrack to Spitak, take the highway W about 1.5 km then N about .7 km to **SHENAVAN** (DD 40.8666667 x 44.2333333) 🏰

✳ **SHENAVAN - ՇԵՆԱՎԱՆ** (till 1946 Giziloran elev. 1711m, pop. 5604) has a cave and a ruined 6-7th c. single-nave basilica nearby. The cave is one of hundreds in Armenia, used from the time of the first humans.

For spelunking guides contact the Armenian Speleological Society (Tel +374-10 58-22-54, 62-02-48, ask for Smbat Davtian or Samvel Shahinian. **Camping** on the riverbed and near the cave.

➤ From Shenavan backtrack to the highway, then W about 1.4 km then N about .2 km to (**Sarahart**, DD 40.8738889 x 44.21) and another 2.2 km N to (**Gogaran** DD 40.8955556 x 44.1991667) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Sarahart - Սարահարթ** “mountain flat” - till 1950 Giullija elev. 1697m, pop. 5604), has two churches and ruined hamlets 6 km N by (**Gogaran - Գոգարան** - till 1946 Gogarjin elev. 5994, pop. 2222) has a 17th c. church and the Sangiot fort nearby. The fort and the deserted hamlets 6 km N of Sarahart are related, relics of the medieval period, destroyed by Mongols, Timur and Seljuks in the 13th-15th cc and abandoned thereafter.

Camping above Gogaran on Mt. Chknagh.

➤ From Gogaran continue SW on the rutted road SW about 4.8 km to (**Shirakamut** DD 40.8605556 x 44.1527778 3) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Shirakamut - Շիրակամուտ** – till 1978 Nalband elev. 1647m, pop. 200) was the epicenter of the 1988 earthquake where 313 villagers were killed. Accessible by jeep or on foot is an important 7th c. monastery, Chichkhanavank, N of the village on the Chichkhan River, sadly destroyed in the same earthquake, though foundations and significant fragments of the decoration can still be seen. The church is a crossover design, bridging the earlier plain hall churches of the 4th-6th cc with the plain cross with outdoor galleries for penitent to worship in, and unlike other early churches that lost much of its original design, Chichkhanavank retained its original plan after renovation in the Middle Ages.

Bronze Age (3rd m. BCE) ritual tombs are nearby. Ask at the village for directions.

Camping on the mountain.

➤ From Shirakamut you join the Spitak-Giumri Highway. From there, go E about 1.3 km to the **CAVES AT GEGHASAR** (DD 40.8491667 x 44.1838889) 🏰

✳ **GEGHASAR - ԳԵԴՍԱՐ** 🏰 (till 1978 Tapanli elev. 1777m, pop. 2171) On the way to the village, in the Pambak River gorge are **cave dwellings** historically in since the 12th c. but archeologists believe they have been in use since

the Stone Age. Like at Khndzoresk in Siunik marz, they were inhabited for hundreds of years, until the last residents left for “terra firma” in the 20th c.



Opposite the caves and little to the E is a dirt road that leads into the river valley, a great spot to have a picnic and snooze.

Inside the village there is a 19th c. S. Sargis church in the village and an Astvatsatsin shrine about 1.8 km S of the village.

➤ Continue W on the Giumri Hwy for about 6 km to the 1.5 km L (S) road to (**Mets Parni**, DD 40.8372222 x 44.1091667) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (**Mets Parni - ՄԵՏ ՊԱՆԻ** - Bekant, then Beykend, then Parni Gegh elev. 1803m, pop. 2019) was built as a Russian military post in 1807, under the command of General Gudovich, a Russian noble trying to make good in the Caucasus after falling into disfavor during the reign of Tsar Paul. The general put an end to a plague epidemic in the Caucasus and restored respect for Russian power. A brilliant victor at Arpa-Chai (near Kars) on 30 August 1807 won him the rank of field marshal, but the siege and unsuccessful assault of Yerevan in November 1808 forced him to withdraw into Georgia. Serious illness with the loss of an eye caused him to leave the Caucasus. The site for this outpost has a commanding view of the river and land pass into Shirak marz.

In 1915 and 1918 Ottoman Turks reached the village and killed hundreds of villagers, many in a place known as “Massacre Valley” where a khachkar stands. The village suffered heavily from the 1988 earthquake, over half the homes

destroyed and 40% of inhabitants live in shelters. There is a church (s Sargis) on the top of Mt. Nerkarar that villagers reconstructed after it was blown up in the 1960s.

Camping on the riverbed and up Mt. Nerkarar.

➤ Backtrack to the Hwy, turn L (W) and continue about 5.1 km to L (S) the 2.5 km road to (**Hartagiugh**, DD 40.8355556 x 44.0466667)

SIDE TRIP: (**Hartagiugh - Հարթագյուղ** - till 1946 Ghaltakhji elev. 1929m, pop. 2360) has a 19th c. church and on the side of Mt. Nerkarar about 1 km S, a S. Hovhannes shrine and pilgrimage site, over the site of a vishap stone.

➤ Backtrack to the Hwy, turn L (W) and continue about 2 km (last L in Lusaghbiur V. before the Jajur Pass) to the L (S) 2 km road to (**Khankoian** DD 40.8397222 x 44.02) 🏰

SIDE TRIP: **Khankoian - ԽՆԿՈՅԱՆ** (till 1946 Gharaboya elev. 1791m, pop. 4458) is the birthplace of children’s writer **Khanko Aper** and once the location of his house museum, ruined in the 1988 earthquake, his papers and personal belongings lost. Khanko Aper wrote fairy tales and children’s stories, and on his death in 1935, the Children’s library in Yerevan was named in his honor, its front doors some of the most famous carvings in the country.

Aper is still hugely popular among children, his works in having been turned into film, music and dance. One, The Meeting of the Mice, was turned into a cartoon by Mkneri Zhoghove (1978, Hyefilm Studio) based on Khanko Aper’s fable of the same name. In it a group of mice meet and decide to hang a bell around the neck of the cat, letting them know when he is near. Their antics in choosing the lucky sucker to hang the bell are part of the fun and Aper’s wit. House museum is in poor shape, but fun to see the inside of a creator’s mind.



The village also has there remains of an **18th c church** with unique Persian influences in its shapes and some embedded painted stone carvings. If you have the time, it is worth the stop. We have not seen any other churches with this kind of décor before.

Camping on the mountain, villagers welcome guests.

➡ From Khnkoian take the west road N about 1.9 km to Lusaghpiur then E on the Spitak Highway about 18.5 km to (**Spitak**)

➡ From Spitak take the SE road 3.8 km to (**Lernantsk**, DD 40.95 x 43.9166667) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Lernantsk - Լեռնաւըք** - till 1950 Spitak elev. 2024m, pop. 4373), is unremarkable with temporary shelters and a 1910 S. Minas Church, but the dramatic rise S of the village, another 8.6 km up an incredibly winding road (Jeeps only) to the **Spitak Pass - Սպիտակի լեռնաւըք** (2378 m) is breathtaking. **Camping** near the pass, your only company is the stars and a shepherd or two.

➡ Backtrack to Spitak, then take the (main) highway S about 5.9 km to **J'RASHEN** (DD 40.7875 x 44.1972222)

🏠 **J'RASHEN - ՋՐԱՇԵՆ** 🏠 (till 1940 Vordnav elev. 1815m, pop. 2663) has a 19th c. church and the Old Pottery Workshop, run by Hamlet Sarkissian, who has been creating pottery and ceramics for more than 12 years, including jugs, vases and pomegranates. His work is for sale.

➡ Just W of J'rashen is a road going W about .5 km to (**Lernavan**, DD 40.7883333 x 44.1844444)

SIDE TRIP: (**Lernavan - Լեռնավան** - till 1946 Ghachaghan elev. 1684m, pop. 2663) has the ruins of the "Kharabak" settlement about 1.8 km W and a 19th c. church. Continue on the highway S about 6.4 km to the gargantuan **Pambak Pass - Փամբակի լեռնաւըք** (DD 40.73042 x 44.19794, elev. 2152 m), with gigantic folds in the mountain covered with snow in the winter or masses of lime green in the spring peppered with wildflowers. The pass is so mammoth it creates its own weather; the lower end by Lernavan and J'rashen are moist and cool, the pas itself is alternately sunny or dripping in clouds, the top in Aragatsotn is cold and windy.

➡ Return to Spitak, then to Vanadzor. End of Trip.



TRIP 6: SOUTHEAST: FIOLETOVO ▲

VANADZOR – LERMONTOVO – (Antarashen) – MARGAHOVIT – FIOLETOVO – (Dilijan)

The Southeast is a wild area of alpine mountains and sloping valleys with farms by the side of the road, inhabited by Russian Molokons at Lermontovo and Fioletovo. The roads pass Mts. Maimekh and Bovakar, good hiking areas. This is a short trip, good to combine with Dilijan and the surrounding area in Tavush, or pairing with Trip 5 for a leisurely one-day trip in Lori.

The Molokons ▲

Molokons are Russian Old Believers, descendants of Orthodox rebels exiled in the 18th century to Armenia's "Siberia" (Amassia) and Sevan ("Yelenovka"). They have since populated numerous villages mainly in Lori, Shirak and Aragatsotn regions. Once numbering around 72,000, most recent census figures show the population of Russians in Armenia at around 12-13,000, 5000 of which are Molokons.

Break-off sects from the Orthodox church in Russia, Molokans are traced back to the 1500's, during a surge in sectarian activity during the 17th and 18th centuries, as the Tsar and the Orthodox church concentrated their control over the country.

Escaping state persecution, sectarians in the central provinces of Russia moved further from the centers of power, to Siberia, Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Crimea, influencing the local populations as they adapted to new customs and surroundings. One of the most significant sects was the Molokon.

The ancestors of the Molokons are from the peasant class in Russia and a few other nationalities in the empire. By religion they belonged to the Orthodox (Greek - Russian) church, although they resist the worship of icons and other representations of God, which they consider corrupted and lifeless because they were created by an idea, not God. They profess the belief in an omnipresent God who lives in the soul of each human being.

They believe that all worship of objects should be banished from religion; they are unholy and nothing more than idolatry, a sin against the Creator. They might fairly be called the 'Country Baptists' of the Russian Orthodoxy, for their stark churches and stringent belief system. In fact the Molokons' doctrine was influenced by western Protestantism (Baptism in particular), rejecting the

ecclesiastical church with its extravagant rituals and corrupt clergy.

Like many sectarian causes, the Molokon doctrine found ready adherents, especially in the 17th century, first among peasants then the lower middle and merchant class. These "Old believers" were first called iconoclasts, then Molokons, because they did not observe fasts as dictated by the Orthodox church, ate meat and drank milk (Russian for milk is 'moloko'), which was a staple of the peasant's life then.

Persecutions ensued with a small respite granted by Alexander I in 1805 granting recognition and freedom to worship to the Molokons and another sect, the Dukhobors (spirit-wrestlers). This was short lived, with persecutions and pogroms escalating from the reign of Nikolai I, with a decree in 1830 forbidding Molokons to settle any land in the Russian empire except the Transcaucasus.

From 1830 Old Believers (Molokons) increased settlement in Armenia, forbidden from settling elsewhere than the Caucasus. Russian settlements –military and Cossack—were founded in the northwest of Armenia and the adjoining regions on the route of the Russian army to Kars and farther to Erzerum.



The largest number entered after the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Persecuted like other religions in the Soviet Union, Molokons and Orthodox made wealth nevertheless, farmers and villages (mostly Molokons) succeeding in the collectives while others took over clerical and other positions in government, which now used Russian as the official language.

Outward migration began after the Great War, when the younger generation left for newly



welcoming and richer lands in the Russian steppes, and accelerated after 1989 when the official language reverted to Armenian, denying Russians of clerical or other managerial positions. There are about 5000 Russian Molokons left, most in Yerevan (2000). Other towns include Vanadzor -- 80 people; Dilijan -- 200, Hrazdan -- 60; Sevan -- 80.

Molokons living in villages number almost as many as those in towns: Fioletovo -- 1,500; Lermontovo -- 800, Tashir region (where formerly 12,500 Molokons lived) -- 400; in Krasnoselsk (where formerly 3,000 people lived) -- 50.

Traditional Russian villages continue to exist at Amassia, Ashotsk (Shirak), Sevan and Semionvka (Gegharkunik), Fioletovo, Lermontovo, Pushkino, Sverdlov, Lernantsk, Medovka, Lerhovit, Petrovka, Tashir and Mikhailovka (Lori).



Stay: Overnight in Vanadzor, village home (rustic amenities), Dilijan in Tavush. Camping at Tejler, Antarashen, by the villages (ask, ask, ask) and on Mt. Tezhler.

Eat: Roadside veggies in season, roadside cafes and restaurants, village home, Vanadzor, Dilijan.

Springs: Lermontovo, Antarashen, Margahovit, Fioletovo

➡ Take the E highway out of Vanadzor about 9.1 km (past Shahumian) to **LERMONTOVO** (DD 40.765 x 44.63)

En route to Lermontovo, a few km outside of Vandzor you pass the **Achajur** (2500-4000 AMD) and **Agni** (2500-5000 AMD) restaurants, on the right side of the road. They have a couple of rooms each for diners (and their 'secretaries') at around 5000 AMD. Also on the right is the **summer camp Tejler**, with tents and camping at 2000 AMD.

✚ **LERMONTOVO - ԼԵՄՈՆՏՈՎՈ** ▲ (till 1941 Voskresenovka elev. 1986m, pop. 3401) was founded, along with Fioletovo, in the late 1820s by Molokons exiled from Tambov District. The inhabitants of the well-kept village of immaculately clean homes with white lace in the windows speak only Russian, shy and do not want their pictures taken (journalists have violated this tenet only after much negotiation).

There are three main branches of Molokon sect: the first is *Postoiannye* (Constant or Steadfast), followed by the uncompromising *Maximalists* and the *Priguni* or Jumpers, who leap and dance during worship (much as the Holy Rollers do in the west). Like the Quakers or the Iconoclasts, worship sites are stripped of all imagery and icons, the service dedicated to prayer, singing and readings from the bible.

The village is inhabited by both Molokons and non-Molokons.

➡ Cross the highway S about 2 km (past Tandzut) up the mountain to **(Antarashen)** ▲

SIDE TRIP: (*Antarashen - Անտառաշեն* pop. 157) lies at the foot of Mt. Tezhler. **Camping** on the mountain.

↻ Backtrack to the Highway, then go E about 2.4 km to **MARGAHOVIT** (DD 40.7380556 x 44.6875)



⚡ **MARGAHOVIT - ՄԱՐԳԱՅՈՎԻՏ** ▲ (till 1978 Hamzachimán elev. 1875m, pop. 3430), was first named after a dense marsh on the Aghstev River. Marsh birds still migrate through the area in spring and fall. 3rd millennium BCE antiquities on Sarisop.

The large Mirak Reforestation Nursery is in Margahovit, attempting to grow 50,000 saplings as part of a reforestation project by the [Armenia Tree Project](http://www.armeniatree.org/whatwedo/ctpr.html) (www.armeniatree.org/whatwedo/ctpr.html).

And that's gold in them hills! From Margahovit a bad jeep track leads S over Mt. Tezhler mountain to the gold-mining town of Meghradzor in the Marmarik river valley. A rail tunnel cuts through the same mountain, said to be 11 km long.

Camping on the mountain.

↻ Continue E about .9 km to **FIOLETEVO** (DD 40.7247222 x 44.7138889)

⚡ **FIOLETEVO - ՖԻՈԼԵՏՈՎՈ** ▲ (till 1936 Nikitino elev. 1710m, pop. 3283) was renamed after Ivan T. Fioletov, a Bolshevik activist shot with the other Baku Commissars in 1918. The village was founded in the 1820's by Molokons and is the only village in the country inhabited only by them.

You will find cabbages, carrots and potatoes set out on the sides of the highway when they are in season. The vegetables here are among the tastiest in a country known for its vegetables and fruits—stop and someone will come out to sell some. A little secret, they may not set them out, but in the spring and summer they also have cherries, plums, canned fruits and compotes, mountain honey and wild mushrooms. Ask nicely and you may just get some.

The cabbages grown at Fioletevo and Lermontovo are highly prized at the Shuka, buying them fresh is an additional plus. Do not be surprised if your dire stops and loads up in the boot of his car. The villagers also pickle their cabbage (Molokan

sauerkraut), which is a hot commodity in the northern Caucasus.



Despite their stand offishness, it is well worth visiting, the children are like children everywhere; trusting and quick to smile, and even the sourest puss can be softened with a smile and a sincere desire to learn their story.

The Vanadzor bus runs twice daily, arriving at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

↻ Continue about 2 km to the **Dilijan Pass**.

Dilijan Pass has plunging mountain slopes covered with thick forests of trees and dense fog. The pass gradually opens to the Dilijan Valley and the resort town in another 7.1 km to (**Dilijan**) in Tavush marz or return to **Vanadzor**.

↻ **END OF TRIP 6.**



The village exists as a customs point, shuffling trucks, minivans, cars and buses into and out of the country and is a major stop on the North-South Caucasus-Persia Trade Route, running between Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Russia. Customs for tourists is pretty straightforward on both sides of the border, though the lines can be long due to the heavy interstate traffic. Note that while Americans are now allowed to enter Georgia without buying a visa, the same is not true of Armenia; it costs \$30 for a 21 day visa.

Note about Visas: There is little hassle entering Armenia after visiting Azerbaijan, but the reverse it not always true. If you plan to visit Armenia and Azerbaijan as part of the same trip, you are strongly advised to visit and get your visa stamped in Azerbaijan first. Armenian border officials take little note of an Azerbaijan visa in your passport, but we have heard of numerous problems encountered by those trying to enter Azerbaijan with an Armenian visa. We have also heard from those who have had no trouble on this account, but do you want to risk being one of those stopped? Words to the wise.

Camping in the area, overnight in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair, **springs** in village and area.

↻ Continue S on the M6 for about 15 km to Karakop and the Chochkan turn to the R over the bridge, then R along the RR tracks then uphill and L at the top of the hairpin climb. From the bridge it is about 6 km to the village of (**Chochkan**, DD 41.186328 x 44.831094) 🏠 🏰

[SIDE TRIP: (**Chochkan - Ծոճկան** elev. 698m, pop. 5762) for details [See Trip 2: Chochkan](#) on page 39]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy then continue S on the M6 for about 3.6 km to **SHNOGH** (DD 41.1477778 x 44.8377778) 🏠 🏰

[**SHNOGH - ՇՆՈՂ** (elev. 784m, pop. 5281) for details [See Trip 2: Shnogh](#) on page 38]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy then continue S on the M6 for about 4.7 km to a bridge that crosses (R) to the Left bank of the Debed River to some industrial buildings, from there go NE along the river about 200 m to the village road, turn L, then R uphill and take L fork on a twisting run into the Akhtala river

gorge to the village of **AKHTALA** (DD 40.15193 x 44.76380) 🏠 🏰

[**AKHTALA - ԱԽԹԱԼԱ** (elev. 1780m, pop. 58289) for details [See Trip 2: Akhtala](#) on page 37]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy then continue S on the M6 for about 9.3 km to the Haghpat road (L), then S and up the hill about 2.3 km to **HAGHPAT** (DD 41.09367 x 44.71105) 🏠 🏰

[**HAGHPAT - ՀԱՂՊԱՏ** ▲ (Haghpat, from Hagh “strong” and pat “wall,” elev. 1212m, pop. 7092) for details [See Trip 2: Haghpat](#) on page 34]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy then continue S on the M6 for about 2 km to the Akner road, then S on a twisting road about 1.5 km to (**Akner**, DD 41.0830556 x 44.69) 🏠

[SIDE TRIP: (**Akner - Ակներ** (elev. 970m, pop. 16209) for details [See Trip 2: Akner](#) on page 33]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy then continue W/S on the M6 for about 1.7 km to the E bridge into **ALAVERDI** (DD 41.1305556 x 44.6519444) 🏠 🏰

[**ALAVERDI - Ալավերդի** (elev. 1296m, pop. 25066) for details [See Trip 1: Alaverdi](#) on page 27]

↻ From Alaverdi train station, take the Vanadzor Highway S about 500 m where the L (E) Sanahin/Sarahart bridge is (by the Gai Station), take it and then follow the road as it winds uphill about 2.5 km to Sarahart. Pass through Sarahart and continue another 1 km or so to **SANAHIN** (DD 41.08778 x 44.66573) 🏠 🏰

[**SANAHIN - ՍԱՆԱԴԻՆ** ▲ (elev. 767m, pop. 3564) for details [See Trip 2: Sanahin](#) on page 31]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy, go S on the M6 about 3.4 km to the signposted turn to Odzun and continue uphill for about for about 4 km to central **ODZUN** (DD 41.05690 x 44.61530) 🏠 🏰

[**ODZUN - ՕՁՈՒՆ** ▲ (elev. 1134m, pop. 17725) for details [See Trip 1: Odzun](#) on page 25]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy, go S on the M6 about 7.8 km to the Kobreh RR Station (R or W) About 80 m

past the railway station is a paved spur that running by the side of the rail tracks. Over the tracks are hundreds of stone steps and rocky paths leading through the forest up the steep hill. It is about 15 minutes for the fit hiker, 30 for the rest of us. Continue uphill through a cluster of houses clinging to the mountain slopes and past the fountain (halfway) to **KOBAYR ABBEY** (DD 41.00613 x 44.63713) 🏠 🏰

[**KOBAYR - ԶՈՐԱՅՐ** ▲ (“KO-BYE-ER”, Russian ‘Kobehr’) for details [See Trip 1: Kobayr](#) on page 24]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy, go S on the M6 about 6.7 into (**Dzoraget**) 🏠 🏰

[SIDE TRIP: (**Dzoraget - Զորագետ** - till 1978 Kolageran, pop. 279) for details [See Trip 1: Dzoraget](#) on page 23]

↻ Continue S on the M6 about 1.5 and through 2 tunnels to the Dzoragiugh road that forks back to the R (W) for another 3 km on rough roads to the S turnoff for Dzoragiugh, continue forward as the main road bends N then W about 600 m to a spring and picnic area, and a road that forks off and down into the River gorge where the Ghergherchai and the Dzoraget merge, about 1.4 km, at **HNEVANK** 🏠

[SIDE TRIP: (**Hnevank – Հնեվանք** for details [See Trip 1: Hnevank](#) on page 22]

↻ Backtrack to the M6 and continue S for about 2.2 km to a left (E) turn N for D’Segh (signposted) then another 2.6 km to the center of **D’SEGH** (DD 40.9633333 x 44.6516667) 🏠 🏰

[**D’SEGH - ԴՍԵՂ** (elev. 1248m, pop. 4125) for details [See Trip 1: D’Segh](#) on page 19]

↻ Backtrack to the M6 and continue S for about 13.5 km to (**Pambak**, DD 40.3861111 x 45.5319444) 🏠 🏰

[SIDE TRIP: (**Pambak - Փամբակ**, elev. 2101m, pop. 2670) for details [See Trip 1: Pambak](#) on page 18]

↻ Backtrack to the Hwy, go S on the M6 about 6.5 into **VANADZOR** (DD 40.80986 x 44.49599) 🏠 🏰

[**VANADZOR ՎԱՆԱԶՈՐ** (formerly Kharakilisa, from 1935-92 Kirovakan, elev. 1339m, pop. 64314) for details [See VANADZOR](#) on page 8]

↻ END OF TRIP 7



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS ▲

Rick Ney (author) first came to Armenia in 1992 to work at the American University of Armenia. In 1993 he began his work in humanitarian aid and development for USAID-funded projects at the Armenian Assembly of America and Fund for Democracy and Development, the latter as Caucasus Region Director. This morphed into writing about Armenia for various publications, which became the first English language complete guide to Armenia in 1996 (online) and 1998 (CD-ROM). It has since become an online resource, visited by more than 24 million unique visitors (www.TACentral.com and www.TourArmenia.info). Rick is passionate about Armenia's deep history, amazing ecology, and making the country accessible for independent travelers, whom he believes will be the basis of Armenia's entry into the open world. In 2000 he began dividing his time between Armenia and caring for a parent in Texas, both of which he considers the richest experiences of his life.

Rafael Torossian (research, maps, and graphics) has been collaborating with Rick on TourArmenia since 1996, providing some much needed reality checks and commentary along the way. In his other life Rafael designs flash sequences, ads, graphics and web sites for [TWRI](#), for a variety of sites and content management projects. In a previous life Rafi was a field and track athlete,

setting the All Armenia record (still unbroken) for the 60 meter dash, then as Assistant to the Minister for Sports, serving (surviving) 6 ministers, before meeting Rick, when they worked together on several humanitarian aid projects managed by the Armenian Assembly of America and Fund for Democracy and Development. In a world where engineers are taxi drivers, Rafi became the finance manager for these projects, creating the first multi-denomination accounting system for USAID projects in the Caucasus, tracking currency that inflated at one time 150% per day. Rafi is an Honored Coach of the Republic of Armenia and lives in Yerevan, a proud Yerevantsi who did not leave during the dark years of 1991-1995.

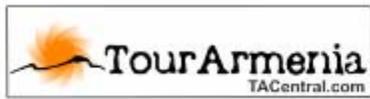
Bella Karapetian (Editing, Translations, Russian Edition) first met Rick in 1993 when she came to the American University and worked in his office as Faculty services Manager and Special Events Coordinator. There she had the chance to use her remarkable patience and good humor with wide-eyed professors wanting to know where the nearest shopping mall was (God give us patience and a good dose of Pantalgin). She then worked at the World Food Program in Armenia as administrator and Program Officer. In her previous life Bella worked with International architects at ArmStateDesign Institute as an information program assistant and translator. She is currently Executive Director of the NGO Historic Armenian Houses. History and architecture are her true loves and she has traveled to China, Thailand, Malaysia, Italy, Germany, and Lebanon and throughout the former Soviet Union. Bella tops this off by maintaining her membership in the World Esperanto Association. *Saluton!*

Thanks to: (Region): *Ashot Levonian for his information on hiking and caving tours in Tavush, to Boris Gasparyan for detailed info and critique of the prehistoric material; (General): to Tigran Nazarian and Christine Karapetian for their insightful comments, advice, trips into the wilderness and challenging ideas; to Gagik Gurjian from the Ministry for Historical Preservation, who has been showing me the intricacies of Armenia's cultural monuments and their influences since 1992, leading me to some of the most amazing places and events I have been, as well as to the large vat of killer Voskevaz wine in his garden; to Stepan Ter-Margaryan & the folks at the Institutes of History and Archeology branches of the National Academy for their help on pointing me to original sources and exhaustive original information on destinations; to Sam Stepanian for his eternal support; to Arminco, Grisha Saghian and Vahan*

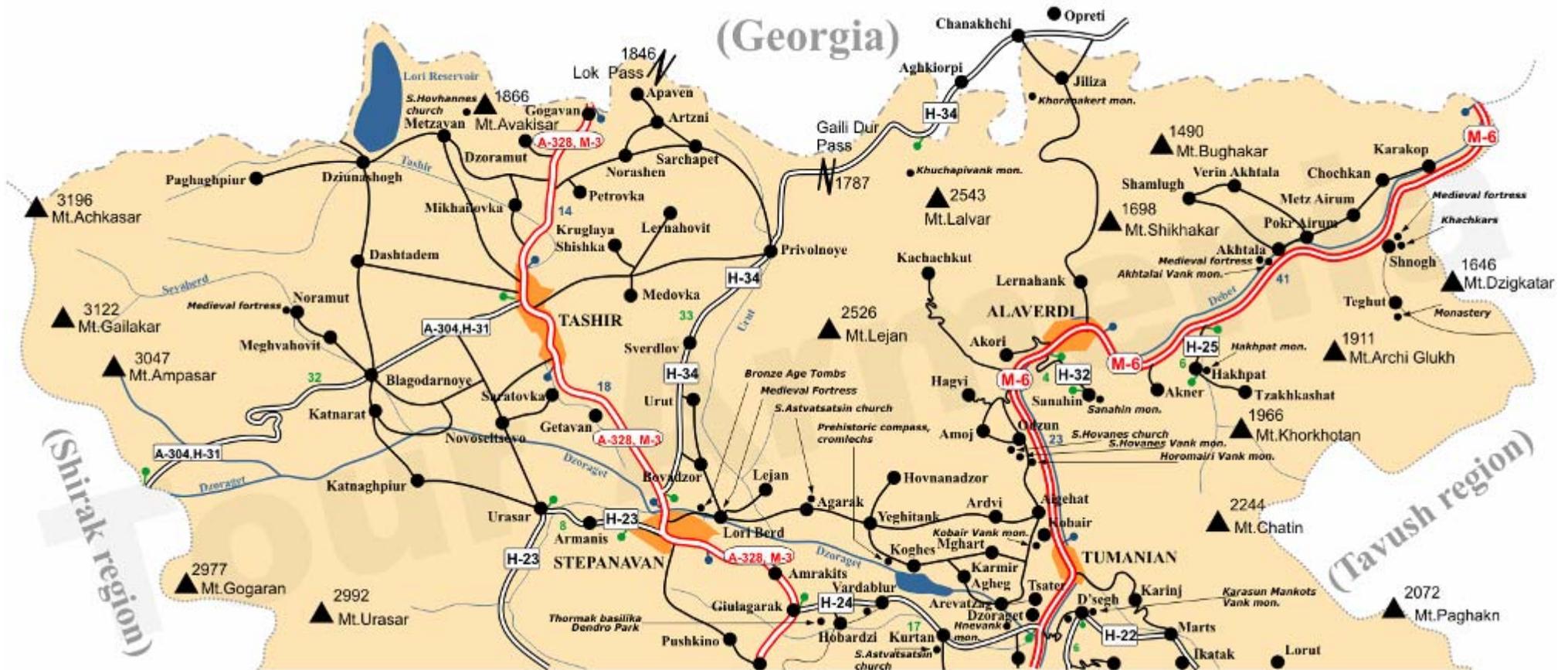
Yerkanian for their support, the creation of the first edition on CD, link ups and links to culture and more. To ArmeniaNow.com for giving me the chance to share this material to their world. And to R and L. TMB.

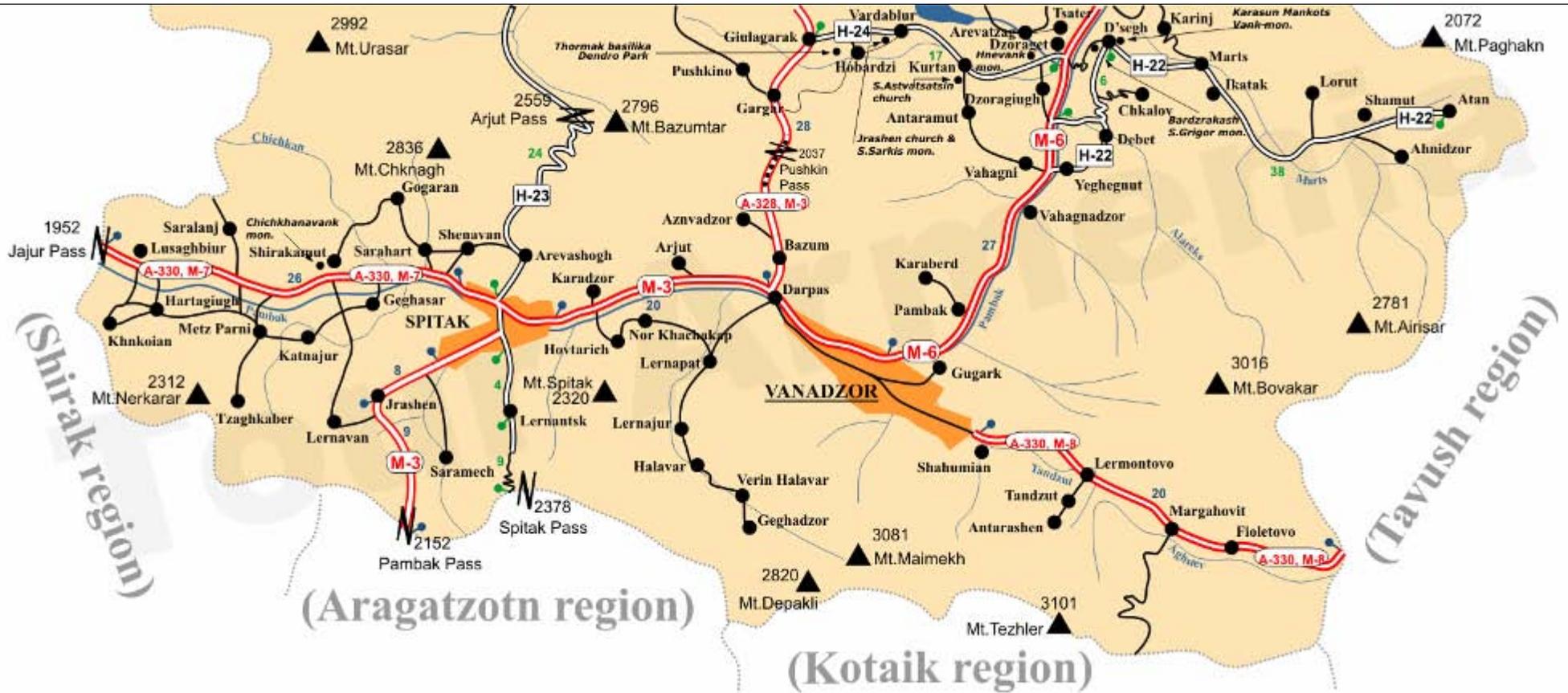
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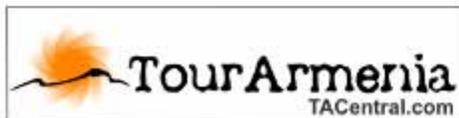


Lori region A





Lori region B



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