

GIUMRI ("Gyumri")
Գյումրի

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There are 3 parts to the Shirak/Gyumri Guide, each is a separate PDF:

1. Shirak Region (Separate PDF)
2. Gyumri (This File)
3. Gyumri Walking Tours (Separate PDF)

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GIUMRI (Gyumri)

INTRODUCTION ▲

After surviving Yerevan's rampant growth and swirling dust, you will find welcome respite and warm hospitality in Gyumri. The capital of Armenia during the Russian era (1821-1918), Old Kumaiyri, present day Gyumri, is a living museum of grand architecture and joie de vivre, a place of parks and promenades, its distinct red and black tufa buildings a hallmark of a bygone age, Armenia's Belle Époque. Gyumri was enriched as an important outpost of the Russian Empire, and fortunes were made catering to the Tsars and spent on opulent dwellings and public buildings. Most of these buildings have survived, over 1000 forming the largest collection of intact historic buildings in the Caucasus.



It is just now that Gyumri has re-emerged as a serious destination. Once Armenia's Second City, with a population of around 250,000, the city suffered tremendous loss in the 1988 earthquake which immediately killed 24,000 people and devastated much of the Soviet style 'new city'. Most of the old center survived, and a growing economy and cultural life have rejuvenated much of the city (though it must now bow to Vanadzor for bragging rights as second most populated city in Armenia) and make this a must-see destination. You may have to start your trip in Yerevan, but for some clean air, real history, lively humor and warm hospitality, visit Gyumri.

HISTORY ▲

Gyumri's history is contemporary to that of Yerevan's though the city to the south has claimed the title of oldest in the country. Truth be told, though, Gyumri's is just as old, and may even be older than its hot cousin, its location in the upper elevations making inhabitation preferable in the Stone Age to its still smoldering cousin to the south.

Evidence of developed human activity and the first large settlement in Gyumri (on the hills to the west of the modern city, around Sev Ghul or Black Tower) is placed to around 5000 BCE, about the same time as that to the south.

Copper Bronze Age Excavations dug as recently as in 2005 have uncovered 1500-900 BCE gravesites in the city of Gyumri itself, inside the "Black Fort" (South Tower).

In Gyumri, prehistoric excavations include the South Tower (Black Fortress), Cherkezi Dzor, the area of poultry farm, Vardbagh & the Turbaza.

Kumaiyri – Urartu, Greek & Roman Gyumri

The mythical beginning of Gyumri is recorded by the 5th c historian Movses Khorenatsi, who recounted that the founder of the Armenian nation, Haik, sent his grandson Aramis with all his family, to a fertile land above Mt. Aragats, where the waters flowed. The place he resided was called Shirak after him. The place was called Kumaiyri.



The historical beginning of Gyumri starts with Assyrian descriptions of the area and a cuneiform inscription for the Urartian King Argishti I (8th c BCE), which can still be found on a mount at Vahramaberd Village (Marmashen), near Gyumri. The inscription reads "By the Glory of Khaldi, the god Argishti says: I invaded the land of the Yeriakhi tribe, invaded Irdaniuni city up to Ishkikulu land". It further refers to the people of Kuliaini, the city's first name.

Urartian artifacts in Gyumri include fragments of belts and clay found on the grounds of the hospital on Shirakatsi Street in Gyumri (known as White hospital among Gyumretsis). Telman Khachaturian made the excavation. These findings are considered to be casual and currently are preserved in the National Museum of History.

The Greek historian and military leader Xenophon (ca. 430-355) mentions Kumaiyri in his book,

"The Anabasis" as did the Greek historian Herodotus writing of the area in his 4th c. History. The Anabasis recounted the epic journey by Xenophon and the "ten thousand" who marched through Armenia en route to the Black Sea in 401 BCE, describing part of the territory the marched Gumnias, or current Gyumri.



The Medieval Era

With the advent of Christianity, Gregori Lousavoritch is known to have established churches in Kumaiyri, on the ruins of pagan temples he had torn down. Among these are the sites of the current S. N'shan and Yot Verk (7 wounds) churches in the city.

Kumaiyri was also mentioned by the 8th c. CE writer Ghevond Yeretz (Leon the Priest) writing of the city in relation with the rebellion against the Arab Umayyad and then Abbasid dynasties.

Kumaiyri remained a backwater during the heady days of Bagratuni, Kamsarakan, Pahlavuni and Orbelian rule (8th-13th cc), as the great city of Ani and the regional capital of Kars took focus away from the small town of Kumaiyri. Much of Gyumri's fascination and later attempts to recapture Ani's glory days is traced to this time, and to the people who descended from these two great medieval cities, especially in the 19th c as Turkish pogroms and mass murders accelerated in Western Armenia, forcing hundreds of thousands of Armenian descendants to emigrate to the city, giving birth under Tsarist protection to a new Golden Age in the country, and Gyumri.

Empire City The most remarkable period of development was during the 19th c. when Shirak became a part of the Russia Empire, and Kumaiyri its regional center. The area was

absorbed into the Empire in 1804, during the first Russo-Persian war. The Russian period initiated a period of tremendous growth and development for the city. A heretofore-feudal society was pushed into the industrial revolution, creating an extraordinarily rich and educated class of citizens, a new Golden Age. Chosen for its strategic location along the Akhurian Valley, Kumaiyri held a huge fortress still used by Russian soldiers guarding the Armenian frontier. Military barracks established in the city include Poligons, Severski and Kazachi Posts, sites of several prehistoric excavations.

By 1837 the city had grown enough it was granted an imperial visit by the Russian Czar Nicholas I, who was said to have renamed the town Alexandropol after his wife, Alexandra Feodorovna. However others note the name was actually derived from the Russian Saint Alexandra (also the name of the church in the Alexandropol Fortress in the city). The city was also referred to as 'Alekp'ol' in local dialect. In 1840 Giumri was formally granted status as a city, and in 1850 it became the capital of the "Alexandropol Region of the Caucasus State of Yerevan".



The Armenian Belle Époque

Giumri / Alexandropol was a major center for trade and craft. By 1860 the number of craftsmen in the city reached more than 5,000, busy constructing the unique Giumri architecture, with its ornamental use of black and red tufa and florid carved wood, rivaling that of Tbilisi and Baku while sharing the same "Armenian Belle Époque" designs. The construction of Amnaprkich (all savior) Cathedral in 1858-1876, a copy of the famous cathedral of Ani, crowned the skyline and marked the highpoint of monumental construction in the city.

In 1899, the Tbilisi-Alexandropol, later the Alexandropol-Yerevan-Persia railways made Giumri/Alexandropol a major point on the line, further feeding its growth. The city reached an extraordinary level of sophistication in design, with over 1000 surviving samples of the period as testament. A love of culture also ensued, with art galleries, design firms, theatres and musical entertainments imported from Russia and Europe.

At the end of 19th century Alexandropol was equal in importance to Tbilisi and Baku, these cities also Armenian centers in the Caucasus. Giumri's citizens ("Giumretsi") delight in this fact, proud of a time when their city dwarfed the then village of Yerevan, which was its backwater town, much as Giumri once was for Ani. At a time when Yerevan was barely two streets long, Giumri had a complex grid of streets, running and (then) modern sewerage drainage and the finest shops, theatres and colleges in the State.

The Belle Époque in Giumri was complimented by writings of the poet Avetik Isahakian, its gusans (bards) and folk singers (Jivani, Sheram, Fahrad, Khaiyat and others). The Armenian opera "Anush" was first performed in Alexandropol in 1912. The city was famous for its schools and colleges where Armenian, Russian, Latin and Greek languages were taught along with philosophy and sciences. The development of education fomented a freedom movement and underground cells, culminating in the events of the Russian revolution and eventual usurpation by the Soviet State.

Genocide

Giumri was host to thousands of refugees escaping the genocide, the greatest influx coming from nearby Kars. Like Giumri, Kars owed much to and perhaps derived its people from the old city of Ani. It is likely that people from Kars outnumbered the native population, and to this day people make a distinction between "Karsetsi" and Giumretsi".



Following the collapse of the Russian Empire and the short-lived First Republic in 1918-1920, the Red Army reentered the area through Lori and retook Alexandropol for the Soviet Union, declaring a Soviet Republic in 1921.

Soviet Period

If Giumri's growth in the 19th c was impressive, that of the Soviet period was extraordinary, if never as architecturally beautiful. Both the population and heavy industrialization increased 8-fold within the next forty years.

In 1924 the city was renamed Leninakan in memory of the leader of the Russian Revolution on Lenin's death. With the decision to make Yerevan the new capital, most of the money in the republic went to that city and its grand designs for the new face of Soviet Armenia. Considered a military strongpoint and so a closed city, Giumri fell into 2nd city status, but was spared the demolition of the historic district. The face of Soviet Giumri went first into the construction of the "Stalin

Shenks" on G. Njdeh avenue, which carefully complemented the Belle Époque buildings in the Old Center. The worst designs were reserved for the Brezhnev and late Soviet periods, far from the center.

Giumri/Leninakan faced the same sacrifices as all of Armenia during the Second World War. With a population of 2 million, Armenia contributed 650,000 soldiers, 315,000 of which died during the 6-year conflict. Some say 30% of the male population of Giumri died.

An industrial boom began after the war, creating jobs for 50,000 people in Giumri. Huge textile and heavy industry factories were built, as were the wretched "Khrushchev" buildings that surround the old city. Workers from through the Soviet Union came to Giumri to staff the factories, one street that housed Russian girls working the textile factories becoming a popular haunt of young men and nick-named "Syphilis Street".

By the 1980's the city had reached 250,000 and was a major industrial production center for the Soviet Union. The petty corruption that had existed in the country since before the

Before and After

Most Giumretsis mark their lives by "Before the Earthquake" and "After the earthquake," even the young born after 1988 still recounting the epic struggles of those horrific times as if they were their own. Even now they cannot go forward ion their lives without knowing that they replace someone who was lost, someone who died, in 'the earthquake'.

It is hard to imagine how horrible the events of 1988 was except if you lived through it, and even the most graphic description of bodies crushed by the weight of three floors of apartments, or those surviving the tremors only to succumb the subzero temperatures of the worst winter in memory, can conjure the true horror of the event. Still, some images survive, searing my imagination with their awful details.

One friend told me one of her worst visions of the earthquake came afterwards, as the shock wore off and people began to comb the city for lost relatives and friends. She came with her uncle to the square in front of the old Univermag, which had collapsed in the earthquake (and is now a new college and bank), but became the focus of the entire city, the square in front converted into a giant outdoor morgue, as body after body was brought and laid out on the frozen ground, ringing the Lenin statue. Survivors came to the square like specters in the snow, some frantically searching for lost loved ones, other collapsing in the snow as they found the body of someone they knew, doubling up in agony and moaning in pain.

"Everywhere. Throughout the city. You cold go no where but people were crying, screaming. Wailing," she said. "It is a vision I can never forget.

Silence. And then the choked-off tears and a soft, steady drone in her voice, "Let's change the subject. Let's talk about something else."

Communists became rampant as a general economic and political malaise engulfed the country. While not in all cases, construction was a prime target, with engineers approving sub code designs and contractors skimming off the supplies when building apartments and offices. This and Leninakan's status as a Closed Military city had terrible consequences in 1988.

Earthquake

The 1988 earthquake shook the city on December 7, instantly killing 10,000 people as row after row of Soviet buildings (the "New Leninakan") collapsed on its inhabitants. The scenes of

destruction were followed by horrific tales of agonizing deaths and attempts at recovery, as well as heroic actions by people all over the world to bring aid to the destroyed city. Locals are still unable to speak of the horrors of that event without coming to tears and any mention of the event or the help that followed is often followed by "let's talk of something else".

In addition, following the earthquake and Armenia's independence and war with Azerbaijan over the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh, the entire economy collapsed and all supplies of gas to the country were halted by Turkey and the Azeris. Years of suffering followed, with a mass exodus of Armenians, a migration out of the country as large as that into the country following the 1915 genocide. From somewhere around 3.5 million, Armenia experienced the loss of 1.5 million, and Giumri fell from 250,000 to barely 125,000 now.

Most of Giumri's able-bodied population left the city in pursuit of work, most to Russia. So many have gone to Russia that there is joke running around quoting Russia's President Putin saying of Armenia's president, "Who is the president of Armenia? I am the real president of Armenia". And in fact, there are more Armenians in Russia than in Armenia, as there are more in the USA.

Giumri Now

Finally, thirteen years after the earthquake one Armenian donor, along with a Norwegian Agency, finally started a comprehensive project to rebuild and construct new housing. Within 3 years 90% of earthquake victims were finally housed in permanent housing, with around 1000 people remaining in domiks (metal shipping containers) 13 years after the earthquake.

The 19th century jewels in the Old Center are a much happier story: surviving mostly intact from the earthquake, the historic heart of the city, with its beautiful Armenian Belle Époque design, has been salvaged and is a walking museum of over 1000 structures, the largest collection of intact historical buildings in the Caucasus.

Giumri's economy is mostly based on remittances from family members working abroad (\$1 billion+), with that money being used to create small shops and businesses and a steadily improving standard of life. With reconstruction, life in the city has become more predictable, and the gentle demeanor of the Giumretsi, and their fabled humor and hospitality, has rebounded.



Overlooking the potholes and lack of paving in the side streets (or maybe because of he lack paving) you can imagine an older time, the red and black ornamental tufa hallmarks of the Armenian Belle Époque.

After independence in 1991, the city was renamed Giumri, but locals still use Leninakan, remembering a pleasanter time and better life.



NAVIGATING THE CITY ▲

Despite local's notorious puncheon for ignoring street names (forget about street name changes) and referring to locations as "Gagik's street", it is impossible to get completely lost in the Old Center, where you will spend most of your time. You will rarely find yourself more than 10 minutes

walk from any point, 15-20 minutes if you hike all the up to Aznavour Square.

What is called the Old Center is anchored by Freedom Square and Haghtanaki Blvd., with its historic streets spanning outwards from these two points.



Haghtanaki (Հաղթանակի) Blvd is the most likely street you will enter the city by car from Yerevan. The street is home to the Old Giumri museum and Berlin Gast Haus. The streets just to east are filled with historic homes in this area are still inhabited by working class locals. The streets are narrow and asphalt is mostly nonexistent, but they are filled with the bustle of family life and friendly atmosphere. Historically important, this is also a real neighborhood.



Freedom Square - Ազատության հրապարակ is one block west of Haghtanaki, and is the heart of the city, with its fountains, Cinema, the Yot Vert Diocese Church and the reborn All Savior Cathedral. Art galleries and museums are

located in this area, along old Abovian and Shahumian streets to the north, with historic neighborhoods found on both sides of these streets, past Rustaveli p. and up to Alex Manugian p.

Giumri's "little vernisage" is the pedestrian-only **Rizhkov**, northeast of the square, which leads to Gorki Street and Peace Circle and Sayat Nova district. The Train Station is at the eastern end of Gorki Street, a 15-minute walk from the Circle.



To the west of the square, up Gai and Sheraz Sts., are still more historic buildings and Gorki (Central) Park, with its magnificent view of the Russian built "Black Fort" (South Tower), Mother Armenia statue and the Turkish border. Follow Ozanian p., which skirts the outer edge of the park, and you will pass the Stadium, the Black Fort itself and end up at Mother Armenia.

South of Freedom Square are All Savior's Park, The Russian Chapel, Giumri's Shuka, more historic streets and the Bus Station (Aftokaiyan).

Just **north of Peace Circle** is Sayat Nova p., which runs up to Independence Square. The area west of here includes the Giumri State Theatre, the Poloz Mukuch tavern, Beer Factory and S. Grigor Lousavoritch.

OVERNIGHT

- 6. Dvin
- 9. Alhmas
- 10. Dghiak
- 12. Isuz
- 27a. Melsida's B&B
- 29. Satik's B&B
- 57. Arax
- 57. Berlin Gast Haus
- 67. Yerazank – Ani District

FOOD & DRINK

- 1. Garun Restaurant
- 13. Di Napoli Restaurant & Shara Restaurant
- 16. Khaits Ishkhan Restaurant
- 19. Kilikia Restaurant
- 27. Ravenna Restaurant
- 34. Poloz Mukuch Tavern
- 35. Jrahars Bistro
- 42. 38 Gorku'
- 49. Vanatur Restaurant – Georgian
- 50. Siro Khariskh Restaurant
- 51. Kalinka Bistro
- 53. Kamar Bistro
- 54. Kumaiyri Restaurant
- 55. Oasis Restaurant
- 59. Phaeton Alek Restaurant
- 66. Parvana Restaurant
- 68. Cicilia Bistro – ANI District
- 69. Venezia Bistro – ANI District

CAFÉ

- 38. Café Flamingo
- 39. Café Robinson Crusoe

- 41. Café Khudozhnik (Melsida's) Bistro
- 45. Café Monte Carlo

BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

- 65. Aftokaiyan

TRAIN

- 28. Railroad Station

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY

- 14. Museum of Nature
- 31. Mher Mkrtchian Home-Mus.
- 32. A. Isahakian Home-Mus.
- 33. Kumaiyri Preserve
- 37. Hovhannes Shiraz Home-Mus.
- 42. Aslamazian Sisters Home-Mus.

- 52. Style Art Gallery
- 60. Mus. Of National Architecture
- 61. Merkurov Home-Mus.

MONUMENTS - SITES

- 5. Lord Byron
- 7. Charles Aznavour Square
- 15. Lenin
- 20. "Haiyuh"
- 23. Avetik Isahakian
- 26. Armen Tigranian
- 57. Zoravar Andranik
- 63. Garegin Nzhdeh
- 64. Mother Armenia / Hayastan

CHURCHES

- 21. S. Grigor Lusavorich
- 30. S. N'shan

- 47. S. Astvatsatsin ("Yot Verk")
- 56. Amnaprkich Cathedral
- 62. "Pelpelan Zham" Russian

THEATRES

- 22. Adjemian Dramatic Theatre
- 44. Puppet Theatre
- 46. Hoktember Cinema

SHOPS, SHUKA

STADIUM

INTERNET, PHONE, POST

GOVT. OFFICES

- 17. Shirak Regional Office
- 24. Giumri Mayor

APOTEKAS

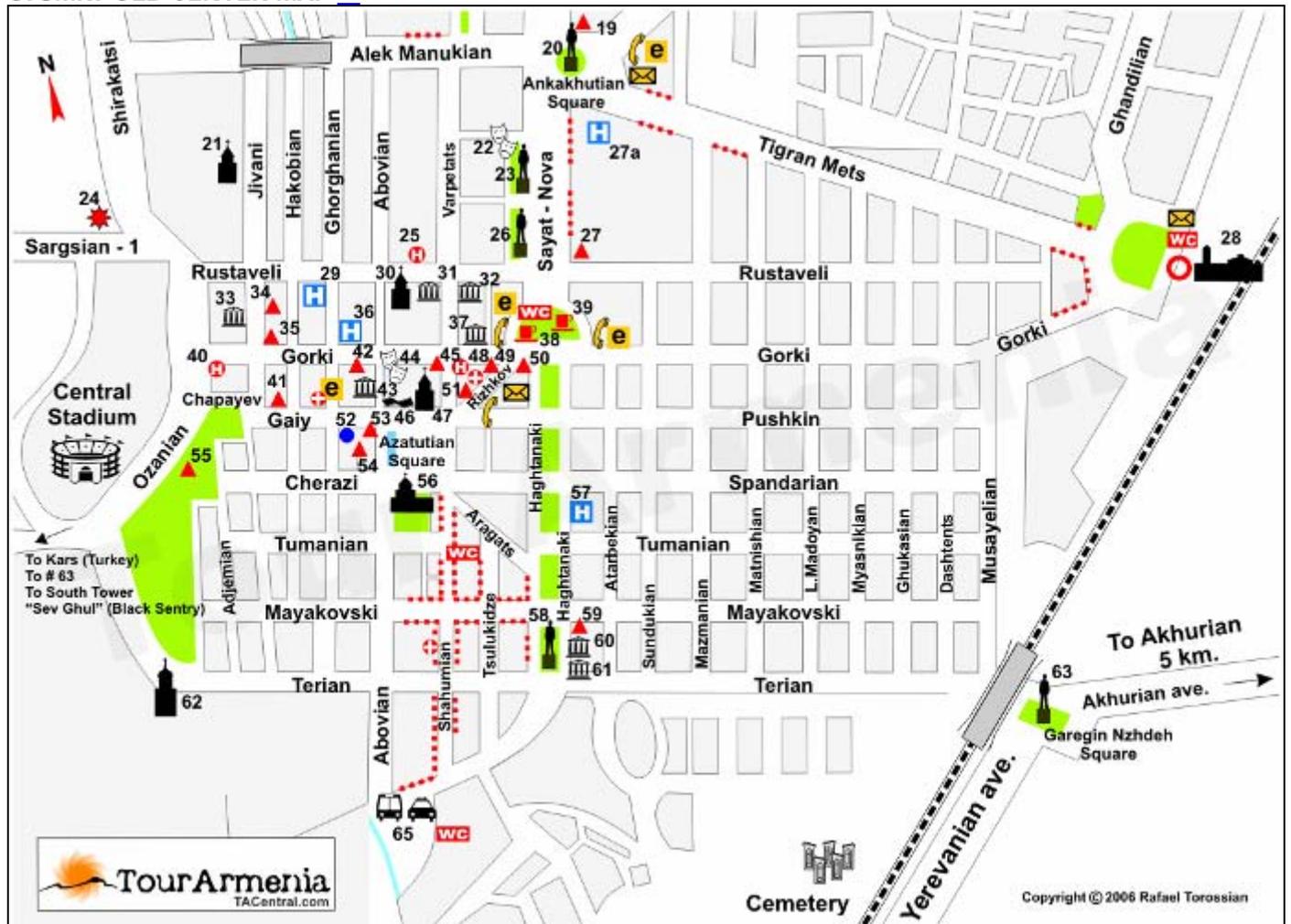
CLINICS - HOSPITALS

- 2. Maternity Hospital
- 3. Italian Hospital
- 4. Samarit Hospital
- 8. Diagnostic Center
- 11. Austrian Children's Hospital
- 18. #2 Polyclinic
- 25. Children's Dental Clinic
- 40. #1 Polyclinic
- 48. #2 Dental Clinic
- 70. Int'l Red Cross – ANI District

CEMETERY

PUBLIC TOILET

GIUMRI OLD CENTER MAP



WALKING TOURS

There are two walking tours of Old Giumri. The tours highlight some of the incredible architecture of Old Giumri, or "Alexandropol" as it was called during its heyday in the Russian Imperial period. Each a unique story, these buildings and their designs make up what is called the Armenian Belle Époque.

To see the tours, open the *Giumri Walking Tour PDF*.

SIGHTS

MONUMENTS & PARKS

Giumri has several monuments and parks worth visiting, the most interesting within walking distance of the Old Center.



Mother Armenia

This mammoth sculpture, erected in 1975, dwarfs the surrounding landscape and can be seen from the South Tower (a.k.a. "Sev Ghul") and more easily at the rotunda in Gorki Park. The statue was designed by Ara Sargsian and Yerem Vardanian (architect Raphael Yeghoian) and is 18 m tall. However with the base it soars a full 41 meters into the air. The statue received immediate complaints from Turkey when it was erected, the Turks calling the statue of a victorious Armenian Women a political provocation. It is in plain sight of the Turkish border and villages up and down the Akhurian valley. If you want to get close, it is a 15 minute walk from Gorki Park. A couple of roadside Khorovatz joints lie at the entrance to the monument steps.

South Tower - Սև Դուլ ("Sev Ghul" or "Black Sentry")

Referred to as Sev Ghul, this is really the South Tower for the much larger Red Fort complex to the north. The tower guarded the southern approaches to the main fort and there were three towers originally, guarding the Yerevan, Kars and Akhaltsikha roads. If necessary the fort could hold 15,000 soldiers and their supplies. From this vantage point you can see the entire Akhurian Valley, the Turkish Border, the city and beyond to the slopes of Mt. Aragats. It is not an easy hike (15-20 minutes from Gorki Park), and the tower is closed to the public, take along a guide to try and gain entry.

The tower was the subject of excavations the summer of 2005 when the new owner (who wants to convert it into a performance complex and hotel) uncovered a central well and Russian artifacts. Further excavation showed a complex of burial chambers from the 15th – 10th centuries BCE. The owner seems willing to preserve the valuable archeological finds and incorporate them into his renovation plans.

Red Fort - Կարմիր Դուլ (closed to visitors)

This massive fortress is really a complex of forts, barracks and Army administrative buildings, all inhabited by the Russian military. The Russians still protect the frontier with Turkey, and locals warily accept their presence. The fort is the most likely candidate for significant archeological finds going back the beginnings of settlement in the Giumri area, and there is an outstanding Russian Church within the compound, but Russians forbid entry to any but the most trusted (connected) individuals.

Gorki (City) Park - Գորկու /քաղաքային/ զբոսայգի

This beautiful oasis on the Western edge of the city has been a green space for centuries, first as a family cemetery and Military park, then as the main public park for the city. The park has a number of statues, including busts of writers Avetik Isahakian and Hovhannes Shiraz, a wooden totem, several carved tufa pieces and a wonderfully kitsch Soviet era statue of a woman rower. May she stand forever!

When the Southern Caucasus were added to the Russian Empire (late 1820's) the immediate concern was for the protection of the new border, and the defensive barriers required to secure the hundreds of km of frontier. The existing medieval fortresses, among them Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, and Giumri, were no longer up to the challenge of protecting the border against much more modern adversaries. Russian military engineers decided to construct a new line of defense systems, anchored on the town of Giumri. The design of 10 outer defense structures was ordered Tsar Nikolai I in the early 1830s, and on June 21, 1835 the Tsar signed a decree approving the design of the new Giumri fortress.

Construction began in parallel with the design of the fortress. At the end of October 1837, during a familiarization trip to the Southern Caucasus, the Tsar visited Giumri to study the progress of the new fort and while here, ordered the fort to be renamed Alexandropol Fortress and the city Alexandropol. Following military regulations, the new fortress was designated a Class II fortress with Class I artillery armament. Around 15,000 military personnel could be accommodated in the huge compound.

But the site has a much older history. Early 20th c excavations showed settlement on the grounds from at the 3rd millennium BCE, while the first casual findings were made during construction of the fortress in 1875, which uncovered a burial site named "Warrior's Grave" because of the weapons found at the site. The rich finds were unfortunately taken to St. Petersburg where they currently reside at the Hermitage (along with much of Armenia's great historical artifacts the Russians acting much like their British cousins by confiscating the histories and treasures of the great civilizations of the near east). Later excavations include the same area by German historian Emil Rosler (1900) and B. Khalatsiants (1908); and systematic excavations in 1983-84 and 1998. What these digs revealed was a 3rd millennium BCE settlement, an Iron Age necropolis and a 6th-5th cc BCE settlement from the early Armenian (Yervandian/Orontic) period.

South Tower (Sev Ghul). In 1834, the first drawings of the defensive South tower were made, with construction perhaps starting at the same time. The tower served as both a watch for the Akhurian valley and a military prison. The tower is truly round, its massive circular walls lined with living quarters, jail cells and storage rooms. A deep well was dug in the middle of the compound, supposed to supply drinking water. By the 1870s the well was abandoned and slowly filled up with rubble and dirt, and at the end of the Soviet Union (1990) the Russian army deserted the South Tower and for 14 years it sat vacant, vandalized and in danger of falling apart. In 2005 the site was sold to a local businessman to develop the huge monument into a cultural/entertainment center (see picture). Plans On completion of the project the tower will become a "Festival and Concert" centre with concert stage, museum, swimming pool and a small hotel.

2005-2006 excavations. The government requires developers to sponsor excavations of historic property they wish to build on and excavations of Sev Ghul began in 2005 and will conclude in the fall of 2006. The excavation of the well recovered cannon shot, military uniform fragments (shirts, boots), pieces of kerosene lamps, horseshoes, porcelain, ceramic and glass. So far 21 meters of debris and artifacts have been cleared from the well, with still more left to uncover. Most importantly, a series of prehistoric graves were found less than a meter under the inner compound floor, a 9th-6th c BCE necropolis. Totems, vases and jewelry were found with the skeletal remains, curled in a fetal position, their heads turned to face the setting sun. The positioning of the body towards the East is credited by church historians to Grigor Lusavorich's attempts in the 4th c CE to break with the pagan tradition, but in fact it began sometime around the 6th C BCE, conclusively dating these remains to the previous period. The necropolis underwent extensive digs in 2006. (Source: Stepan Ter-Margaryan)





There is a large building near the northern entrance built in the early 20th century, first a public club, then a theatre and now home to Shirak TV. The building's façade has some interesting early Soviet carvings. Just above the theatre is an enclosed atrium with band shell and restaurant and above that the Rotunda, a neo-classical monument overlooking the Akhurian Valley and Mother Armenia.

Haghtanakhi Boulevard

This tree lined boulevard will be your first entry point into Giumri if you come by car from Yerevan. The Museum National Architecture and Urban Life and Merkurov Museum are located at the south end of the boulevard, as is the large statue of Andranik mounted on a horse and collection of busts in the central median.



Andranik Statue - Անդրանիկի հուշարձան

One the leaders of the Freedom Fighter movement, Andranik Ozanian was born in 1865 in

Shopin Garahisar. Trained as a carpenter, Andranik followed his father's trade until the age of seventeen, when his father was beaten by a Turk. Andranik retaliated by beating the man who attacked his father, and was forced to run away. He joined the guerilla campaign, becoming a leader in the 1880's.

Andranik led raids against Ottomans, and the Turks grew to fear him, saying that, "bullets never touched the Pasha." In reality he was shot during battles, but survived all wounds. A seminal battle for Andranik was fought in 1901 at Arakelotz Vank in Mush Region, where he led a group of 30 that repelled 3000 Turkish soldiers. Andranik's successes included the First Balkan War, pinning down 10,000 Turkish soldiers at Maritsaget with only 250 men. In 1913, the Bulgarian King Ferdinand conferred on Andranik the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and made him an honorary citizen of the country.

Andranik alone did not trust the Young Turks, who rose to power just before and during the First World War. His fears were confirmed when they instigated the Genocide of 1915. Leading forces against the Turks during the period, he encouraged Russian involvement and their invasion of Ottoman controlled Armenia.

He repelled additional attempts to invade Southern Armenia and waged decisive victories in Zangezur ("Ringing Gates" or entrance to Vayots Dzor and Siunik).

Andranik left Armenia following the 1918 Batumi Agreement, which removed the territories of Zangezur and Nagorno Karabakh from Armenia, as well as Armenian lands taken in Turkey. Feeling the politicians had betrayed the Armenian cause he refused to honor the agreements, and exiled himself to Paris, where he died in 1927.

Row of Busts: Armenian Revolutionaries

Sponsored by the Dashnaksutiun (ARF) party, this row of bronze busts at the base of Haghtanakhi Boulevard are of famous ARF Armenians:

Gevorg V (1847-1930, Katoghikos during genocide and early Soviet era),

D'ro D'rastamat Kanahyan (1884-1956, Armenian General during Genocide and Turkish invasion of 1918-1920. Aligned himself with Germans during WWII in failed attempt to win Armenian independence from Soviets),

Smbat Makhluto, Sako Sevkaretsi (Sargis Tsovanian, 1870-1908 – leader of the Armenian

resistance in the late 19th century – hero of the defense of Shamsadin and Ghazakh during rebellion of 1905),

Peto Giumretsi (Alexander Petrosian),

Garegin Nzhdeh (Ter-Harutiunian, 1886-1957 – leader of Armenian resistance to Soviet domination and the ceding of Siunik/Zangezur to Turkish control in 1920-21),

Aram Manukian (1879-1919- leader of resistance to genocide in Van, minister of interior in first republic),



Nikol Duman (Ter-Hovhannissian, 1867-1919, leader of resistance in Baku and Yerevan during 1905 rebellion),

Aghbiur Serob Vardanian (1864- , one of the 19th c. Freedom Fighters, organized resistance to 1895 Hamid massacres, esp. in Taron district, stopping Turkish and Kurd attacks. Andranik first joined the resistance in his brigade),

Gevorg Chaush (Ghazarian - d. 1907, member of Armenian resistance, died at battle of Solukh),

Kristafor Mikayelian (1854-1905, leader in the Armenian resistance of the 19th c., credited with forging alliance between various factions of resistance, published the Feydaiyin journal *Droshak*), in 1901 Kristafor ran Operation *Potorig*, essentially to extort large sums of money from richer Armenians for revolutionary action. He died while testing hand grenades in a plot to assassinate the Sultan).

Simon Zavarian (1866-1913 – leader of the ARF),

Soghoman Tehlirian (1896-1960, Armenian who in 1921 assassinated Talaat Pasha. Tehlirian's entire family was killed during the genocide, a genocide widely viewed as being instigated and led by Talaat Pasha. His trial was a sensation, the court of Berlin finding him innocent.),

Rostom (Stepan Zorian, 1867-1919, leader of the Russian rebellions of 1903-1904, rebellion of 1905 and resistance during WWI, a defender of Baku during Soviet aggression.)

Khaghaghutian Circle - Խաղաղության օղակ Maiden Fountain

The Circle, at the northern end of Haghtanakhi Boulevard at Gorki street, is actually only part of a circle, encircled on its northern end with early 20th century buildings, including an "Arabesque" fantasy that locals continue to debate the merits of. The park is a favorite among pensioners, often found sunning in cooler weather. The park also has a WC and two cafes: Flamingo and the more famous Robinson, where tables are located in tree houses.

Independence Square - Անկախության հրապարակ

The square and statue are dedicated to (what else?) Independence & Freedom of the Armenian nation. It is located between Sayat Nova and Garegin Nzhdeh pts.

Charles Aznavour Square - Շառլ Ազնավուրի հրապարակ

This square, surrounded by governmental and educational buildings, is named after French singer Charles Aznavour, one of the first Western Armenians to provide humanitarian aid to Armenia on a large scale. The popular singer, discovered by Edith Piaf when he was in a street gang, continues to support Armenia's development, in particular with earthquake relief to Giumri and Spitak. The unremarkable statue in the square is of the chanteur himself.

Garegin Nzhdeh Square - Գարեգին Նժդեհի հրապարակ

At the intersection of Terian and Yerevanian, this is the first statue to greet you when you arrive from Yerevan by car. Nzhdeh (1886-1955) is associated with Armenia's freedom fighters and fight for independence during the tumultuous years of 1915-1921. He is first known as one of the men who joined Andranik during the first Balkan War and he soon became a commander for one of Andranik's units, fighting by his side. Nzhdeh led Armenian & Yesdi volunteers in battle against the Turks during WWI and, with Andranik, repulsed both Red Army and Turkish attempts to smash through Zangezur ('Ringing Gates'), the gateway to the South of Armenia. Mustafa Kamal ('Ataturk') the leader of the reorganized Turkish government, wanted to claim the Armenian lands

as part of a Pan Turkish empire stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Afghan border. Andranik and Nzhdeh repulsed these attacks and preserved Siunik for Armenia, though they could not prevent Lenin from ceding the Armenian inhabited Nagorno Karabakh to the Azeris. Nzhdeh continued his struggle for Armenian independence, even joining Andranik in fruitless negotiations with the Germans during World War II. Imprisoned as a counter-revolutionary, Nzhdeh died in a Gulag in 1955. In 1983 a group of Armenian intellectuals spirited Nzhdeh's remains to Armenia. Part of his remains (the little finger of the right hand and vertebra), were secretly buried on the slope of Mt. Khustup in Siunik, according to his wishes. The rest of the remains were hidden for 4 years, and in 1987 buried in within the church grounds of Spitakavor, which remains a place of pilgrimage for nationalists and those who remember the commander.

Shuka - **Շուկա**
Giumri's Shuka is the oldest and largest in Armenia. The Shuka broadly encompasses both sides of Shahumian & Tsulukidze Pts. south of Freedom Square to the Bus Station and the western side of Haghtanaki Blvd. The Shuka sells everything from food to nuts and bolts, sellers line the streets and the market stalls in the main Shuka building at the north end of Shahumian. There are a few sellers of handcrafts, but it is more likely to find that on Rizhkov.

MUSEUMS

Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life in Giumri & the Merkurov House Studio, 47 Haghtanaki, Tel: 23-600, 21-281, 23-148, email: sonah@web.am. Open every day except Monday, 10-5. Admission 1000 AMD includes both museums.

The Museums Located in the same complex at the bottom of Haghtanaki pta. are two interesting museums, each of which serves as a kind of bookend and starting point to the exploring the city. They are both small (the much larger collections are mostly in storage, the buildings still under repair after extensive damage during the 1988 earthquake).

The Dzitoghtsian Home and Museum - Զիտօղտսյան Տուն-թանգարան is located in an historic Giumri mansion built by the Dzitoghtsian family, which immigrated to Giumri from Western Armenia in the late 1800s. Wealthy members of the most prestigious guild in Giumri, the Dzitoghtsians lived their lives among the highest

echelons of society and were true representatives of the Giumri Belle Époque.



The entrance is upstairs; take the archway to the right of the Phaeton Alek restaurant, which is on the lower level facing the street. Once upstairs, go to the far right door at the end of the courtyard to enter the museum. Admission (1000 AMD) includes both museums and permission to make photographs.

The museum is divided into two sections, each on opposite sides of the upper courtyard with collections showing the life and times of Giumri through time, especially its golden era in the 19th century. Collections include contemporary artwork, carpets and urban artifacts from Giumri, and are a great way to get acquainted with the city's unique history.

The first room displays an exhibition of photographs of famous people. Among them are photographs of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Jacques Cousteau.

The second room displays **photographs** of old Giumri, a map model and 19th c **maps** of Old Alexandropol, as well as the city rest, adopted in 1843. Next room has an odd display of keys on the wall, documents form the early period as well as a very well done **Diorama** of the old city, showing the current center before it was torn down to make way for the Soviet Square. The detailing is quite good and one only wishes they would tear down the square and rebuild this 19th c Armenian Agora. Backtrack to the ticket room and make a left where a gallery of modern art is exhibited.

Across the courtyard and through the narrow white doors are the ethnographic exhibitions of Giumri

artisans, customs and homes. The first room features **photographs and samples** from 19th-early 20th c Giumretsis, featuring **Shushanik Khurghinian** (see Other Sites below), the poet Avetik Isahakian and other famous artists. The room also displays musical instruments used by some of the **gusans** and folk singers revered in the 19th c. The next room has displays of items connected to **Giumri's festivals and celebrations**, including intricately engraved wedding invitations (with the note "Please, no gifts" featured on them), a shadow puppet display and, hanging from the ceiling, decorations used during Lent or **Bari Gentan**, a holdover from the pagan era. There is a tree branch wrapped with colored ribbons and decorated with candy, walnuts and dried pomegranate, and some stick figures, dolls dressed in bright colors with a large pomegranate at the bottom, stuck with seven feathers. The tradition was to take one feather out each week of Lent, for good luck.



The next two rooms show a **"typical" household in old Giumri**, with furniture and appliances. Note the wooden stool with a hole carve in the center. I thought it was a 19th c baby's toilet, but nope, it was used to place toddlers in to keep them from wandering around the room.

Across the next hall are **three rooms holding the original furniture used by the Dzitoghtsian family**, starting with a dining/study area, then a lavishly decked out living room (replete with red velvet curtains and exquisitely hand made furniture) and finally a bedroom with a mannequin of one of the Dzitoghtsian's daughters, forlornly looking out he window to her beau on the street below.

The ground floor houses the **Phaeton Alek restaurant** (on page 14), a taste of grand old Giumri with prices to match.



In the same building on the S end is the **Merkurov House Studio - Մերկուրովի Տուն-արվեստանոց**, 47 Haghtanaki p., Tel: 23-600, 36-720, e-mail: arshakm@inbox.ru.

The three room collection forms the house museum of a Giumretsi sculpture best known for creating the old statue of Lenin on Republic Square in Yerevan. The statue was considered one of the best representations of the father of Russian Communism, though before its demise locals loved to show visitors how, at a certain angle, Lenin appeared to have an erection pointing to the then statue of Stalin on top of the city (torn down and replaced with Mother Armenia after Krushev's famous diatribe against Stalin in the 1950s). The statue has long since been carted away to become a piece of kitsch art piece for a European restaurant, but Merkurov's work is on display, beginning with **artifacts from his studio**, placed in careful placed casualness on one side of the long room while photos of his family and friends line the walls of the other side. Among the items on display are his bed, and an early map of the Soviet Union, during the 1920s Civil War, and the small version of a Lenin Statue, in plaster. **The second room**, a long immaculately white gallery features his extensive collection of **death masks** of famous Soviet personages, models for his sculptural work. Among the persons shown are Plekhanov, Sverdlov and the grand master, Vladimir Lenin himself. The exhibition is a macabre for some, but fascinating for others, especially Lenin's death mask, through which it is possible to see the effects of he stroke that eventually killed him.



The Two Sisters (Aslamazian Sisters) Gallery (museum) - Ասլամազյան քույրերի պատկերասրահ, 232 Abovian p. is a real treasure. The newly reconstructed museum is classic Old Giumri: black tufa building opening up to a flower-laden garden hemmed in on two sides with porches featuring lovely wooden lattice work. The museum features the work of Mariam and Yeranuhi Aslamazian, two artists who managed to transcend the strict constructs of Social Realism while leading independent lives within and without the Soviet Union. One sister, Mariam Aslamazian, is still alive, living in Moscow.

Contemporaries of Picasso, Gauguin and Martiros Sarian, Mariam's paintings evoke the dramatic, colorful themes of the times. While critics argue the relative strengths of her paintings, her exquisite ceramic plates are universally proclaimed masterpieces. The museum also highlights ceramics done by Yeranuhi Aslamazian. This is a must-see spot, for the extraordinary work on display and the bohemian lifestyle these artists represented. Nothing else like it in Armenia. The ground floor is also used as an exhibition hall. Open every day except Monday, 10-5. Donation.

Shiraz House Museum, 101 Shahumian, Tel: 25-142, memorial museum dedicated to Hovhannes Shiraz, a 20th century writer of classic Armenian Poetry. Born Hovhannes Onnik Garabedian three days after the beginning of the genocide, Shiraz grew up on the streets, barefoot and starving.

In 1935, Shiraz published his first work, "Beginning Of Spring", establishing his fame. The novelist Ahrbed named the poet "Shiraz", since "this youth's poems have the fragrance of roses, fresh and covered with dew, like the roses of Shiraz."

In 1937 Shiraz entered the Armenian Literature Department of Yerevan's State University, where he studied until 1941. Until his death on March 14, 1984, Shiraz published many books, mostly poetry, but also quartets, parables and translations. He enjoyed wide recognition both in Armenia and abroad, and is considered one of the greatest Armenian poets of the 20th century. His poems relate to Ararat, Motherhood and the Armenian Homeland:

*"As long as you never have a hut in the fatherland,
You are just a forgotten orphan under a foreign moon."*



The home museum is hard to understand without knowing his work or Armenian, still the museum is worth a stop for the pretty garden, eclectic architectural details and the enthusiastic staff. Open every day except Monday, 10-5. Donation.

Avetik Isahakian House Museum - Ավետիկ Իսահակյանի Տուն-թանգարան, 91 Shahumian, museum dedicated to Poet working in the 19th-early 20th centuries. Isahakian (1875-1957) is famous in Armenian literature for being part of the new Golden Age of Armenian letters, and wrote in a lyrical romantic style. Isahakian spent time in Paris before returning to Armenia in 1934, where he played an active role in creating the Armenian Academy of Sciences. Among his more famous works are "Yerkehr u Vehrkehr" (Songs and Wounds), "Abu Lala Mahari," "Im Hokin" (My Soul), "Maiyrikis" (To My Mother), "Kishehr" (Night), "Kuzes Linem" (You Want Me To Be), "Usta Karo", "Hayrenigits Heru" (Away From My Fatherland), "Tarinehr Heto" (Years Later). It is said the Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff was so taken with Isahakian's 'The Little Willow,'

he rushed to set it to music 'because,' he said, 'the melody was inherent in the verse.' Open every day except Monday, 10-5. Donation.

Kumayri Historic District, 66 Jivani, p., Tel: 23-434, consists of the entire center of the city and its historic buildings, making up Alexandropol or Old Giumri. Call the office for the entire Historical District. Call up the District Director Zhorair for one of the most entertaining walking tours you could hope for. You need translator, but his knowledge is unsurpassed, as is his wickedly funny quips about those who lived before and now in the historic district of the city.

Mher Mkrтчian Memorial Museum - Միեր Մկրթցյանի Տուն-թանգարան, 30 Rustaveli, museum dedicated to the life and work of one of Armenia's most beloved actors, **Frunzik Mher Mkrтчian**. Known for his large nose and comic roles, Mkrтчian nonetheless led a tragic personal life. An actor in both film and theatre, Mkrтчian performed Shakespeare, Western and Armenian plays, but was best known for his roles in the Russian cinema: "Mimi No", "Aibolit 66", "Kavkas skaya plenitsa" and perhaps most famously, "Mer Mankutian Tango" (The Tango of our childhood) with Galia Novents. Fantastically successful and one of the most famous comedians of his time, Mkrтчian was driven to drink over the loss of his wife's and son's minds and the death of his daughter in a car accident right after her marriage. By the end of his life he refused all roles and was consumed by drink. Open every day except Monday, 10-5. Donation.



Shirak Regional Museum - Շիրակի երկրագիտական թանգարան, 118 Miasnikian p.,

Tel: 30-134, 22-847, 22-799, fax: 33-034, Email: smuseum@web.am

The Shirak Regional Museum is an heroic effort, continuing to operate in tiny quarters after its premises were destroyed during the 1988 earthquake. The large collection is housed in a number of domiks around town, the staff still hoping for allocation of space or construction of a museum to display them in. The staff continues research and excavations and are easily accessible to the more serious-minded tourist who wants to delve deeper into Shirak's archeological history. The director, Hamazasp Khachatryan and his staff can be found at excavations around the marz in the summer, and seem to enjoy explaining their work. Museum Closed, offices open in season at odd hours, when they are back from excavations.

THE ARTS ▲

The arts have a long history in Giumri, culture never being far from any discussion. Even during the years following the earthquake when nothing else seemed to work, the theatre, galleries and museums were among the first public buildings to reopen, art deemed a right by each citizen. Giumri has produced an inordinate number of artists for its size, a fact Giumretsis delight in reminding anyone who will listen: Opera Composer Armen Tigranian, Painter Minas Avetisian, poets Avetik Isahakian & Hovhannes Shiraz and actor Frunzik Mher Mkrтчian are among the famous Armenian artists who called Shirak home. Tigranian's opera "Anush" was first performed in Giumri, in 1912, a *fin de siecle* ornament for a golden age.

ART GALLERIES

Style Art Galley - Ժամանակակից արվեստի թանգարան, 12 Gai p., Tel: 22-011 is a remarkable place in Giumri: a private art gallery with no governmental support! Run by the colorful and enigmatic Artoush Mkrтчyan, the gallery is a hallmark to the days when cutting edge art was the norm in Giumri, and it hosts exhibitions by artists around the world. On exhibit when we visited were several piece made up of blue bottles (the largest entitled "Democracy") and an installation piece by Sargis, which takes up an entire room with a huge mirror on one end, silky blue lighting and a vaguely Kabuki-like kimono made from old Armenian fabrics. Strips of film covered the corners and the kimono. Amazing stuff anywhere, let alone Giumri.

THEATRE

Adjemian State Dramatic Theatre - Աձեմյանի անվան Պետական Դրամատիկական Թատրոն, 4 Sayat Nova, 2-25-38, 2-13-32, is famous for being the best theatre in Armenia, producing such writers as Mkrtich Armen (Heghnar Akhpiur), actors Artavasd Pashaiyan, Tsolak Amerikian, Levon Zorabian and Armen Armenian. The theatre continued performing after the earthquake and despite the emigration of its best actors, continues to produce dynamic plays and is still considered among the best in the country. Partly this is to do with Giumretsi's character and love of culture. Audiences make known their displeasure over poor performances, pushing actors to greater levels of expertise (one anecdote is remembered: an actor once announced his work was still "in progress" and someone in the back of the house retorted "one rehearsal would have been nice"). Noted plays in the repertory are Shakespeare's "12th Night (Vartan Adjemian, lead actor), "Ara Gheghetsik & Samiram", "Yerkir Haireni", "Kandats Ojak", "Kourash Mairik", "Artavast", "Char Vokjeh" and "Korata". The theatre performs its repertory in Armenian during the winter season. Watch for touring productions from Yerevan and outside Armenia, which occasionally perform here. Performances are in evenings, with weekend matinees. Performances are announced in front of the theatre. 700-1000 AMD.

Alikian Puppet Theatre of Giumri - Գյումրիի Ալիկյանի անվան Տիկնիկային Թատրոն, 131 Abovian, 2-17-85, has been a part of Giumri's landscape. Puppets run the range for traditional marionettes to more experimental presentations, and you may be torn between which is more fun to watch: the show or the kids in the audience. Performances are matinees, weekends, and 12.00-15.00. 200-500 AMD.



FILM
Russian-dubbed films are shown daily at the **Hoktember Kino Theatre** on Freedom Square, 2-32-86. The opulent building is worth a visit in itself, the façade highlighted with huge pictures of famous Armenian films and actors, including Sergei Parajanov's The color of Pomegranate and Armenia's "Anna Maniani", Galia Novents, appearing with Mher Mkrtchian. Films on weekends, times announced in front of the building. 500-1000 AMD. Popcorn just 50 AMD!

CHURCHES ▲

Giumri has some interesting churches, including a few working establishments.

Diocese Office, Armenian Church, 2-37-77



Astvatsatsin (Yot Verk) Cathedral - Աստվածածին /Յոթվերք/ եկեղեցի, Freedom Square, (under reconstruction). Giumri's working church and bishopric See, Yot Verk is not remarkable but a living, breathing church, with weddings, baptisms and prayers ever continuing. Pigeons in front are for ritual sacrifice. Buy one and set it free if you can't stand the thought of its throat being cut. The bell tower domes remain from the 1988 earthquake, helping to save the church structure (*See Walking Tour*).

Amnaprkitch (All Savior) - Ամենափրկիչ, 145 Abovian, (under reconstruction). Constructed between in 1843-1877, the cathedral is based on the 8th c. cathedral of Ani, which was destroyed in the Middle Ages and represents the obsession with Ani Kumaiyri had during its heyday. The church was a concert hall I Soviet times and is being rebuilt, preserving the original details in the modern construction. (See Walking Tour). Squirrel your way into the building site and you

may just get a tour of the reconstruction process. I was lucky enough to be taken by workers to the top of the building, a stunning view of the city.



S. Grigor Lousavoritch - Սուրբ Գրիգոր Լուսավորիչ, 62 Jivani, (closed)

S. Hripsime - Սուրբ Հռիփսիմե, Austrian District, F. Werfel Sq.

Our Lady of Armenia Convent, 6 E. Charents, Ani District, 3-43-38, diramer@web.am. The convent for Sister Arusiag Sajonian and her orphanage. Perhaps the only woman in Armenia government officials are really afraid of, Sister Arusiag is relentless in her work to give destitute children a decent life. She has worked miracles in Armenia, creating an oasis of security and hope in a sea of misery. Her summer camp in Tzakhghadzor is legendary, and includes accommodations for tourists (the money from which goes to support her work). Never afraid to ask for help, this Philly native leaves no stone unturned in her efforts to protect the children that cross her door. This is a Must Go to see how aid should be done, be prepared to contribute something.

Evangelical Baptist, 16 Romanos Melikian, 4-16-51.

S. Hagop Mtsbinetsi - Սուրբ Հակոբ Մծբնեցի, P Sevak, Ani District.

Pelpelan Zham Russian Chapel - Պլպլան Ժամ Ռուսական եկեղեցի, intersection of Nalbandian and Terian. The Russian Orthodox chapel was built in 1879-80 and used in Alexandropol's heyday as a funerary chapel. The church was nicknamed "Pelpelan Zham" (Shimmering Chapel) due to its once gleaming silver roof. There used to be a Russian cemetery next to the building, but it was

replaced in the 1950's by the Russian military by a children's play area.



S. N'shan, 117 Abovian. Built by the city, this neighborhood church was first named S. Mariam Church, but when another, newer church in the center was named the same, the parishioners were forced to change theirs. They chose S. N'shan (Saint Sign). If doors are open, go inside to see the simple yet elegant design.

OTHER SITES

In the East side of Old Giumri (opposite of Haghtanaki Boulevard) there a re number of interesting houses, much like those in Slobodka (see Walking Tour 2). Among these is the **birthplace and early home for Shushanik Khurghinian** (nee Polpochian, b. August 18, 1876, d. Nov. 24, 1927), considered Armenia's first feminist writer and a avid proponent of the early Marxist movement until it clashed with her view of women's rights. Her works were required readings in the Soviet Armenian school system, pat of which explains her fall from grace and relative obscurity, but her views on women's rights and especially her horror at their treatment in the old Feudal System and the Genocide combine in her poetry into powerful commentaries on her times and at times, sadly, on the plight of modern Armenian women. The house still stands on Pushkin Street in the East of Old Giumri.

Shuka, flows down Shahumian, Tsulukidze and Haghtanaki pts S of Azatutian square, and is a mixture of open-air food stalls (with some of the best blue cheese and lavash in the country), mterks, kiosks and small bakeries, as well as he ubiquitous car parts, hardware and *shinaniut*

The shoe box

Giumretsis are proud people; proud of their history, their humor, their heritage, and especially, of their city. They may have been on the down and outs for a decade or so, but that hasn't stopped them from crowing about their city, their unique way of living ("Giumretsis may be Armenians," one Giumretsi told me with a sly smile, "but we have 'made of good quality' stamped in our passports."). They are especially proud of their historic buildings with their 'Armenian Belle Époque' design, and watch with concern as new buildings are erected over the ruins of the old, sometimes with modern designs clashing along with the old.

Open debate is often heard over cups of coffee at one of the city's cafes (or mugs of beer at the Polos Mukuch Tavern) about the latest attempts to reconstruct the city, with scorn and praise heaped on several buildings going up in the heart of the city. The most hotly debated building is the Modernist Glass building with fire engine red frames that is being erected between the Hoktemberian Cinema and Yot Vert Cathedral on the north side of Freedom Square. It will be home to an electronic store (ts architect wants it to be used as a modern art museum), but no matter what name goes up on the marquee, the locals will be quick and decisive in giving it the name it will go by the rest of its life. Most do not like the building on first look; it clashes with the church, it is not Alexandropol, it is too much like Yerevan.

But already they are claiming the building as her own, even with their criticism, and whatever nickname they eventually give it (I am told by the end of the grand opening night), it will be—loved or hated—theirs, and securely a Giumri landmark.

(construction) stores. Everything is here, and everything on sale. Bargaining is hard and if you have a good translator as a good (better if you have a local Giumretsi) you can catch the fast and furious repartees between buyers and sellers, spiced with some real Giumri humor (watch out, they can be spun your way in a flash). Great way

to spend an hour, and to buy some good cheap eats.



The **Modernist Glass building** on the North end of the Freedom Square is causing an uproar of criticism and debate even as it reaches its opening date in late 2006. A large glass façade looking like shattered glass pieces welded together with thick slabs of red metal, set against polished jet black tufa walls, is already an icon, even as locals decry its place next to the Soviet Rococo Hoktemberian Cinema and the Late Medieval Yot Verk Cathedral. Despite their hard luck, Giumretsis are fiercely proud of their cultural heritage and this extends to their architecture, and it seems everyone has an opinion about the reconstruction efforts in the city, from street cleaners to the new oligarchs. A welcome change from Yerevan's hideous monstrosities rising in dust clouds over the ruins of historic neighborhoods, Giumretsis "own" their city and its buildings like few communities (see inset), and it is not unusual to be asked our opinion about particular design projects. Be prepared for a debate if you offer an opinion counter to the questioner, and for a lively debate to ensue, drawing in people around you. This is community activism at its best.

PRACTICALS

Area Code: 312
 Long Distance: 0312 + local number
 From abroad: +(374) 312 + 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 (0312) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 312 if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Plane

Giumri's Airport is located 7 Km from the city center (Taxi 1000 AMD from city center, 1000-2000 AMD from the airport). Armavia provides flights to Moscow Vnukovo and Domodedovo Airports, several times a week. This is the cheapest way between Moscow and Armenia, with flight and taxi to Yerevan cheaper than most flights to Yerevan only. Note you need a Russian visa. O/W \$150-200, R/T around \$300-350. Contact Anahit at Bazmankiun 2-22-19, (091) 21-92-23) for schedule and to book a flight.

By Train

The Yerevan-Giumri train (elektrichka) is the most economical way to arrive in Giumri (480 AMD), if it can be a squeeze with one class seating. Notoriously late, still be there early in case it experiences one of its occasional "on time" blips. The **Yerevan-Giumri train** runs every day from Yerevan (08.00) and to Yerevan (21.40). The train is often delayed, but be there in case it is on time or early. The Giumri Train Station is located on Kaiyeranamerts H'raparak (Railway Station Sq.) at the intersection of Gorki and Tigran Mets Pghats (Tel: 21-002), and is a 15-minute walk from Freedom Square or Berlin Gast Haus.

By Bus, Minivan

Buses run daily to Yerevan, Vanadzor, Akhalkalaki, Tbilisi and Batumi. Less frequently, buses run to and from Iran, Russia and Turkey. Buses run relatively on time, though they may wait until they are filled before they leave.

Yerevan buses run daily between the Yerevan Aftokaiyeran on Admiral Isahaakov p. and the Giumri aftokaiyeran 2 blocks south of the Giumri Shuka. Several buses a day travel this route, at 800-1000 AMD.

Vanadzor buses run daily between the Vanadzor and Giumri aftokaiyeran. Several buses a day run this route at 800-1200 AMD on their way to Akhalkalaki & Tashir.

International Bus

Akhalkalak, Tashir, Tbilisi and Batumi buses run from their respective bus stations and the Giumri aftokaiyeran. Daily from 800 – 1200 AMD to

Tbilisi, catch separate bus in Tbilisi to Batumi (around \$10).

Giumri-Istanbul bus runs regularly on Fridays (tel: 22-311, 40-932). 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 Kesebirler Turizm, Kucuk Langa Cad. Emniyet, tel. (0212) 632-7874, (0212) 32 8461, mob: (0535) 716-2384, (0535) 770-8272, email: rayaistanbul@hotmail.com.

The bus runs via Yerevan, Vanadzor (tel. 22-790 Lusine), Kilikia Avtogayan (tel. 54-07-56) and Trabzon (tel. 0462-325-5522)

Russia, Iran, buses run on charter. Ask at a tour agency, your hotel or B&B for details.

Minivans (Marshrutni Taxis) also run daily to and from Yerevan, Akhalkalaki, Tbilisi and Batumi, and can be a more comfortable way to travel, though they pack them in with luggage and supplies, and leave only when they have enough passengers. If you want more room, offer to by several seats for you and your stuff. There are no set schedules, minivans leave when they are full.

Yerevan minivans run between the Kino Rossiya parking lot at Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi Pghats. and the Giumri aftokaiyeran. 1300-1500 AMD.

Vanadzor minivans run between the Vanadzor aftokaiyeran and the Giumri aftokaiyeran. 1000-1200 AMD.

Akhalkalaki, Tbilisi and Batumi minivans run between their respective bus stations and the Giumri aftokaiyeran. Prices vary, from 2000 AMD for Akhalkalaki to 5000 AMD to Batumi.

By Car

Giumri is located on the M1 highway, 120 kilometers northwest of Yerevan, 59 kilometers west of Vanadzor, and 50 kilometers south of the Georgian border. The highways are in good condition easily traveled from Yerevan within 2 hours in a soviet vehicle, 90 minutes if you like your drive nerve-wracking. Petrol stations and rest stops/kebab stands proliferate the southern end of the highway (those around Agarak combine excellent cooking with stunning views of Mt. Ararat), and regularly beyond Talin. The highway

to Kars in Turkey is currently closed though discussions on opening the border continue *ad vomitum*.

By Taxi

Yerevan-Gyumri

From Yerevan, taxis to Gyumri are located in the parking lot beside **Kino Hairenik (Kino Rossiya)** at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi Pghts. Taxis normally charge 8000 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 try to wait for more paying passengers to fill the car!

You can also order a taxi by phone. The going rate is 12,000 AMD. Most Yerevan taxi services provide this service, but we called Voyage tel: (010) 54-54-05, 54-54-06).

From Gyumri, 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 is more remote. We failed to get anything close to 8000 AMD (the best we got was 9,000 AMD but wait for another paying passenger) and rather than give them satisfaction, we ordered a taxi for 13,000 AMD tel: 3-04-40, 3-04-50).

Vanadzor-Gyumri taxis run on order, around \$15.

Georgia-Gyumri taxis run on order, around \$60 each way to Tbilisi.



AROUND

On foot is the best way to savor the city's unique architecture and warm hospitality. As opposed to Yerevan, where pedestrians are a target sport, Gyumri's drivers are polite and generally obey traffic laws. In the center, no two points are more than a 15 minute walk away, with a hike up G. Nzhdeh a hefty 20 minutes. Even the more hardy travelers who want to hike to Mother Armenia or the Black (South) Tower, will find it an easy 30 minute stroll from Freedom Square (the Turkish border is another 30 minutes, but closed).

Taxis are frequent and cheap, at 100 AMD per kilometer, you rarely spend more than 500 AMD between destinations. Catch one on the street or call ahead to pre-order ("LUX": 3-04-40, 3-04-50, "MAP": 3-06-96, "SAMBA": 3-00-93).

Buses and Minivans are less frequent, and follow the main routes between city districts. 50 AMD for buses, 100 AMD for minivans.

Tour Agencies, Guides [▲]

Bazmankiun, 6/3 Khaghaghutian Oghak, (tel. 22219, 37201, mob. 091 21 92 23 / 71 46 56), is an international service company specializing in facilitating business, visits and translation services. It also happens to be run by some enterprising young professionals, who can book flights, land travel, B&B stays and tours. Anahit and her "cadre" seem to be able to cover just about any need a traveler may have, with aplomb and good humor. Great find for the adventure or specialist traveler. As an NGO, Bazmankiun has friends and networks throughout the area, including Shirak tours, below.

Shirak Tours, 25 Haghtanaki p., (tel. 23148, 37559), is a well-regarded agency attached to the Berlin Gast Haus. Tour guides include Stepan, a working archeologist who can introduce the history buff into the 5000 year history of the area, including recent finds. We were lucky enough to visit during a major excavation at the South Tower (Black fort) where Stepan and his colleagues had uncovered 9th century BCE graves. Book travel, arrange tours.

Shirak Competitiveness Center (SCC), 16 G. Nzhdeh p. tel: 3-39-61 fax: 3-39-16 email: scc@shirakinfo.am is an NGO dedicated to the development of Gyumri and the Shirak region. As such the center has created several useful pamphlets and maps of Gyumri, including a rather

long walking tour of the city and a video promoting the area. A friendly place to get information including events and changing venues.



COMMUNICATION

Fire – 101
Police – 102
Ambulance service – 103
Gas emergency service – 104
Trunk Line – 107
Telephone directory information – 109
Paging service – 189

Phone, telegraphs

The Post Office is located on Independence Sq. at the end of Sayat Nova p. Phone cards, long distance calls (USA, Russia 150 AMD per minute) and post drops can be made here. Postal delivery is slow and unreliable.

Telephone Service shops are scattered around the city, on the main streets. 150 AMD per minute to USA and Russia.

Internet

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

Arminco has offices at 5a Vazgen Sargsian & 6 Ryzhkov p. (tel. 36329), emails: ssh@arminco.com, gevmel@arminco.com

4+1, 22 G. Nzhdeh, 3-45-49, email: naira.q@rambler.ru

Msnnet Club, 59 Gorki, url: www.armnet.narod.ru, email: msnnet_club@yahoo.com

Hope Link, 2 Tigran Mets (tel. 35059), tickets, basic tours.

Almer, 4 Haghtanaki p. (tel. 22551), tickets, basic tours.

MAPS, MONEY, FILM, CLINICS, ETC.

Maps

SCC, 16 Garagin Nzhdeh p. 33-916 or 33-961, has printed several pamphlets helpful to the visitor. Included are a fold out map, brochure, walking tour and video highlighting parts of the city and region (1000 AMD +). Maps of Armenia and the Caucasus are also available at **Berlin Gast Haus** and the **Knigi shop** on Charles Aznavour Square (2000 AMD +)

ATM, Bank, Exchange

ATM or money transactions can be done at **Ardshininvestbank (ATM)** 7 Gai p. 2-46-47, **ACBA Bank**, 18a Shirakatsi p. 3-78-81, **Unibank**, 1 Haghtanaki. 3-30-55 and **Converse Bank**, 4b G. Nzhdeh Sq. 4-20-95. **Exchange points** are scattered around the city. One of the best is near the large food Market in front of the Dzitoghtsonts Museum. Rates vary by a few drams.

Film

A **Kodak shop** is on Gai p. just off of Freedom Square. Development, Film, batteries, CD-R disks.

Consulates

Russian Federation Consulate, 5 G. Nzhdeh, tel: 3-45-33, 3-72-61, fax: 3-45-42. Visas arranged here, difficult staff, best to go through a travel agency.

Pharmacy

Apothecaries (Armenian: deghatuner) can be found throughout the city. There is a 24 hour **Apoteka** on Rizhkov p., another one block off of Freedom Square at the corner of Gai and Ghorghanian pts., others on Shahumian/Abovian pts. (Gyumri Shuka) and G. Nzhdeh p.

Clinic, Hospital

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. Three are the Red Cross (Danish) Clinic on 5th street in Ani district, the 2nd polyclinic on Khrimyan Hairik p. in the Center and the Italian Polyclinic on Shirakatsi p.

Dental

In the old center on Khakhaghutiun circle there is a Dental clinic named "Stomalux" and another is on Gorki street, "Stomadent".

Sports, Exercise

Shirak Football Stadium on Ozanian p. (below Gorki City Park) hosts sports competitions and soccer matches. The **Body Building Federation**, 1 Aram Khachatrian 2-24-08 is into serious development of competitive body-building, but they will allow access to facilities for a small donation. **Aragats Sports Center**, Mher Mkrtchian, 3-10-59 also allows access for the casual user. The **Tennis Training Center**, 28a Repin p. 3-49-09 has tennis courts you can reserve by calling ahead.

OVERNIGHT

After paying the extortionate prices in Yerevan, your pocket book will find relief in Giumri, with clean, friendly hotels starting around \$55 for a double, and B&B's from only 5000 AMD. You will be forgiven for wondering why you ever stayed in Yerevan when Giumri provides so much more for the money.

** denotes recommended venue

HOTELS

Hotels run the gamut from the best in Armenia to Bosetun (places for your, er, secretary) and quickie flophouses. Women are not safe in the cheapest venues, but men can find a cheap (if noisy) place to crash.

Rock Bottom

Avstriakan Dghiak (Hambardzumik), G. Nzhdeh p. 3-07-77, 5 kilometers from Center. Cheap digs, red light hotel. Not for women. Around 5000 AMD, cheaper by the hour.

Dvin, 2 Margaret Thatcher (Ani District) 3-00-58 5 kilometers from Center. Red light hotel far from center. An Int'l agency accidentally booked a group of 7 women here, who spent 6 nights fighting off the men-folk. Not safe. SGL/DBL 5000 AMD, or rent by the hour (call girl negotiated).

Yerazank, 2 Minas Avetisian (Ani District) (091) 42-49-55, Five kilometers from Center, Bosetun connected to mafia style bistro. Not safe. 5000 AMD

Inexpensive-Moderate

****Lchap**, 8 Gharsi p. (next to pool at base of Mother Armenia Statue) 3-03-59, 500 m from Gorky Park and Center.

New motel/restaurant (2006) built around a lovely courtyard with flowers, roses, trees and a fountain. Clean rooms with SGL/DBL at 10,000/15.000 AMD. Get it while it's new!

Voske Blur, Monkekan Spozagee (Children's Park and RR) 2-49-59 (hotel), 3-61-23 (restaurant). Small but decent hotel built above the Children's park and RR in a pretty park setting with trees, fountain and flowers. 400 m from the gates to Gorki Park and Old Center. Ask for the Bird's Nest Room (my nickname), a DBL on the third floor with spectacular views of the city and Turkey. Fun tacky with kitsch furnishings (and oo-la-la, look at the nude cupie doll on the wall of the Deluxe room!). Friendly staff. The cheap rooms have no windows, others have great views. All rooms DBL at 8000/10,000/15,000.

Expensive

****Berlin Gast Haus**, 25 Haghtanaki p. tel: 3-76-59, 2-31-48; Fax 3-03-86, e-mail: info@berlinhotel-gyumri.am, web: www.berlinhotel-gyumri.am, Old Center. Still the best hotel in Armenia for immaculately cleaned rooms, friendly and efficient service and price. Formed by the German Red Cross to support their medical services. Comfortable, clean rooms with all amenities: hot/cold water, air-conditioning, internet and direct dial phones, satellite TV, restaurant and Minibar. Breakfast included. Too bad they don't expand to include an affordable, clean hostel. A little too high at SGL/DBL/APT at \$45/\$55/\$75. Accepts Visa CC.



Alhmas, 1 G. Nzhdeh p. tel: 3-94-44 (091) 42-73-24

1 kilometer from Center

Basic, clean rooms slightly over decorated like most hotels in Armenia, on busy, dusty street. Café in same building. Amenities include hot water, air-conditioning, Satellite TV, direct dial phone. SGL/DBL for \$50/70, but they bargain down \$10-20 depending on how empty they are.

Isuz, 1 G. Nzhdeh pta., tel: 3-33-69 Fax: 3-03-69, 1 kilometer from center. 12 western standard rooms, 8 double and 4 suites, including a tidy kitchenette, a satellite TV and a mini bar. SGL/DBL/TRIPLE for \$60/70/120

Very Expensive

Arax, 27 Gorki p. tel: 3-58-15, email: araks95@web.am, Old Center. Overdone décor in the Soviet Rococo style, rooms are surprisingly basic, OK clean. Amenities include hot water, air-conditioning, Satellite TV, direct dial phone. A favorite haunt of New Armenians carousing until late at night. Though no one seems to be there. . . SGL/DBL/STE at \$100/150/200.

B&B, APARTMENT

Some of the best deals in town can be B&B's, though they are pricey and cannot compete with lodging like Voske Blur of Lchap. Located in private homes and apartments in the Old Center, these run the gamut from basic but cozy to a taste of historic Giumri with wrought iron balconies and rococo ceilings. Heating, hot water and dial up phones are standard on all venues, as is breakfast cooked to your order.

Anahit at Bazmankiun (Old Center) 2-22-19, (091) 21-92-23, 71-46-56, email: bazmankiun@gyumri.am. Provides lodging at various venues around town. Apartments and private houses include breakfasts, hot water, dial up phone, and all the comforts of a Giumri home. A little pricey at 5000 – 8000 AMD per person depending on the venue but Anahit is a wealth of information and has a great personality. English.

Melsida's B&B, Sayat Nova / Tigran Mets ps. (Center), 2-13-56 (to get there go north on Sayat Nova from the old center and as you enter Ankakhutian Square, turn right on Tigran Mets following the S side of the square, then take the first archway just past the academy and go straight into the alley. Melsida's is the third metal gate on the left). The B&B is in a three-story private house, accommodations on second floor, with private balcony and entrance. The rooms are basic and will leave some people cold. The

courtyard is sparse (there is a dog kept locked up in a kennel) and could use some flowers, but the view from the balcony is nice. Still, this ain't the Shangri La. Facilities on the ground floor, there is a half bath on the second floor though when we checked it did not work, the water tank unable to fill the toilet reservoir. Melsida says she will fix it for 2007, which will make all the difference. 3500 AMD which includes breakfast. Has washing machine, can do laundry and ironing for 5000 AMD for entire load.

Satik's B&B on Ghorghanian p. (Old Center), 2-42-32. The B&B is in a traditional building and is popular with Peace Corps volunteers, but too expensive at 8000 AMD.

OTHER

There are numerous possibilities in the town, most of which are found by simply walking around and asking. The accommodations vary from the most basic to fairly good digs if your luck plays out. A good basic rate for bed and breakfast is between 3500 - 5000 AMD.

FOOD & DRINK

\$ - 1000-2000 AMD
 \$\$ - 3000 – 4000 AMD
 \$\$\$ - 4000 + AMD

** denotes recommended venues

After Yerevan's exorbitant process you will find Giumri a pleasant surprise on your pocket book. We rarely spent more than 2400 AMD per person for multi course meals, and often got by for less. Thank God!

Old Center / Independence Square

21/16 Club, 25 Gorki, 3-21-16, araks95@web.am: Part of Arax Hotel, disco / restaurant, Armenian food, local mafia on the side - \$\$\$

28 Gorku Srjarian, 28 Gorki: the owners renovated the front of the old City Baths into a pleasant café/restaurant with Armenian/Russian food - \$\$

Edera, 104 Gorki, 3-88-33: dark dining rooms for tête-à-têtes, Armenian food - \$\$\$

Flamingo Cafe, Khaghaghutian Oghak (Peace Circle) Park, 2-49-74: Café food, pretty - \$

Garun, 1 Marmashen, 3-77-03: Khorovatz - \$\$

Jrahars (Mermaid), 79 Jivani, 2-17-51: Good Khorovatz - \$/\$\$

****Kalinka,** 4 Rizhkov, 2-38-93, kalinka@shirak.am: Good, basic Russian/Armenian food in upstairs café with artwork as light shades - \$

****Kamar,** 14 Gai, 2-39-83: Excellent food in a traditional underground Giumri bistro, Armenian/Russian food. Two of us had three courses with beer for less than 4000 AMD. A real find - \$

Kebab Joint, 10 meters S on Jivani p. from Gorki p. Look for the small sign on the building opposite the Mterk shop at the SW corner of Gorki and Jivani, then ask as you walk. Private house cooks up Khash, kebab, khorovatz, kievski kutlet - \$

Kumaiyri, 246 Abovian, 2-11-62: Mafia favorite, Khorovatz - \$\$/\$\$\$

Mersita's Artist Café, behind the Commerce College on Hakobian p. Great Khash, 1000 AMD - \$.

Millennium, 46a Khrimian Hairik, 3-07-37: Wedding party venue, fun if want to watch one and can get in. - \$\$

Monte Carlo, 71 Gorki, 2-13-86: Armenian/Russian menu - \$\$\$

Oasis Gorki, (Central) Park, 2-15-32: family restaurant by the Rotunda, winter garden, Armenian food - \$\$

Phaeton Alek, 47 Haghtanaki, tel 3-29-88: Armenian/Russian menu - \$\$

Poloz Mukuch, 75 Jivani, 3-45-11: Bistro Tavern, Pub Grub and snacks - \$\$/\$\$



Ravenna, 7 Sayat Nova, 3-10-04, alfafarm@gyumri.am: Tea café - \$

Robinson, Khaghaghutian Oghak (Peace Circle) Park, 2-49-74: Outdoor café and Khorovatz, musicians, singers, don't let the belly dancers

deter you, this is a fun place where your table is up in the trees - \$/\$\$

Siro Khariskh (Love's Anchor), Haghtanaki pta., 4-10-40: Armenian food, OK - \$\$

****Vanatur / Vratsakan Khohanots,** 1 Rizhkov, 3-01-92: Georgian food, Khachapuri, upstairs has private dining rooms, downstairs like Bistro. The food is excellent, we have been four times and it never wavers. The jumbo size Khinkali (100 AMD each) is the largest we have seen anywhere, including Georgia, and is a house specialty (with its own chef). We ordered 4 with the yummy Khchapuri Imertia and a few salad dishes and stuffed ourselves silly for 2000 AMD per person. Tasty - \$/\$\$

G. Nzhdeh / Aznavour Sq.

Di Napoli, 1/5 G. Nzhdeh, 3-30-74: Food/service good, Arm/Rus menu - \$/\$\$

****Kilikia, Bistro 22 G. Nzhdeh,** 3-88-78: Good Armenian food, great prices - \$/\$\$

Parvana, Odanavakayan pght., 4-22-99: Khorovatz, one of us loved it, the other said she had food poisoning - \$\$

Shara, 1/5 G. Nzhdeh, 3-55-63: Same owners and food as Di Napoli - \$/\$\$

Ani District, Red Fort

Cicilia, P. Sevak: Chap eats in Ani District - \$

****Khaits Ishkhan, 1 Red Fort, 3-82-59: Excellent farm-raised fish, expensive but worth it - \$\$\$ Venezia, 4a P. Sevak, 3-68-91: Mafia hangout, Khorovatz - \$\$\$+**

RESOURCES

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Regional

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[Armenian House Literature](http://www.cac-biodiversity.org/arm/index.htm) www.cac-biodiversity.org/arm/index.htm

ABOUT THE AUTHORS ▲

Rick Ney (*author*) started his life in Armenia in 1992, working in education, humanitarian aid and development projects that morphed into IT development and writing about Armenia; a relationship of 14 years which has taken him to it seems every nook of his adopted country. Rick is passionate about Armenia's deep history and amazing ecology, and can be found roaming the countryside in search of new places to introduce to the world. Rick is equally passionate about making the country accessible for independent travelers, whom he believes will be the basis of Armenia's development and entry into the democratic world. Rick divides his time between Armenia and caring for a parent in Texas, both of which he considers the richest experiences of his life.

Rick wrote the first full guide to Armenia in the post Soviet era and the first multi-media guide on CD-ROM, TourArmenia. Other writings include articles about Armenia's prehistoric observatories at Metsamor and Karahundj, Armenia's Nature and hiking trails and commentary on his experiences in the country. Still others are travel articles for several publications. Rick and his small team at TourArmenia continue to add information about the country to their web site at www.TACentral.com and www.TourArmenia.info.

Rafael Torossian (*research, maps, and graphics*) has been collaborating with Rick on TourArmenia since 1996, focusing on maps and graphics while

providing some much needed reality checks and commentary along the way. In his other real life, Rafael designs flash sequences, ads, graphics and web sites for [TWRI](http://www.TWRI.org), designing for a wide variety of sites and content management projects.

In a previous life Rafi was the Assistant to the Minister for Sports, serving 6 ministers, before meeting Rick when they worked together on several humanitarian aid projects funded by USAID and 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, learning computer skills and creating the first multi-denomination accounting system for USAID projects in the Caucasus.

In an even earlier life Rafi was an athlete, competing in Light Athletics (Track) where he set the All Armenia record for the 60 meter dash, a record that still stands. He was a Sports Teacher and an Honored Coach of the Republic of Armenia. He lives in Yerevan, is a proud Yerevantsi, one of the few who did not leave in 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, where she learned patience and good humor working with American professors (God give us patience and a dose of Pantalgin). She then worked at the World Food Program in Armenia for 11 years as an administrator and Program Officer. At the same time she collaborated with Rick on articles and the first TourArmenia CD-ROM. In her previous life Bella worked with International architects at ArmStateDesign Institute as an information program assistant and translator, as well as learning the form and function of design in life, a gift she carries with her to this day. History and architecture is her true love 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!*

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