

TAVUSH marz Տավուշ մարզ

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Note about pronunciation: we transcribe words using local dialect, and substitute "i" for "y" as in Sarigiugh instead of Sariguygh. "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.

Border closures: Due to the continuing conflict over Karabakh Tavush's border area nearest Azerbaijan may be blocked to visitors when you are traveling. Though the entire marz is normally open and a truce between both countries has been in effect since 1995, there have been border incidents, the latest in 2005 when villagers from one side ran over to the other and attacked locals. Most destinations are far from this area and safe from incidents like this but caution is necessary, and you must not risk visiting the near border if incidents have occurred while you are here. Ask your guide or authorities first.

INTRODUCTION

Tavush lies in the Northeast of Armenia, and is considered by many its most remote area. A tiny portion of the North-South corridor from Georgia to Iran passes through the far NW end of the marz, leaving the rest to be served by rugged mountain roads (read: pot-holed or rutted dirt paths) into its mountain hamlets. The rest is hemmed in by the Virahaiyots, Gugarats and Miapor mountains and the tributaries of the Kura River flowing to the Azerbaijan border to the east.

The marz is a folded mountainscape, with heavily forested mountains plunging into canyons and white-water rivers coursing through the region. Forests give way to mountain meadows and a cool, crisp landscape of wild flowers and eagles in the upper elevations, and some of Armenia's mildest weather in the lower elevations, with plenty of snow in the winter and moist, cool summers. Fog often envelops the mountains in the early morning hours, giving a haunting, comforting feel to the landscape.

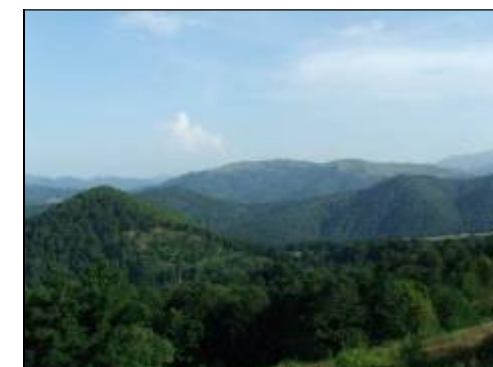
Highlights

- *Visit Dilijan and walk its leafy streets and Old World houses* (p. 6)
- *Sample a bottle or two of the excellent wine at Ijevan Winery* (p. 24)
- *Travel the Shamshadin region, Armenia's "Shangri La" with forests, mountains and medieval castles at Berd* (p. 29), *Artsvaberd* (p. 32), *Kirants* (p. 42) and *Berdavan* (p. 48)
- *Visit Goshavank, founded by 13th c historian, mathematician and scientist Mkhitar Gosh* (p. 15)
- *Visit the 13th c. forest monastery at Haghartsin, with its royal banqueting hall* (p. 14)
- *Visit the extraordinary Bronze Age to 13th c sites at Makaravank* (p. 40)
- *See the Koghmb monastery near Noyemberian* (p. 46)
- *Hike the woods around Dilijan* (p. 8) & *Ijevan* (p. 23)
- *Roam the Aghstev* (p. 19), *Tavush* (p. 31) and *Khndzorut* (p. 33) *Rivers, explore their caves* (p. 6), *soak in their natural springs* (p. 2)
- *Climb Mts. Hovik, Ijevan, Pahakn, and Jilis in the west, Mts. Itsakar, Murghuz, Metsial and Petrosi ala in the south* (p. 5)
- *Drive up Mt. Murghuz to Gegharkunik marz and Lake Sevan* (p. 28)
- *Travel up the Sevkar pass to Arekelots* (p. 43) and *Noyemberian* (p. 44)
- *Explore the extraordinary Yenokavan gorge and the Anapat caves* (p. 21)
- *Jeep up the Samson ravine to Kirants, Samson, Deghdznut Vank and Noyemberian* (p. 21)
- *Travel to Tbilisi (93 km) via Noyemberian* (p. 44) and the border post at *Bagratashen* (p. 49)

To the north is the (now dormant) industrial town of Noyemberian, in the Koghmb riverbed. Nearby are the amazing Koghmb monastery and some important archeological excavations, plus the road to Georgia and Tbilisi. In the south is the resort town of Dilijan, dubbed Armenia's "Little Switzerland" by the Soviet Tourist board, and in this case the proletariat got it right. Houses boast wooden lattice trim and balustrades with a uniquely Tavush design in the stonework. The center holds Ijevan, a second resort area and favorite summer camp area during Soviet times. Ijevan is the gateway to the East, over the high Sarum and Tsaghkut mountain passes into the incredible, wild, Tavush mountain valleys and Shamshadin, Armenia's "Shangri La". All the towns in this region ramble up and down wooded hills, you are never far from solitude and nature.

Like Lori a part of the Gugark Kingdom, from the beginning the area was known as the "middle land" (middle earth may be more to the truth), craved for its natural resources and as a buffer zone between Armenia and its eastern enemies. Castles and fortresses from the Bronze Age forward dot the landscape, especially in the east. A domain for the Armenian kings and princes (Mamikonian, Bagratuni, Zakarian, Orbeli) as well as the Kings of Georgia, Tavush has traces of each epoch of its history indelibly carved into its mountains and valleys.

The capital of the region is Ijevan, in a valley with woodlands and vineyards, and is home to Ijevan Winery, one of the most successful wineries in the country.



NATURE ▲

Tavush is part of Armenia's green belt with the largest forest in the country covering its second oldest mountains. Up to 410 million years old, the Miapor, G'nats, Hakhum, Ijevan, Halab, Gugarats and Voskepar Mountain ranges first clashed across the district, forming myriad striations of mountains, valleys, vegetation zones and rock formations.

The area is so diverse with so many varieties of forests, vegetation, flora and fauna, it is hard to take it all in. The area is the major meeting place of the Iranian, Caucasian, and Minor Asian Tectonic Plates, and it is possible to stand astride several landmasses in a single spot. The weather is extremely variable, with towns and villages located at a higher altitude than Yerevan actually having warmer temperatures in the dead of January. In fact, the major towns in the region, Ijevan and Noyemberian, far in the north of Armenia, have the same climatic zones as the semi-tropical city of Meghri in the far south.

The diversity is astounding. Every type of vegetation in Armenia inhabits the region. Forests include *Dry* and *Arax Oak*, *Eastern Beech*, *Caucasian Pine*, a coniferous tree called the 'Tis', *Elm*, *Tulip*, *Georgian Oak*, *evergreen* and other deciduous trees. Marshlands and forests vie for attention with meadows teeming with wildflowers. All are inhabited by the largest diversity of animals in the country. The largest population of Royal Stag and roe deer are found in Tavush, along with kites, eagles, wild cats, bears, lynx and Caucasian squirrels.



The region is coursed by the *Aghstev*, *Khndzorut*, *Tavush*, *Hakhum*, *Sarnajur*, *Spitakjur*, *Aksipara*

and *Koghb Rivers*, each of which feed the Kura River in Azerbaijan. The Aghstev River is the largest River in the region, with its headwaters in Lori Region. The rivers all run from South to North, dropping more than 2500 meters before they enter Azerbaijan. As such they form the greatest potential for hydroelectric generation in the country.

Tavush District has the largest Nature Preserve in Armenia, the Dilijan Preserve. This technically prevents locals from logging the trees, but the energy blockade and a lack of adequate jobs in the region has meant this restriction is largely ignored. What is surprising when one visits the region is that while perhaps 15% of the forest has been logged since 1990, it is renewing itself in a relatively short period of time. Until substitute employment is created, though, the region is in danger of serious ecological damage.

Flora Tavush is a habitat for a variety of flower species. A partial list includes:

Mountain pass flora includes *Iris furcata*, *Anemone fasciculata*, *A. ramunculoides*, *Primula ruprechtii*, *P. macrocalyx*, *Trollius patulus*, *Caltha polypetala*,

Mountain Flora include *Tulipa florensvyi*, *T. confusa*: f. pink, f. red, f. yellow, *Iris grossheimii*, *I. Paradoxa*, *I. Caucasica*, *I. Pseudocaucasica*, *I. Atropatana*,

Northern flora include *Iris imbricata*, *Tulipa sosnovskyi*, *Fritillaria pinardii*, *F. armenia*, *Colchicum ninae*, *C. Szovitsii*, *Merendera raddeana*, *Crocus asamii*, *Corydalis persica*, *Ornithogalum sigmoideum*,

River Gorge flora include *Iris lineolata*, *I. Paradoxa*, *I. Caucasica*, *Allium stamineum*, *Bellevia paradoxa*,

Sub-region flora include *Alkanna orientalis*, *Cerasus incana*, *Prus. salicifolia*, *Cerasus mahaleb*, *Amygdalus ferzlinia*, *Spiraea crenata*, *Saxifraga cymbalaria*, *Linaria armeniaca*,

Other flora include *Iris lineolata*, *I. Caucasica*, *Merendera mirzoeval*, *Colchicum szovitsii*, *Gagea ssp.*, *Puschkinia scilloides*, *Draba ssp.*, *Lillemantia canescens*, *Ranunculus ssp.*

Wild relatives of crop plants: Fruit trees include the Greek Walnut (*Junglans regia* L.), *Mahaleb Cherry* (*Cerasus mahaleb* L. Mill), *Pear*

(*Pyrus takhtadzianii* Fed.), *Ficus* (*Ficus carica* L.), *Almond* (*Amygdalus fenrliana* (Fritsch), *Blackthorn* (*Prunus spinosa*), *Pitachio* (*Pistacia mutica* Fisch. et Mey.), *Wild Apple* (*Malus orientalis* Uglitzk).

Wild Berries include the *Grape* (*vitis sylvestris* C.C. Gmel), *woodland strawberry* (*Fragaria vesca* L.), *Blackberries* (*Rubus armeniacus* Focke.).

Cereal grains include the *Flax* (*Linum barsegianii* gabr.), *Alfalfa* (*Medicago papillosa* boiss) and *Maize* (*Secale vavilovii* grossh)

For detailed information and list of species see [TourArmenia Flora pages](#)

Birds Tavush is similar to Lori in the number and variety of topographies, but with a warmer climate and so a greater variety of birds. There are two main locales: the forested mountains of the NW and SE (Dilijan, Berd), and the river valleys between (Ijevan, Noyemberian).

Tavush's mountain plains and 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*

Valleys, Lowlands and scrub birds include *Great Spotted Cuckoo*, *Short-eared Owl*, *Syrian Woodpecker*, *Eurasian Penduline Tit*, *Yellowhammer*, *Eurasian Tree Sparrow*, *Spanish Sparrow*, *Bohemian Waxwing*, *Red-backed Shrike*, *Dunnock*,

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*, *Long-eared Owl*, *Eurasian Wryneck*, *Eurasian Green 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](#)

Thermal and Mineral Springs ▲

There are more than 20,000 (some say 40,000) natural springs in Armenia. The springs (including

mineral and thermal springs) supported a thriving health and spa ("Sanatorium") industry in the 1980's, and make up one of Armenia's most promising tourist attractions.



Tavush has numerous springs throughout the region, most are pure or carbonated calcium, including those on the Gugarats Range (Mt. Ulvanasar) and at Voskepar near Noyemberian, near Ijevan at Aigehovit village, Dilijan, and near Berd at Mosesegh village.

For a complete list of thermal and mineral springs see [TourArmenia Springs pages](#).

Ecological Alert Tavush is threatened by its own success, the government and local mafia actively involved in selling off the resources that make this the country's most beautiful area. The volume of wood exported from Armenia has risen sharply over the last four years (some say more than 100%), most of it from Tavush and neighboring Lori, exported to Europe (France, Germany), Russia and Asia. Hardwoods are the wood of choice and much of the old growth forest in Armenia is under attack, leaving visible scars on the landscape for kilometers on end.

It is easy to find evidence of illegal logging in the region; try to drive up any mountain road to one of the most important monasteries (Kirants, Samsoni, Deghdznuti, Nor Varagavank, Ch'khmuradi, Kaputvank, Mshkavank, Jiliza) on the itinerary and you will soon find your vehicle accosted by deep ruts in the path made by over-laden logging trucks plying the mountain sides. Once lonely forest trails to monasteries, churches and some of Armenia's most pristine areas are now merely a part of a vast web of logging routes

made by bulldozers tearing up sections of the forest for illegal logging.



At the rate of cutting, it is "officially" predicted that Armenia's forests—making up 23% of the landmass in 1988—makes up barely 18% now and will make up 15% by 2020. But these are the same folks selling concessions to local mafias and corrupt government officials to cut trees, so their rosy scenario is hardly to be believed. More accurate figures gathered during field studies conducted by local environmental groups predict that the forests of Tavush and Lori will disappear as self-sustaining entities by 2010 if the current rate of clear cutting continues.

The most vulnerable trees, those listed in the Red Book of Endangered Species, are also the most prized by French, German and Asian wood buyers, who have strict laws forbidding the cutting trees in their own country but who seem to have no conscious regarding other countries' ecological needs.

Endangered trees are being cut for furniture (Europe) and for brandy barrels at the Brandy factory in Yerevan (owned by the French company Pierre Ricard).

Adding insult to injury, the Ministry of Nature Protection is the prime mover behind selling and illegally cutting trees, its current minister one of the worst offenders if its own bans on destroying Armenia's forests. Local NGO's are actively fighting this, and some action may be coming, but it is feared that without US and European pressure, the forests of Tavush will be gone within 15 years. Unfortunately, studies by both the USA and European Union have produced studies supporting the continued destruction of the

environment for raw resources to be exported to their own countries, not to preservation of Armenia's precious and wondrous environment. [See Armenian Forests NGO](#) website.

Unfortunately the issue is clouded further by local needs. Cities like Ijevan, Berd and Noyemberian are all dormant industrial towns, their factories no longer spewing toxic wastes into the air—which is good—but also bad since the thousands of jobs they once generated are also gone. The human suffering and loss of jobs has driven residents to seek income wherever they can, including illegal lumber trade. Many feel, after a decade of misery and poverty that they have finally found a trade that generates real income, as furniture makers and loggers. To simply end the trade will add further misery and impoverishment, and even the most heartfelt plea to stop logging falls on deaf ears unless a viable alternative is found.

Further complicating the issue are the numerous Eco-NGO programs which often compete with each other at cross purposes, or simply fail in their goals, resulting in further cynicism in the local population and doubts that anything other than cutting their trees will bring income. Still others, like the [Armenia Tree Project](http://www.armeniatree.org/whatwedo/ctpr.htm) (www.armeniatree.org/whatwedo/ctpr.htm), while having noble goals, fall far short of the mark, planting thousands of trees that mostly die for lack of follow up or critical care during the saplings first years of growth. A comprehensive program that includes (honest) government officials and local NGOs, and that hire the well qualified foresters from the Soviet period (which remain the most knowledgeable experts in the field).

What you can do While illegal tree cutting is a booming business, it is also one that tries to hide itself within the forests its is destroying (and it can be dangerous to accost any logger in the forest with the error of his ways. He is committing an illegal act and may react in a hostile manner—do NOT do this!). The more visitors who witness the illegal act, the harder it is for government officials to hide behind their subterfuge and denials. Involving the EU is especially important, since Armenia is trying to gain favorable status with Europe until it is considered for membership. European visitors can play an important act in forcing the government to curbing the illegal cutting by both witnessing the act and then demanding action in the EU.

One small but particular act that you can do may have an immediate impact: The Brandy factory

use of endangered species in its product is especially galling since it can use sustainable trees imported from elsewhere. This prompts us to ask readers: **DO NOT buy any Armenian cognac** until Pierre Ricard can prove its product is not made from illegally cut endangered trees. We also ask French and European members to investigate Pierre Ricard's use of illegally cut trees in producing its brandy.

DO: ▲

Visit Dilijan and walk its leafy streets and Old World shops and crafts studios. Stay overnight in an Ijevan summer camp, and hike the woodlands nearby. Sample a bottle or two of the excellent wine at Ijevan Winery. Travel the Shamshadin region, Armenia's "Shangri La" and castles at Berd, Arstvaber, Kirants and Berdavan. Visit Goshavank, founded by 13th c historian, mathematician and scientist Mkhitar Gosh. Visit the 13th c. forest monastery at Haghartsin, with its royal banquet hall. Visit the extraordinary Bronze age to 13th c sites at Makaravank. See the Koghb monastery near Noyemberian. Hike the woods around Dilijan, the Aghstev, Tavush and Khndzorut rivers, explore their caves, soak in their natural springs. Climb Mts. Hovik, Ijevan, Pahakn, and Jilis in the west, Mts. Itsakar, Murghuz, Metsial and Petrosi ala in the south.

WHEN? ▲

Tavush is as complex geographically as Lori, but with more of the marz at lower elevations, experiences warmer, milder weather. Spring is a beautiful time to visit, the trees beginning budding in late February, with a full flush of emerald green by May. Wildflowers drape the open meadows and valleys in April to June, flowering at the top of the mountains through August. Summers are warm down below, cooler above, and can be humid. Rainfall is among the greatest in the country, with morning and evening fog common in lowlands and in mountain crevices. Autumn is glorious, with cool temperatures and a canvas of reds and yellows on the forests. Locals love to visit Dilijan and Ijevan in October, when the colors reach their peak. Winters are called "soft" by locals, with snow on the mountains, but valleys experiencing among the warmest temperatures in the country. Winter sports include mountain hiking, snowboarding and cross-country skiing. 6 weather zones, from the snow covered mountain tops to

the dense forests and moist climes along river beds.

HOW LONG? ▲

You can make Dilijan in an easy overnight trip, taking in the Swiss Miss village and a couple of the nearby sites in the same go. If you start from Yerevan it is about 3 hours (with a stop at Sevan on the way), 45 minutes from Sevan City. From Dilijan, figure +1 day to see the rest of the nearby sights and go on to Ijevan, + 1 day to go into Shamshadin and explore the area around Berd (overnight Berd), and +1 day to drive up to Noyemberian and visit Koghb monastery. From Noyemberian you can hookup with the highway to Tbilisi or head west into Lori to visit Haghpap, Alaverdi and Sanahin.

Hitting the Highlights It is impossible to squeeze in the best sights of this magnificent marz into a few days, as the journey is one of the best bits. But if all you have is a few days here are a few must-sees: Haghartsin, Goshavank, Makaravank, Dilijan (1-2 days); Ijevan, Yenokavan (1-2 days); Ijevan to Berd (1 day); Berd, Shamshadin (1 day); Ijevan to Noyemberian (1 day); Noyemberian to Dilijan or Alaverdi (1 day).

HISTORY ▲

Tavush region history is roughly parallel to that of Lori, shaped by the fortunes of the mountain tribes inhabiting the region from prehistoric times, to the fortunes of Armenian princely families and the Georgian kings in Medieval times.



PREHISTORIC AGE ▲

Archeologists have found traces of human activity from the Stone Age, but scant evidence of any widespread activity in the marz. In 2003 a team of archeologists discovered a series of caves near Ijevan with

unspecified pictograms, probably from the Palaeolithic era (200,000-10,000 BCE). Settlement concentrated on the Koghb, Aksipara, Aghstev and Tavush river basins, with activity focused on hunting and fishing. The Aghstev river basin in particular revealed an array of implements used by inhabitants who were cave dwellers. The large forests supported a wide variety of animal species,

prehistoric cattle, mountain lions, tigers, roe deer among them. The difficult terrain and thick forestland was not conducive to large settlements, and the two primary ones in the region, Dilijan and Ijevan are recent inventions figuratively, outposts of the Copper - Bronze Age.



COPPER AND BRONZE AGES ▲

The ores for copper and bronze are not abundant nor easily mined in Tavush, and the area was sparsely populated during this period. Lori received the most attention for both metal ores and wood, something which probably saved its forests from wholesale felling until just recently. The area was known as the Middle Land, a buffer zone between the kingdom of the west and the tribes to the east.

Prehistoric excavations in Tavush region include the copper –bronze age settlements at Dilijan, Ijevan, Berd, Koghb and Kirants plus numerous sites on the Koghb, Aksipara, Aghstev and Tavush river basins. Cyclopean fortresses were erected at Berd, Koghb and Kirants, and artifacts include pottery, tools, bronze and copper items and animist totems with distinctive sun and astral iconography.

URARTIAN & ROMAN PERIOD ▲

The Tavush marz territory was part of the Etuni (Utik) state on the creation (9th c BCE) of the Araratian (Urartian) empire. Its main purpose was to be a buffer against the tribes up north and as a source of wood, clay and felsite for the empire. The huge wooden posts and roof beams at Erebuni most likely came from this region.

Urartu was a world power, almost conquering Assyria in its heyday, and Tavush supplied both men and wood to the empire's efforts. Invading

Cimmerians (Skythians) that led to the downfall of this world power entered through Tavush and Lori.

Urartian settlements in Tavush include Dilijan, Ijevan, Berd, Kirants and Koghb.

After the fall of Urartu, as the Persians under Cyrus I absorbed the country, Tavush became a part of the Armenian Satrapy which eventually became a kingdom known as the Mets Haik or Greater Armenia. Under its most powerful ruler, Tigran the Great (140-55 BCE) Tavush was one of four border zones governed by princely families ("bdeskhutiun," from "bdeskhk" or prince). It's western and central areas were a part of Gugark province, with the areas around Ijevan and Noyemberian comprising the Dzorapor, Kangarq and Koghbapor districts. Dilijan and its surrounding forests became a favorite hunting area and summer retreat for Armenia's kings, and was a part of the Varazhnunk province. The Eastern area became the Tuskustak district (Tavush in the Middle Ages) of Utikueh province.

Mets Haik sites are at Dilijan, Ijevan, Berd & Noyemberian, with artifacts on display at the Dilijan Local Tradition, Koghb History and Ijevan Historical and Local Tradition Museums.



EARLY CHRISTIAN – MIDDLE AGES ▲

Despite vigorous attempts to convert the region to the Christian faith, and countless "miracles" performed to sway the local population, Tavush was one of the last regions to adopt the new faith, stubbornly hanging on to its pre-Christian beliefs. These include a still vibrant folklore based on forest spirits it is best not to tempt or anger. Very few churches were built until after the 5th c, and the monastic and scholarly flowering of the 4th c seems to have bypassed the region, except for one

legend crediting the 5th c. scholar and founder of the Armenian Alphabet, Mesrop Mashtots, with opening one of the first schools in Kangark province, at S. Sarkis church which he is said to have had built.

The Arkuni (Arshacid, Artsruni) Royal family had strong ties with the region, establishing the village of Arkunashen in historic Dzorapor province and the oldest church in the region is the 5th c S. Astvatsatsin in Voskepar, built in Kangark district.

The 387 division of Armenia between Persia and Rome allowed Gugark to be absorbed into Georgia, with only a few Armenian princes retaining their independence. Among these was the Armenian Katolikos Sahak G. Dzoraporetsi, who was born in Arkunashen village. He was elected Katolikos in 677 during a tumultuous time for the kingdom and church, as Armenia refused Byzantium demands to adopt the findings of the Chalcedonian Council that declared Jesus was both divine and human in form (Armenians believed that Christ was in one form only, human and divine together) and by the invasion of the Arab Caliphate. The Armenians had been absent during the Chalcedonian council, unable to attend due to attacks by the Sassanid kingdom in Persia. Byzantine refused Armenia's pleas for help, and, feeling betrayed, the Armenian Church rejected the Chalcedony, which bore little relation to their orthodox beliefs anyway. Sahak played a key part in the rejection of Chalcedony and the break from the Greek Church. As a result Byzantium further refused to help Armenia defend itself from Arab attack. Sahak died en route to Damascus to placate the Caliph. His mission was completed by his successor Hovhannes Odznetsi, which formed the basis for the later restoration of the Armenian kingdom under the Bagratunis.

In 861 the Arabs appointed Ashot Bagratuni (the Carnivorous) "Prince of Princes" over Armenia, and officially King of Armenia in 885, cementing a long period of eminence for his family (The Bagratuni or Bagratid Dynasty). Medieval Tavush reached its height under the rule of the Bagratunis, overlords of the area during the Golden Age of Architecture, when the majority of monasteries and churches in Tavush were begun.

The Bagratuni lands included all of Northeast Armenia up to the Kura River in present day Azerbaijan, and renovated or built castles, fortresses, towns and monasteries in the area. In Tavush these include Gag, Kaiyan, Kaiytson, Katsaret, Tavush, Yerghevan.

Inside of the Bagratuni kingdom in Northeast Armenia there arose principedoms or petty kingdoms run by families that were semi-autonomous though professing allegiance to the king in Ani. One of these was the Kiurikian family, founders of the kingdom of Lori or Tashir-Dzoraget (996-1118), who reigned over Northeast Armenia including the whole of present-day Tavush marz. The Kiurikians were destined to play an important role in resisting invasions of Shaddadin emirs from Gandzak in the 10th-11th cc.

During this period Armenian culture 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 glory was short-lived as the Bagratuni kingdom fell to Seljuk Turk attacks and the Kiurikian kingdom became fractured, falling to the armies of Emir Kizil in 1105. The Kiurikians moved east, establishing a new fiefdom at Berd. In 1198 they had established the Nor Varaq monastery to house the N'shan relic, which had been brought from Varaq Vank in Vaspurakan, now under Seljuk rule.



THE GEORGIANS, SHAMSHADIN & KAZAKH ▲

In the 12th c the region was absorbed into the powerful Georgian kingdom, under King David (the builder), founder of the Orbeli or Orbelian royal families. Related to the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty by marriage, when the Ani kingdom fell, they quickly usurped the eastern regions of

Gugark, including Tavush, which was given to the Armenian prince Sarkis (Zakareh) Zakarian by King Giorgi III and his daughter Queen Tamara. The Zakarians were godparents to the branch of ancient and noble Artsruni family at Mahkanaberd (Kiranots canyon) and Haghpata.

With the transformation of Georgia into a major military power in the 12th century, the political situation for Armenians improved decisively. And in twenty years of fighting, under the leadership of Sarkis sons Ivaneh and Zakareh Zakarian, the Georgian army retook a significant part of Armenia from Seljuk domination as well as the Eastern regions of the Kiurikian kingdom: Kaiyan (Dzorapor), Kaiytson, Tavush, Gaga fortress, Matsnaberd, Mahkanaberd.

The region experienced a new flowering of culture with the construction of monasteries at Khoranashat, Nor Getik, Arekelots, Deghdznut, Makaravank, Haghartsin, Kirants, Mshkavank and Jukhtak, as well as the Moro canyon monastery complex. Royal palaces, bridges, roads, canals, and caravanserais were also built in the rush to civilize the country.

Architectural masterpieces in Tavush include the imposing dining hall at Haghartsin, the highly artistic ornamental designs at Deghdznut and Mankavank monasteries, Arekelots monastery, and the Kaiyan and Gaga fortresses.

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, Haghartsin and Archakut.



The intellect and writer, Mkhitar Gosh taught in Tavush 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. Other great intellectuals of the period were Mkhitar's student Hovhannes Tavushetsi (Vanakan vardapet), founder of a school and library in the monastery of Khoranashat and who inspired a new generation of scholars, including the 13th c. historian and scientist Kirakos Gandzaketsi (*General History* from 303 to 1265, the last part of which dealt with the invasion of the Tatars), Vartan the Great (the *Book of Questions*, a study of Genesis and apocryphal books), Khachatur Tarontsi (abbot of Haghartsin, Vartan Areveltsi (*Commentaries on Daniel, the Pentateuch, Psalms and Songs, History from creation to 1264*), Grigor Aknertsi (*History of the Mongols*), Arakel Tarsontsi and Hovhannes Armanetsi.

Long considered a devotional act and so done without regard for recognition, the great architectural and sculptural masterpieces from this period were not anonymously done, and we have names to commemorate their great work: Grigoris, Minas, Paghos, Kaghak and Yeridasard.

The glories were short lived as Gugark fell to invasions by Jalal-al-Adin in 1228 and the Mongol hordes in 1238, who laid waste to the region, taking Matsnaberd, Tavush, Katsaret, Nor Berd, Gag, Kaiyan along with the rest of Tavush. Gugark was incorporated into the *Kurjistan vilayet* of the *Atarpatakan province*, the region's pastureland becoming the personal estates of Mongol princes who used it for summer grazing. The 1254 Mongol census of Armenia had severe consequences for the country, the remaining noble families, heavily taxed, their lands confiscated for grazing, began to collapse, those who could immigrated to the kingdom of Cilicia on the Mediterranean Sea. The Armenian population in Tavush shrank noticeably, towns and villages became deserted, the great monasteries left to slowly decay, and monasteries and churches were deserted.

By the end of the 14th century Tavush seemed to have stopped existing, the invasion of the Tatar-Mongols and Turkish tribes that followed was over a deserted land, and they used it to tend herds.

Armenians regained some control in the 16th century, as the "rehabilitated" Kherumian family, starting from their estate in the Kiranots canyon in the 1500s, began a 300 year reign over the Aghstev valley.

As Persia asserted control in the 16th c over northern Armenia, Armenians and Georgians rebelled. The Persian shahs responded by establishing a rear guard in Tavush, settling Armenian pasturelands with nomadic Kazakh and Shamshadil (Shamshadin) Tatars, giving these areas their popular names.

In the 18th century the region became the battle ground between two powers, the khan of Yerevan and the Ottoman Turks. Added to this were invasions from Daghestan in the northern Caucasus. Armenian and Georgian rebellion became so great that the Persian khan Agha Mahmad in 1795 initiated a punishing military campaign against the Georgian capital Tiflis and all of Northeast Armenia, including Tavush. The destruction was complete, villages, towns and monasteries were sacked and burned. It was during this campaign that Vanadzor, in Lori, was burnt to the ground, giving it the name "Kharakilisa" (Black Church). Tavush was equally destroyed, the Kherumian province eradicated. Most survivors escaped to Russia, a few hid out in the mountains and caves, their shelters can still be seen.

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 and to take the Transcaucasus.

Beginning in the 1700's Meliks of Karabakh began to petition the Russian Tsar for permission to immigrate to Russian lands, to escape persecution. On March 9, 1798, during the Persian persecutions, the Meliks Jumshud and Fridon began a series of petitions to the new Tsar Pavel I, to lead an expedition against the Persians, or at least to grant asylum in the Kazakh (formerly Gugark), no longer inhabited by Armenians. By now Karabakh has been suffering from the effects of the Persian attacks and a famine caused by a prolonged drought. Most did not wait for the Tsar's permission and began to resettle Tavush on their own. In addition, Armenians who had escaped to Russia began to return, settling in the upper regions to escape a plague infecting inhabitants of the lowlands. On June 29, 1799

Tsar Pavel I granted the petition to resettle to Kazakh (Tavush), in effect allowing what had already occurred, repopulating the marz with Armenians.



19th CENTURY ▲

Tavush'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. Owing to its small population, Tavush, known Kazakh-Shamshadin, was first incorporated into Lori district, then in 1868 it was united with the newly formed Elizavetopol province under the name Kazakh.

Not as large or important as Giumri to the West, Tavush was nevertheless prized for its natural resources. As Armenian enclaves in Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Giumri grew, Tavushetsis contributed to the new Armenian identity, mostly in religion, building dozens of wooden, then stone churches throughout the district, and contributing acolytes and seminarians to the mother See in Echmiadzin. One noted Tavush bishop was Grigor Manucharian from Hakhum, a.k.a. "Dali Qeshish" (the crazy priest), a patriot of the Independence movement.

FIRST REPUBLIC ▲

Tavush was part of 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. The Turks were stopped at Vanadzor and routed at Sardarapat, but continued to exert pressure on the country. The republic was short-lived as the Red Army crossed into Armenia through Tavush and Lori in 1920. For the next 70 years Tavush was a part of the Soviet Union.

THE SOVIET PERIOD ▲

Tavush's development during the Soviet period was extraordinary. The marz was carved from the Kazakh province, Tavush incorporated present day Dilijan, Ljevan, Shamshadin, Baranai and Karmir village or Jambarak. It was reorganized in 1929 and 1930 before expanding in 1990 into its present size, combining the old Noyemberian, Ljevan, Tavush, Shamshadin and Dilijan districts.

Soviet Armenia industrialized some in the region, but focused mainly on agriculture, collectivizing farms in the region. Under the Soviets farms produced 9% of the agricultural products for Armenia, second only to the Ararat valley, with specialties in fruit, cattle and pork. Wood manufacturing and furniture making were established in Ljevan and Dilijan. The Ljevan carpet factory was established, becoming one of the largest in the country. Both the population and industrialization increased 4-fold within the next 20 years.

After World War II (in which Tavushetsis sacrificed up to 25% of their male population), a new boom began, with the expansion of tobacco (Ljevan, Shamshadin) and fruit (Noyemberian) production, both considered among the best in the Soviet Union. Another specialty became grape cultivation, leading to several good wineries that still produce exports. The Ljevan mineral water factory was established as well. Dilijan, and to a lesser degree Tavush were developed as resort areas in the 1960s, Dilijan becoming one of the Armenia's most popular destinations, along with Sevan, Jermuk and Tzaghkadzor.

EARTHQUAKE AND 2ND REPUBLIC ▲

Luckily, Tavush was not damaged by the Spitak earthquake of 1988 that devastated much of Lori region, but it could not avoid the effects of the conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh or the collapse of the Soviet economy in 1991. When Azerbaijan stopped supplying gas to the country, and attacked, Tavush was among the first to suffer. Border clashes led to concerted attack as the Azeris promised to wipe the Armenians off the map. The undeclared war escalated until 1995, when the Armenian army won a decisive battle and sealed off a buffer zone around Karabakh. Tavushetsis' descended from the Meliks who emigrated from Karabakh in 1798, were among the first to volunteer, and the first to receive blows by Azeri fighters. 9000 ha of arable land still lie fallow, too close to the border to safely farm, and rare but serious clashes continue to spill over the border.

Like the rest of the country, Tavush has faced an exodus of its people in search of a better life. Perhaps half the population is gone, seeking work in Yerevan, Russia and the west. Those who left send remittances to their relatives at home.

TAVUSH NOW ▲

Tavush's economy is based on agriculture, seasonal tourism and remittances from family members working abroad, with that money funding small enterprises and a slowly improving standard of life. Grand tobacco, a Canadian owned tobacco concern keeps Armenian tobacco farmers employed, and the Noyemberian fruit industry has found ready customers for its canned fruit. Dilijan has recovered somewhat from the catastrophic 90's and is experiencing ever growing groups of tourists in the summer. Still, everything is seasonal and the region has some of the poorest villages in the country, those that still have inhabitants. Graft and corruption is rife in all transactions, locals adding it the cost of doing business.



Tavush' forests are at great risk, old growth stands of trees felled to feed the furniture industry in France, Germany, Russia (Russia!) and Yerevan. Yet real income is not within the reach of the average Tavushetsi, who see any business, even that spoils their land, better than no business at all. The tobacco industry does more than foul people's lungs, the intensive farming and chemical pesticides needed to raise the plants is causing erosion and soil depletion. The one blessing of the early 90's was that farmers, unable to obtain chemical fertilizers from Russia, were forced to adopt organic farming, which ended up producing some of the healthiest, tastiest fruits and vegetables imaginable. With recovery the

chemical fertilizers are back, and the health of the soil, and products are in decline.

The marz is still a wilderness, its forests the thickest in Armenia, its mountains some of the most rugged, and the air is pure by any standard in the country. Parts are heavily farmed, but most is wild and remote. In the east and north villagers are unused to seeing strangers so far from the beaten path, and more hospitable for it.

IN AND OUT ▲

By Rail Before the conflict with Azerbaijan the main rail corridor for Armenia ran through Tavush, connecting with the Baku-Tbilisi rail line. If a resolution to the conflict is found, it is expected for this rail line (was well as the main road corridor) to reopen. Now closed.

By Air There are no air connections to Tavush region, though Dilijan, Ljevan and Noyemberian have small airports. It may be possible to rent helicopter transport, if you have the bucks: contact [Avarayr or Mountain Rescue Team](#) to inquire.

By Road There are two main roads into and out of Tavush, with intersecting mountain paths that link the marz to Lori, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Gegharkunik (Sevan). From Dilijan, the main road in and out of the marz is the **Northeastern route** (M24). 30 km to Ljevan and another 19 km to Azatamut, at the Azerbaijan border. It is a full 67 km from Dilijan to Kazakh, across the Azerbaijan border (closed).

Just before Azatamut the **Northern route** (A46) travels 30 kilometers through a winding and poor mountain road to Noyemberian, via the Kirants valley, then another 10 km to where it hooks up with the Georgian- Alaverdi highway just above Airum, from where it is 10 km to Sadakhlo on the border, 63 km to Tbilisi, and 30 km to Alaverdi.

From Ljevan, an **eastern route** (A45) climbs 36 km via the Sarum and Tsaghkut mountain passes to Berd and the Shamshadin valley, Armenia's "Shangri-La". The **Southern route** travels from Dilijan 46 km on the (M24) via the Sevan pass to Lake Sevan. From Sevan it is 53 km to Yerevan on the main highway. Finally, the **Southwestern route** travels 40 km to Vanadzor (A330 / M8), passing the 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 Yerevan travel daily from Dilijan, Ljevan & Noyemberian, with stops along the way, one being Sevan. From Noyemberian it is possible to board a bus to Tbilisi or a minivan to Airum where you can catch the train to Tbilisi or Yerevan. Minivans travel the same routes, plus connect major towns with villages. Cars with drivers can be rented in Yerevan, Dilijan, Noyemberian or Ljevan, the latter taxis. Taxis can be found in Dilijan, Ljevan and Noyemberian, and 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.



OVERNIGHT/EAT ▲

Lodging Dilijan has a several decent hotel-resorts and pensionats which fill up in the summer months, so plan ahead. But the wonderful development are the numerous B&Bs in Dilijan plus locals ready to rent out houses, apartments or rooms (5000 AMD – 10,000 AMD). Ljevan has a basic hotel and jambar (summer camp) in the area, but also numerous B&Bs and overnights in local homes (5000-7000 AMD). Noyemberian has a basic Soviet style hotel (3000–7000 AMD) and overnights (5000 AMD). Berd has a decrepit hotel that still wants to charge 5000 AMD, and a treasure trove of local residences for overnight (5000 AMD). The amenities can be limited, but you can bargain breakfast into the deal. Tavush also has pensionats and summer camps outside of towns, and if they have room, it's a cheap stay at 2500/10,000 AMD a night (bed/cabin). Villagers will put up anyone in need; the amenities will 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. *Camping* is available throughout the marz, mostly in wild areas or river beds. Before setting up camp be sure you are not intruding on private property, especially if you are close to a village or farm. Ask and you will almost certainly be given permission, and probably food, drink and an evening of stories into the bargain. Details for lodging are listed in individual Day Trips.

Eating out in the region can be found at roadside stands and cafes along the highway to Dilijan and Ijevan, both of which have cafes, restaurants and bistros. Noyemberian has khorovatz stands and a couple of restaurants, as does Berd. Bottled water is generally not available outside of towns, though the ubiquitous Coca-Cola knockoffs are everywhere. Tavush 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.

DESTINATIONS ▲

Tavush has a lot more destinations than you would think on first glance, it is not just a Swiss Miss village.

Picturesque locales include Haghartsin, Dilijan, Ijevan, Yenokavan, the mountain track from Yenokavan to Jujevan, Hakhum River Valley, Kirants Valley, Khndzorut River, the mountain road from Chambarak to Navur, Chinari, Tzaghkavan, Aigehovit, Makaravank, Sevk, Archakut, Koghb, Archis, Koghb River Valley.

Prehistoric / Urartian excavations in Tavush Region include Govino & Redkin (Dilijan), Ijevan, Yenokavan, Berd, Gandzakar, Tsaghkut Pass, Dashti Berd, Chinchin, Berd, Norashen, Mamaslu, Artsvaber, Aigedzor, Chinari, Tzaghkavan, Vazashen, Lusadzor, Bardzraber, Achajur, Sevk, Sarigiugh, Berkaber, Tzaghkavan, Jujevan, Noyemberian, Koghb, Airum, Archis.

Medieval monasteries, churches, Khachkars & ruins will be found at Haghartsin, Goshavank, Jukhtak, Matosavank, Khoranashat, Varagavank, Shkhmuradi, Arekelots, Deghdznut, "Moro Dzor" Tsoviz Vank, Makaravank, Mshkavank, Jukhtak, Kaputak, Samsoni Vank, Kirants Vank.

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. The great forests of Tavush are in the North and NE, while rugged terrain with intermittent stands of forests are the SE, on the mountains of Inaksar, Metsial and the high steppes leading to Gegharkunik. Tavush's rivers are among Armenia's most appealing, with the ancient caravan route trailing the Aghstev River passing pristine waters and urban domains alike, as well as excavations and settlements from each epoch of Armenia's history. Other river ways are the Khndzorut. Tavush and Hakhum in Berd sub region, and the Joghas, Voskepar and Koghb in the North.



Hiking and trekking ▲ is spectacular throughout Tavush, especially along the line of mountains on the West of the marz, and following the numerous rivers in the region, the Aghtsev, Hakhum, Tavush, and Khndzorut merely the most prominent. In the south the forests are thick and beautiful plentiful, though logging may interrupt your trek nearer to the highway. Both Dilijan and Ijevan have some excellent hiking in surrounding forests, and good day hikes include treks from Dilijan to the Haghartsin and Goshavank monasteries and from Ijevan to Mt. Itsakar or the Sarum Pass into Shamshadin. Shamshadin has folding mountains and rolling valleys gradually dropping in elevation towards the Kura River valley in Azerbaijan, with medieval castles, forts and monasteries guarding the mountain passes. In the SE the hiking is good along the Pambak river and up Mts. Bovakar and Mt. Airisar. In the N, hiking along the Noyemberian road follows the border, so you need to be sure of your bearings and the situation before taking off, but the road and the valleys pass some incredible medieval sites at Achajur (Makaravank), Archakut and the Joghas Reservoir.

Mountain treks in Tavush are considered relatively easy to moderate in difficulty, of course assuming you are in good shape. Mountains in the region are in the North (Noyemberian): Mts. Salerk, Mishkhana, Dsigkatar; West: Mts. Gomshavar, Ghazanchi, Abo, Pahakn, Jilis, Khachaghbiur, Ijevan; West (Ijevan): Mts. Kaiyen, Hovk; East (Ijevan): Mts. Inaskar, Itsakar; East (Berd): Mts. Arsar, Kaghnutumb, Otsikar, Metsial, Mughuz, Petrosi tala; SW (Dilijan): Arevelian, Haghartsin, Pokr Maimekh, Mets Maimekh, Kazarchi Bugor, Maralijan and Bundukh.

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. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#) for experienced guides.



Caving. ▲ For avid spelunkers, the most spectacular vistas are underground. Tavush has hundred of caves, with concentrations of caves on the Aghstev, Tavush and Khndzorut rivers, near Ijevan and Berd, where the caves have been inhabited since the Stone Age. In the Yenokavan canyon, the Anapat cave is lined with intricate totem carvings while the Lastiver cave has an indoor lake. For more details on caves see [TourArmenia Caving pages](#)

Flower Watching April to June have the mildest weather in the region, as well as the most spectacular flower display, esp. along the river valleys and mountain plateaus of the Northeast and Northwest. In the south the forests themselves are the main display, with spring flowering trees budding in late March-April. Best places to look are in Shamshadin (Berd), esp. the

Sarum and Tsaghkut passes, the roads to Ijevan and Noyemberian and in June-July the alpine country on Mts. Kaiyen, Hovk, Haghartsin, Pokr Maimekh and Mets Maimekh.

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: deep in forests, on mountain crags and steppe land, river valleys and far meadows. The forests around Dilijan are fairly accessible, Shamshadin's mountains and valleys are a two hours drive from Dilijan, the western mountains (Gomshavar, Ghazanchi, Abo, Pahakn, Jilis, Khachaghbiur, Ijevan) are the most remote but promising for craggy rock and mountain steppe birds; the Aksipara and Voskepar rivers and Kirants valley; and the steppe land around Noyemberian are good areas. See [Resources](#) for web links.

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.

Adventure Tour 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@aqa.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.



Apaga Tours, (tel. Yerevan (010) 57 03 28, cell: (091) 49 58 34), www.apaga.info, artak@artak.net, specializes in classical and nature tours in the area.

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.

DILIJAN ▲

(DD 40.73857 x 44.86699)

[Map](#)

✚ **DILIJAN - ԴԻԼԻՋԱՆ** (formerly Hovk elev. 1518m, pop. 20414) is on the right bank of the Aghstev river, 40 km east of Vanadzor and 106 km from Yerevan via Sevan. The town, looking like a Swiss mountain hamlet, has a storied history, from humble beginnings as a simple Stone Age settlement to Bronze Age citadel, Urartian fortress and a royal retreat for the kings of Armenia and Emirs of Persia to its total destruction by Mongols and Tatars and rebirth in the Tsarist period as a health spa and resort for the rich and powerful, then for members of trade unions and factories in the Soviet era. It is still one of Armenia's most popular destinations, for its cool weather, immense forest preserve and Swiss chalet style of architecture.



Surrounded by the Dilijan Nature Preserve, 24,000 hectares of old growth forest (much of which still survives, despite illegal logging), Dilijan has numerous wilderness trails and mountain treks leading to some of Armenia's most enchanting cultural monuments; churches, monasteries and prehistoric citadels nestled amongst thick stands of trees, bushes and vines. Its cool clean air, dappled light and mild summer climate make it a welcome respite from the stifling heat and dusty streets of Yerevan, and a nice contrast to the beautiful but stark alpine country around Sevan. If Yerevan is for business and Sevan for partying, Dilijan is for rejuvenating, for contemplating art, soaking in mineral spring baths, walking through the forests that creep into the heart of the city, listening to nature.

Dilijan is also a city of artists. For 200 years artists and musicians from all over the Russian Empire and Soviet Union gathered here, drawing inspiration from its idyllic setting (Benjamin Britten, Aram Khachaturian, Dimitri Shostakovich, Mstislav Rostropovich). New artists still spend vacations in the area and occasional exhibitions and sales are held in the town.

Overnight venues, once limited to a hand full of pensionats are now complemented by dozens of B&Bs in local houses, some of which combine local wooden handcrafting with warm hospitality and spectacular views of the forests from balconies.

Background. Prehistoric sites near Dilijan date back to the Stone Age, along the Aghstev river. An Early Iron Age site, Golovino, is 3 km SW of town and another, Late Iron Age site, Redkin Lager, is 3 km NE. Artifacts include pottery, tools, bronze and copper items and animist totems with distinctive sun and astral iconography. During the Urartian epoch, the area was a part of the Etwini or Utikueh tribal region, also known as the Middle Land, a buffer zone between Urartu and the tribes to the north.

During the reign of Tigran the Great (140-55 BCE), the settlement was one of four border zones in Gugark province. Later, as Rome and the Parthia struggled for control over the country, Dilijan was called Hovk, it and the surrounding forests became a favorite hunting ground and summer retreat for Armenia's kings, part of the Arshakuni (Arshacid) Varazhnunk province. The area around Dilijan was called "Kaiyenzadzor" or "Dzorapor", the city itself called "Hovk." The Arshakunis established their summer home at Arkunashen in the area, from which their power and the spread of early monasticism in Tavush arose.

Dilijan was not yet a town but rather a trade point on the Asian (Silk and Spice) trail following the Aghstev River canyon, to the Kura river valley, the Caspian Sea and Asia Major. But the beginnings of its development are traced to this period, as Royal favor initiated building fortresses, royal compounds and pagan temples at sites later to become Haghartsin and Goshavank monastic centers and the city itself.

The area's thick forests and abundant wildlife continued to attract the powers-that-were, passing from the Arshakunis to the Parthians to the Arabs and then in the 9th c to the Bagratunis and their vassals the Kiurikians, who established their

stronghold in Dzorapor and who played an important role in resisting invasions of Shaddadid emirs from Gandzak in the 10th-11th cc. It was during the Kiurikian period that the Dzorapor and Hovk entered their golden age, as Haghartsin, Goshavank and the settlement grew tremendously, the monasteries favored by royal patronage and their position on a major trade route between Byzantium and Asia.

The area was lavished with money which was spent on construction and the development of Armenian arts; some to the most beautiful khachkar carvings are at Goshavank and old Haghartsin, as were some of its most beautiful manuscripts and the advancement of science under Mkhitar Gosh and others at Goshavank.



Dzorapor was considered such a beautiful, cultured place that the medieval linguist and scholar Grigor Pahlavuni Magistros (990-1058) wrote, *"If God one day would like to come visit Armenia, I would bring him to Hovk. The difference between Hovk and other beautiful places in the world is here people forget death."*

The district and town fell to the Seljuk armies of Emir Kizil in 1105, the Kiurikians moving east to establish their stronghold at Berd. It regained its freedom under the Georgian Orbeli Kings and the Armenian princes Ivaneh and Zakareh Zakarian in the early 12th c, and a short reflowering of culture began with the construction of monasteries at Jukhtak, Makaravank and expansion of Haghartsin.

The town suffered slaughter and destruction at the hands of Jalai-al-Adin in 1228 and the Mongol hordes in 1238, who laid waste to the region. The Mongol census of 1254 further depopulated the area, leaving an empty land to later Tatar,

Ottoman and Persian invaders (13th-16th cc), who used the area for herding their flocks and for hunting wild bore, much as their Armenian counterparts did in earlier times. The settlement survived somehow, a stop on the Asian trading route, the first time the name Dilijan was written was in 1666 by the French traveler Jean Charden. In the 18th c it was completely destroyed during punishing raids by the Mahmad in retaliation for Armenian rebellion.

Appeals for help from the Russian Empire led to the Russo-Persian wars of the 18th-19th cc, and in 1801 the Georgian treaty between the powers absorbed the region and Dilijan into the Russian Empire.

Dilijan became a popular health spa in the 19th century, especially for people suffering from respiratory ailments, who sought relief in Dilijan's clean mountain air, cool, moist summers and "soft" winters. The exact date the city became a health spa is unknown, but letters written in the first half of the century mention the curative properties of the town's air and moist climate, which led to the construction of its first spas, the Russian counterparts to the great health spas of Europe. When the 1899 Tbilisi-Alexandropol-Yerevan railroad was constructed in through Dilijan, its survival was insured.

Dilijan played a key role in the developments of the first republic and was a conduit for the successful retaking of the Armenia by the Red Army in 1920. In early Soviet times textile and light industry were established in the town, and it was not until Khrushchev's time in the mid 1950's that its development as the most popular summer resort in the country began. Resorts, pensionats and hotels began catering to the intelligentsia and Soviet politicians formed a mass migration every summer to escape the stifling heat of the Ararat Valley for Dilijan's cool climes much as the Raj did in India during the days of the British Empire. The most important resort were the Cinematographer's Union Rest Home, the Composers union pensionat and the several Mineral Spas in town, which became enclaves of cultural and political dynamos, often shaping the following years' achievements during late night feasts and long summer "salons."

Facing economic disaster after independence in 1991, the country's recovery and the rise of a nouveau riche class fostered a recovery in Dilijan, not as quickly as Lake Sevan (which is, frankly one big orgy during the summer months), but substantial and growing nonetheless. Prices, by

Yerevan standards are still very cheap, but rising steadily as more and more locals revel in its beautiful surroundings and traditional charms.

Mineral Springs. Dilijan has a lot of mineral springs, one of which drives a booming business in bottled mineral water once named (appropriately) Dilijan Mineral Water. Its new incarnation is Frolova Baltica, the blue-bottled water exported primarily to Russia and Latvia. It is hands down the best bottled mineral water in Armenia and if you find any on your treks, try it. Other springs support the sanatoriums and spas in the area, and still others are found on the Aghstev River, free for the soaking or drinking.

Weather. Dilijan has fantastic weather, its winters are snowy but relatively warm compared to Vanadzor or Yerevan, and summers are cool and moist. The surrounding forests create a micro-climate that protects the area and contributes to a denser oxygen level and a moist climate. Winters can be snowy but mild, the air moist. Springs start early, in March, with wild flowers dotting the landscape before trees bud, and flowering trees blanketing the mountainsides. Summers are cool with frequent rain showers breaking into sunny days. Autumns have warm days, cool nights, and is the most beautiful time as trees change colors into masses of reds and yellows on the hillsides. The tourists are gone and locals celebrate the autumnal passing with feasts made from the fruit of the land, fresh honey, cheese, milk and mountain grown vegetables.

Ecology. Dilijan is surrounded on all sides by the Dilijan Nature preserve, 24,000 ha of old growth forests stretching the Sevan Pass to Ijevan. It was established in 1958 to protect endemic species of oak, ash and elm, as well as recently planted stands of pine. The forest also has wild apple, plum and pear which ripen in early summer, summer mushrooms (be sure to have an expert guide to avoid food poisoning) and wild raspberries and blackberries in late summer/fall.

Wildlife includes bear, wolf, fox, rabbit, various birds, hedgehog, weasel and other animals. The forest has numerous brooks and mineral springs. The water is potable, but you may want to filter sediment out after rainstorms.

The city lies on the right bank of the Aghstev river, a conduit for people and trade for hundreds of thousands of years. Despite illegal logging, the forests still retain much of their density and character. The city is as much a part of the forest

as it is an urban area, its unique architecture draws inspiration from the woodlands and steep mountain inclines.

Risks are the forests themselves. As illegal logging continues, the forest that protects the city from erosion, mudslides and desertification is shrinking, and the idyllic setting that makes this city so special, and such a powerful draw from tourists, is at risk of disappearing.

Bearings The *Dilijan Tourism Information Center* is on Sharambeian p. in the Old Center just up the hill from the roundabout into town (tel. 5651, 7250). The city center is on the right bank of the Aghstev river, as is the bulk of the town's housing and shops. Sanitariums and resorts are mostly on the left bank or N side of the town. From Sevan the highway will convert to Kamo and Gorki pts. on the south of town. Less than 509 m from the Aghstev River roundabout, Sharambeian p. will climb the hills to your right (E). From Vanadzor, the highway converts to Kalinini p. as it enters town on the W. From Kalinini p. enter the **town center** via the Aghstev River roundabout/bridge, which links Kalinini (Vanadzor hwy), Tsaturian, the Tbilisi Highway and Gorki p. The **bus stop** is here. Go S on Gorki and in less than 50 m Sharambeian p. starts climbing the hills to the left (E). This is the **Historical District or Old Center**, where the Dilijan Architectural Preserve and Museum are, as well as renovated traditional buildings, shops and galleries. From here Sovneri and Miasnikian pts. wind uphill to the S and E of the old town. To the east are a number of B&B's, on or around Orjonokidze, Shahumian and Hovsepien pts.

The cinematographer Union and Dilijan Rest Resorts are on Parz Lich Road, east of town on the right (S) bank. The Haghartsin, Ararat and Haik Rest Houses are S, on Kamo p. / Golovino District as is the massive Lernaian Hayastan Spa. The Shushan Holiday House and other hotels are on the left bank, Getapnia p. B&B's are throughout the town, the most beautiful East of the Old Center, on Miasnikian, Orjonokidze, Shahumian, Hovsepien and Gai.

Dilijan is not as easy to walk as other cities, most streets are on an incline. It is excellent exercise, but if you are unaccustomed to walking uphill, you will find it strenuous. The spas and pensionats are outside of town, several kilometers distant. Of course, if you stay in the center, you will find it relatively easy to walk around.

Taxis are available throughout the town, in the center and near cafes. 100 AMD per km is standard but confirm price before starting on your trip.

SIGHTS

The city's main site is its natural splendor the Dilijan Forest preserve wrapping around the city and even creeping into parts of it. Cafes, parks and a few monuments lie within the town, but other than these (which can be seen a few hours at most) enjoy the nature, the clean cool air, and the local life.



The center (Miasnikian, Sharambeian pts.) is where you will find the **historical center** and **old alley**, inhabited by 19th c and early 20th buildings, in fine hewn stone trimmed in wooden latticework and balustrades. The buildings house galleries, shops and artists studios where artists and craftsmen create their work using traditional methods. Artists have frequented Dilijan for over 200 years, beginning from the Russian Empire period when many were drawn to the city as a spa, then stayed to capture its natural splendors. The street is the location of the Dilijan Architectural Preserve and Ethnographic museum ([see Dilijan Architectural Preserve-Museum, below](#)).

Near the post office are steps leading to the **rotunda**, an early 20th c structure high above the city overlooking the hills. Now sadly in disrepair, the rotunda is a neo-classical outdoor pavilion with a large semicircular arcade of Greek columns facing the western sky. The view is lovely from here, and one can imagine chiffon-wearing ladies and tuxedoed men at evening summer cotillions, dancing under the stars. In Soviet times it continued to be a favorite place of dances and

tête-à-têtes among the young. Over time it has decayed, and needs a loving hand to restore its former grandeur.



The **Genocide Monument** is the large open concrete "tent" you see as you approach the city. The monument is made of three trapezoidal "needles" leaning on each other, with 6 points on their ends for "legs" and "arms". The figure looks vaguely Jetson, though it is meant to commemorate the 1915 genocide of 2 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks and the Young Turk movement.

Serik Davtian library. The library is named after Serik Davtian, an early 20th c. textiles and art authority. Davtian's research into the origins of Armenian needle lace argues that it originated in Armenia, the threads, dies, needles and hardwood for frames are all traced to the Bronze Age in Armenia (a 3000 year old brooch found in Armenia shows two women wearing head scarves edged in lace similar to those worn by Armenians in the past). Davtian was also an expert in Armenian carpets, showing that Armenian carpet weaving predates Iranian, Turkish and Central Asian carpets by centuries. Davtian was the author of many art books, housed at the library.

Museums

Dilijan Architectural Preserve-Museum, 2 Sharambeian p. (open 10 am – 5 pm, closed on Mondays) was founded in 1983 at the initiative of the artist Vanik Sharambeian, and operates under the auspices of the State Department for Preservation of Cultural and Historical Monuments. This unique cultural institution was established in a district of Dilijan built up at the end of the 19th to beginning of the 20th cc with two-story houses that belonged to the merchants Ananov and

Badalov. In 1970 the district was restored to its original shape and style. A second renovation is ongoing with funding by Tufenkian Heritage, which operates for-profit high-end carpet exports and luxury hotels in Armenia.



The Tufenkian project is attempting to turn a dry "museum" into a living historical theme park, a demonstration center where local artists and artisans practice their craft for tourists. Unfortunately, during this process, most of the historical buildings are closed and the new area remains one big construction zone, interesting to watch for about 5 minutes, but leaving regrets for not being able to visit the finished product. A few signs with details of the project, as well as its historic significance, would be nice.

The museum's collection comprises 2,266 items of which 248 were on permanent display (applied art, pottery, painting, wood and metal, jewelry, photographs, etc.). The museum was also a research and information center with a branch in Goshavank (monastery complex not far from Dilijan).

Dilijan Local Tradition Museum, 28 Miasnikian p. (tel. 6075), open 10-5, was founded in 1950 to house archeological artifacts found by a highway contractor (Redkin) and crew working on the Yerevan-Tbilisi road. Archeologists continued excavations at the site, plus another one 3 km S of town. The museum moved to its present building in 1957. The collection of this community museum comprises 8,670 archaeological and ethnographic items. Departments include ethnography, arts, revolution and "modernity."



The museum is on two floors of a dilapidated house, the floors for which lean forwards about 5 degrees beginning with the stairs. The downstairs exhibition hall contains a short history of the region, beginning with the Stone Age, artifacts from excavations, a nice diorama of Haghartsin Monastery and pictures of historic sites in the area. New placards in English have been installed.

Upstairs is the **National Art Gallery, Dilijan Branch**, with canvases and drawings by Gevorg Bashinjaghian, Vartkes Sureniants, Martiros Sarian, Hovhannes Aiyvazovski, Rockwell Kent, Shishkin and others. Open 10-5 daily, museum director is Lilitte Ginosian.



The Dilijan Branch of National Museum of Folk Art, 1 Getapnia p. open 11-4, was founded in 1975 at the initiative of Armenian artist Hovhannes ("Vanik") Sharambeiyani (1926-1986). The main collection comprises 720 items, mostly antiques and lovely pieces of folk art (1950-1970). The museum director and her staff are mostly intent on

selling their local craftwork and can be unhelpful unless you "hire" them as a guide. It is not really necessary to have a guide for this small collection, though be sure to look for the miniature design you can only see by microscope and the "Lenin Room", with various craftwork adorned by his image. I particularly liked the huge bronze table top with his picture and images of the revolution, as well as the decision to put his items in the same room as a collection of locally knitted socks (on sale, \$10). Prior to the museum's founding, the building was Sharambeiyani's home, though it was built in the 19th century and first belonged to Countess Mariam Tumanian.

Art, Galleries, Crafts

Other than the *National Art gallery* Dilijan branch, there is a *gallery* in the Old Center, plus galleries and *artist studios* throughout town. A good place to scout talent is the *Academy of Art*, Dilijan Branch just W of the Old Center roundabout. Students and teachers will have work on display there, plus can direct tour private galleries, studios and exhibitions not open to the public.

Art

Aghasi & Arsen Gogchian, 131 Sayat Nova p. (tel. 2627), ceramics.

Gagik Mazmanian, 14/20 Moldovakian p. (tel. 3363), multimedia.

Gevorg Makvetsian, 56 Maxim Gorki p. (tel. 7003), paintings.

Hregghen Gasparian, 95 Kamo p. (tel. 7261), needlework, drawings, charcoals, tapestry.

Lyova Grigorian, 25b Maxim Gorki p. (tel. 7154), paintings.

Nune Tovmasian, (tel. 4791), artwork, sewing art, drawings.

Victor Harutunian, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 5651), iron forging, metal

Another artist to look for is **Ghazar Ghazarian**, 56 Maxim Gorki p. (tel. 7003), a "Realistic Romantic" whose paintings are exhibited in galleries at Yerevan, Moscow, Hrazdan, Dilijan and Martuni, as well as in many private collections abroad. Since 1998 he has been the Dean of the Art Academy.

Crafts

Armene Poghosian, 12/34 Getapnia p. (tel. 5770), paintings, lacework, tapestry.

Ashot Babaiyan, 26 Miasnikian p. (tel. 091-748149), natural art

Evgenia Kerlan, 9 Maxim Gorki p. (tel. 3318), needle work, crocheting and knitting

Grunia Amirkhanian, 80 Gaiy p. apt. 24 (tel. 3535), needle work

Hasmik Soghomonian, 85/2 Kalinini p. (tel. 3369), accessory art, needlepoint, sewing, purses.

Karine Davtian, 2/09 Shahumian p. (tel. 4924), dolls, needle point, knitting, sewing crafts.

Karineh Ghazarian, 50 Getpania p. (tel. 3332), tapestry

Margarita Harutunian, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 5650), needle work, knitting, crocheting

Marieta Kocharian, 62a Kalinini p. (tel. 4700, 4009), wood and needle art, tapestry.

Narine Musaelian, 76 Miasnikian p. apt. 11 (tel. 7192), macramé

Nunufar Ghazarian, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 7059), macramé

Nushik Malkhasian, 68/9 Getapnia p. (tel. 3504), lacework, needlepoint, embroidery.

Revik & Grisha Hovsepian, 31 Gaiy p., apt. 40 (tel. 3979), wood crafts, vases, khachkars, souvenirs.

Roza Alikhanian, 1st blind alley, Shahumian p. apt. 7 (tel. 3504), needle work

Roza Ulikhanian, 84 Getapnia p. apt. 20 (tel. 3662), needle work

Shushanik Manukian, 2nd lane, Andranik p. house 25 (tel. 2791), needle work

Susanna Melkonian, 13 Hovsepian p. (tel. 4058), needle point

Tamara Davtian, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 5651), traditional costumes, needle work.

Victoria & Veronica Harutunian, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 5651), needle work, knitting, crocheting

Also see [ASCAP Tavush art project: Patkerasah](#) and [Arvesti Link Page](#) (if you cannot read the words, click on links to open art samples from students and young artists in the region).

Cultural Centers, Theatre, Concerts, Cinema

For a city with its first theatre performance in 1880, the theatre scene is sparse, restricted to the

occasional performance and folk dance at hotels or resorts. In the summer, the cinematographer's resort shows films, evenings and weekends. Guests are allowed. Check with the front desk (tel. 6139, 2710) to inquire.

Culture Center, 53 Miasnikian p. (tel. 3809), open 8.30-21.00, has concerts, recitals and occasional performances. Check for latest schedule.

Yerevan Fine Arts State Academy, Kalinin p. (tel. 6184), open 09.00-15.00 has classes and occasional recitals and exhibitions.

Art School after V. Sharamberian, 62a Kalinin p. (tel. 4009), open 09.00-17.00 has the odd exhibition and art classes for students of all ages.

Dilijan Music School, 57 Kalinin p. (tel. 7486, 3237, 6027) open 09.00-16.00, has occasional recitals and performances, classes.

Parks

The Children's park is of Tsaturian p. Next to the roundabout is the *City Park*, with a lake and bridge.

Springs

Near the post office is the *Matinov spring*, with clean mountain water. Others are at the *Dilijan* and *Lernaiyin Sanatorium* (for pay).

The *Dilijan Frolova Balka Mineral Water Bottling Company* is 5 km from Dilijan center (take the Vanadzor highway 3.3 km W of the Old Center roundabout, then go N about 2.8 km at the railroad bridge). No free samples, but you might get them to reveal the source, 7 km from the bottling factory.



Excavations

There is not much to see at these excavations except mounds indicating significant archeological finds. The *Golovino* excavation is 3 km south of town on the Sevan highway. The excavation revealed Iron Age shaft graves, and later digs uncovered traces of Bronze Age activity. Artifacts are on display at the Local Tradition Museum. The *Redkin* excavation 6.6 km NE of the roundabout (2.9 km from the NE city limits) on the Dilijan road on the south bank of the river (also Redkin Camp), is named after a highway contractor who, with his workers uncovered iron age artifacts while working on the Tbilisi-Yerevan highway. Artifacts are on display at the Local Tradition Museum.

Churches

See [Haghartsin](#), [Goshavank](#), [Jukhtak vank](#), [Matosavank](#).

Other

The *Dilijan Human Rights Library*, School N 2, 2nd Floor, HR Library, 137 Kalinin (tel: 2364, e-mail: hrlibrary_dilijan@rin.ru) contains about 850 pieces of literature, mainly on Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and Armenian Legislation. The library provides periodical press and Internet access to its clients. For further information, contact Anahit Ananian, Librarian.

Nature Trails ▲

Next to the Matinov Spring are some steps that lead to the *Rotunda forest* and *old orchards*. Climb as high as you can for some incredible vistas of the city and surrounding forest.

If you keep hiking into the oak forest you will find various edible *mushrooms* and unique *wildflowers* (*wild Tulips*, *Iris*, *Hyacinths*, *Fritillaria*, *Orchis*, *Gladiolus*, *Calendula*) For detailed information and list of species see [TourArmenia Flora pages](#).

Soma. Caution must be made in collecting *mushrooms*. Armenia has over 4000 varieties, and some are quite toxic or hallucinogenic. Among the latter is the *Amanita muscaria*. This mushroom, which contains the powerful hallucinogen muscimol, is traced to Soma, a god, also an intoxicating beverage referenced in some 120 verses of the 2nd m. BCE Indian epic the Rig Veda and Armenian pre-Christian hallucinogenic religious rites and tree worship (the mushrooms are found at the base of aspen, beech, birch larch, oak and pine trees). Besides humans, two other animals, deer and raven, are known to relish this mushroom.



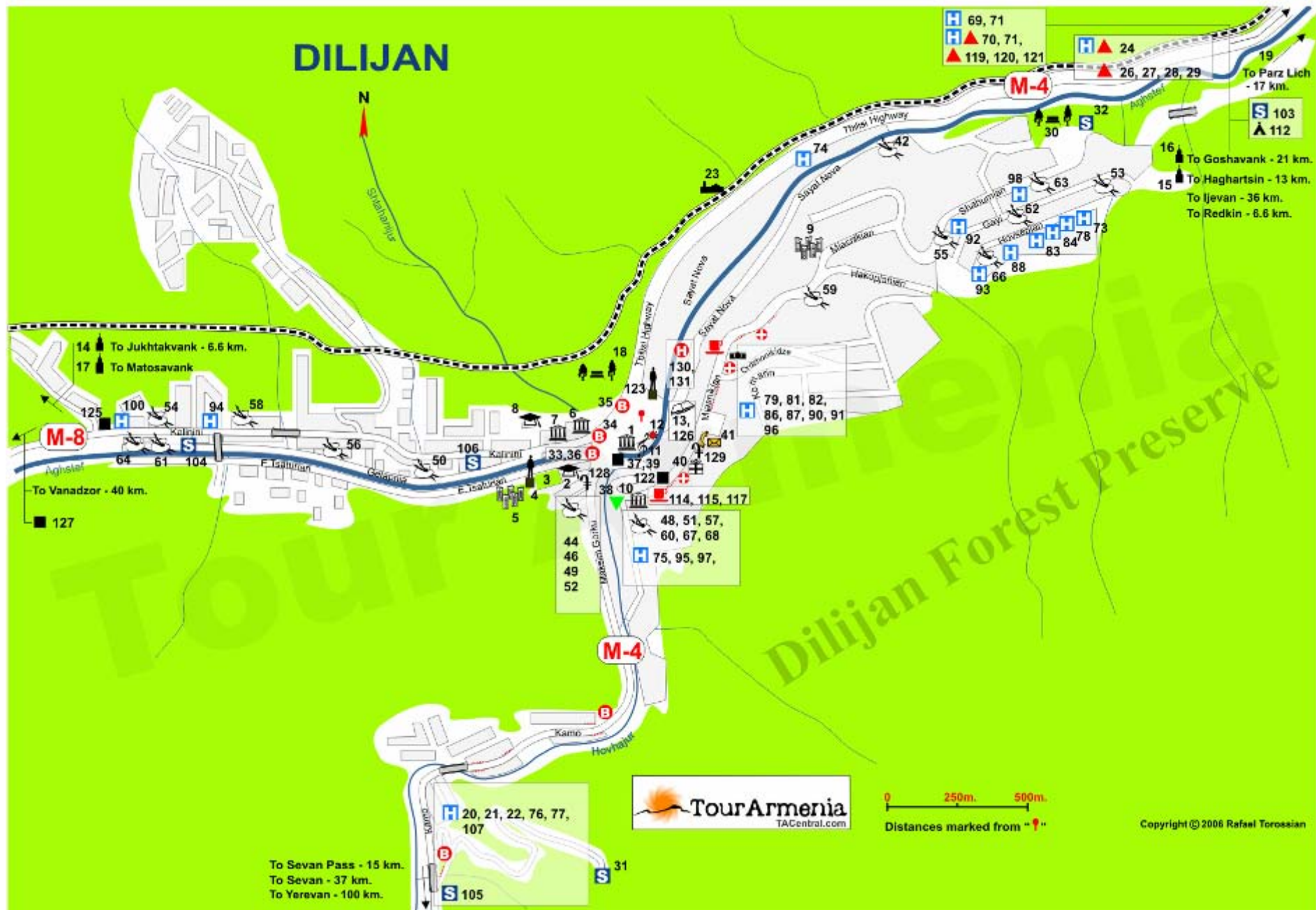
The Armenian highland is one of the places historians hold to be the starting point for the

Indo-Iranian (Indo-European) peoples. If so, then the Soma of the ancient Indian Veda scriptures, as well as the mythology and gods of the ancient world, could well have sprung from here, with the *Amanita muscaria* one of its fountains. The mushroom is easily detected, it looks like those found in fairytales, a red-capped mushroom with white polka dots. In nature it appears first as a white "egg", with the stalk pushing up under a membrane or veil, the signature orange-red cap appearing from behind the membrane. This matches the description in the Vedas and early Indo-European beliefs.

One view even holds that religion itself was born in the hallucinogenic effects of soma, or the *Amanita muscaria*. This could explain early Armenian worship of trees, the hallucinogenic mushrooms are found at their bases, appearing after storms and believed to appear where lightning struck. One would well find trees worthy of respect after a "trip" on mushrooms and its euphoric high.

The mushroom continues to be collected and used by locals in the remotest mountain areas, and trees favored by the *Amanita* are still revered, you can find them on mountain passes and roads, covered with small bits of cloth offered in prayer. Some say the mushrooms found under these "burning trees" are related not just to the Abraham tradition in the bible, but to the birth of Vahagn, the main Armenian god, born of fire with eyes like discs of the sun and hair like fennel (red dots in a veil of white), to the Vedic fire god Agni, and to the Prometheus legend, where fire was given to man from the seed of a fennel.

See [Robert Bedrossian, Soma through the Armenians](#).



DILIJAN MAP KEY

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL, MOTEL

- 69. Dzorapor Hotel
- 70. Getap Motel
- 71. Sunk Motel

GUEST HOUSE

- 20/72. Haiq
- 73. Casanova Inn, 63 Hovsepien
- 74. Mush
- 75. Dili Villa, 12 Miasnikian

B&B

- 21/77. Liana Mkhitarian, 203 Kamo
- 22. Anahit, 195 Kamo
- 76. Sofia, 249 Kamo
- 78. Levon Alikhanian, 62 Hovsepien
- 79. Leili, 1st lane, 5 Orjonokidze
- 80. Knarik, 16 Atabekian
- 81. Kakav, 53 Kamarini
- 82. Benik Babinian, 8 Orjonokidze
- 83. Greta Zargarian, 44 Hovsepien
- 84. Gretah Movsisian, 48 Hovsepien
- 85. Hasmik Frangouljian, 8 1st
- 86. Grinya, 1st lane, 1 Orjonokidze
- 87. Heghineh Alikhanian, 4th lane, 2 Orjonokidze
- 88. Ashot Markarian, 14a Hovsepien
- 89. Arus Davtian, 13 1st
- 90. Anahit Hovsepien, 12a Orjonokidze
- 91. Zina Chiboukhchian, 2nd lane, 19 Miasnikian
- 92. Yeve Santrossyan, 4th lane, 4 Shahumian
- 93. Vrezh Frangoulyan, 3 Hovsepien
- 94. Dilijans, Varazdat Amian, 64a Kalinini
- 95. Tamara, 12 Miasnikian
- 96. Sunrise, 1st lane, 19 Orjonokidze
- 97. Nina's, 18 Miasnikian
- 98. Nunufar Ghazoumian, 1st lane; 17 Shahumian p.
- 99. Tate, 42h, 26 Komisarneri p.
- 100. Lyova Petrosian, 132Kalinini p.
- 101. Hovsepi Hiuratun, 5 Iermontov

PENSIONAT, SANATORIUM

- 30. Dasht Hangestan Goti
- 31. Lernaikin Hayastan Resort
- 32. Usanogh Pensionat
- 102. Cinematographers' Union House
- 103. House of Composes and Musicians

- 104. Dilijan Sanatorium, 14 Parz Lich road
- 105. Haghartsin Holiday Home, Golovino
- 106. Shushan Rest-House, 7 Getapnia
- 107. Ararat Rest- House, Kamo
- 108. Haik Rest House 137 Kamo
- 109. Lernaikin Hayastan
- 110. Dash rest Area/Hotel

- 111. Children's Tubercular Sanatorium, Orjonokidze

CAMPING

- 112. Redkin Camp

FOOD & DRINK

- 24. Restaurant/Hotel
- 25. Getap, Ijevan highway
- 26. Aghtamar Restaurant
- 27. Kebab Stand
- 28. Picnic
- 29. Ureni Khorovatz
- 113. Hatsatun, 2 Sharambeian
- 114. Rotund Café, 40 Miasnikian
- 115. Khnkalianots Restaurant, 29 Miasnikian
- 116. Sunk, 14 Parz Lich
- 117. Mimino, 30b Miasnikian
- 119. Getik, Parz Lich
- 120. Khortkaran, 104 Tbilisian
- 121. Restaurant Idjevan Janaparin, 158 Tbilisian

CAFÉ

BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

- 33. Yerevan Buses
- 34. Vanadzor Buses
- 36. Ijevan Buses
- 37. Central Aftokaiyan

TRAIN

- 23. Railroad Station

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY

- 1. Architectural Preserve-Museum, 2 Sharambeian
- 2. Fine Arts Academy
- 6. Museum of Folk Art, 1 Getapnia
- 10. Local Tradition Museum, 28 Miasnikian p.

MONUMENTS

- 4. World War II Monument
- 122. Rotunda
- 123 Genocide Monument

CHURCHES

See [Around Dilijan](#)

- 14. Jukhtavank
- 15. Haghartsin
- 16. Goshavank
- 17. Matosavank

THEATRES, MUSIC

- 11. Culture House

SHOPS, SHUKA

- 38. Shuka (Market)
- 39. Shops and Kiosks
- 40. Souvenirs

ARTISTS, CRAFTS, FOLK ART

- 42. Aghasi & Arsen Gogchian, 131 Sayat Nova
- 43. Gagik Mazmanian, 14/20 Moldovakian
- 44. Gevorg Makvetsian, 56 Maxim Gorki
- 45. Hregghen Gasparian, 95 Kamo
- 46. Lyova Grigorian, 25b Maxim Gorki
- 47. Nune Tovmasian
- 48. Tamara, 12 Miasnikian
- 49. Ghazar Ghazarian, 56 Maxim Gorki
- 50. Armine Poghosian, 12/34 Getapnia
- 51. Ashot Babaiyan, 26 Miasnikian
- 52. Evgenia Kerlan, 9 Maxim Gorki
- 53. Grunia Amirkhanian, 80 Gay p. apt. 24
- 54. Hasmik Soghomonian, 85/2 Kalinini
- 55. Karine Davtian, 2/09 Shahumian
- 56. Karineh Ghazarian, 50 Getpania
- 57. Margarita Harutunian, 12 Miasnikian
- 58. Marieta Kocharian, 62a Kalinini
- 59. Narine Musaelian, 76 Miasnikian
- 60. Nunufar Ghazarian, 12 Miasnikian
- 61. Nushik Malkhasian, 68/9 Getapnia
- 62. Revik & Grisha Hovsepien, 31 Gay
- 63. Roza Alikhanian, 1st blind alley, Shahumian
- 64. Roza Ulikhanian, 84 Getapnia p. apt. 20
- 65. Shushanik Manukian, #25, 2nd lane, Andranik p.
- 66. Susanna Melkonian, 13 Hovsepien
- 67. Tamara Davtian, 12 Miasnikian

- 68. Victoria & Veronica Harutunian, 12 Miasnikian

OTHER

- 5. Cemetery
- 7. Arts College
- 8. Fine Arfts School
- 9. Cemetery
- 13. Serik Davtian library
- 125. Human Rights Library, School N 2
- 127. Dilijan Frolova Balka Mineral Water Bottling Company

STADIUM

INTERNET, PHONE, POST

GOVT. OFFICES

- 12. Dilijan Mayor's Office
- 41. Post Office

BANK, ATM

- 128. *ArmSavingsBank*, 19 Gorki p
- 129. *ASHB*, 60 Miasnikian p.

TRAVEL AGENT

- 38. Air Tickets
- 75. Dilitours, 12 Miasnikian

APOTEKAS

CLINICS - HOSPITALS

- 130. Central Hospital, 7 Sayat Nova
- 131. Polyclinic

PARKS

- 3. Children's Park
- 18. nature Park
- 19. Parz Lich

PUBLIC TOILET



PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 2680

Long Distance: 02680 + local number

From abroad: +(374) 2680 + 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 (02680) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 2680 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Bus, Minivan

The bus is a reliable means of travel, if vehicles are older and worn around the edges, and they tend to pack 'em in. Still, they work and they are cheap. Minivans are more convenient, 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 Dilijan on routes from Yerevan, Tbilisi and Sevan. *Yerevan-Dilijan* buses run daily between the Yerevan Northern Bus Station, 1 Sevan Highway and the Yerevan Central Bus Station on Admiral Isahakian pta. and the Dilijan aftokaiyeran (Maxim Gorki p.). 800 AMD. Other routes are Dilijan-Ijevan (300 AMD), Dilijan-Vanadzor (500 AMD).

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) leave from the Bus Station on Sharambeian p. in Dilijan. Minivans do not have a set schedule, they leave when they are full and generally run once a day to outlying areas, ask. Minivans connect Dilijan with *Yerevan Northern Bus station* (1000 AMD), *Vanadzor* (800

AMD), *Sevan* (800 AMD), *Ijevan* (100 AMD), *Berd* (500 AMD) and *Noyemberian* (800 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. Taxis congregate at the Bus Station (Maxim Gorki), Town Center (Miasnikian) and in the old center (Miasnikian).

Yerevan-Dilijan Taxis

From Yerevan, taxis to Dilijan are located in the parking lot beside (*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. If your party is less than 4, some drivers will charge the full fare then 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 Voyage tel: (010) 54-54-05, 54-54-06).

From Dilijan, taxis to Yerevan are at the *Aftokaiyeran* (bus station) near the Old Center, and at resorts and hotels during summer months. Bargaining is harder here, and gets harder the later in the day, when chances of finding a return passenger are more remote. 15000-20000 AMD. Taxis to Sevan are around 5000 AMD, to Ijevan 1000 AMD, to Vanadzor around 2000 AMD. [See taxi list for call taxi.](#)

By Car Dilijan is at the crossroads of the west-east/northeast Vanadzor-Tbilisi highway and the Sevan Highway to the S. Highways serving Dilijan are the M24 which runs from Yerevan to the M4 in Azerbaijan which is closed at the border (Sevan: 46 km, Yerevan: 99 km, Ijevan: 30 km, Azatamut/border: 67 km) and the A330/M8 (Vanadzor: 40 km). It takes about 1.5 hours to Yerevan, 45 minutes to Ijevan, 1 hour to the border. To go to Berd, connect with the H45 at Ijevan (66 km, 3 hours). To go to Noyemberian, connect with the H46 at Azatamut (35 km, 3.5 hours).

Petrol stations and rest stops/kebab stands proliferate on the entries to town and the Ijevan highway.

AROUND

On foot is a bit of a hike from the Bus Station to the top of the Old Center, but it is convenient for

exploring the river valley sites (Fine Arts Academy, Children's Park, Arts College, Folk Arts Museum) and the Old center itself (architectural preserve and Museum, Local tradition Museum, Mayor's Office and Library). It is also the best way to take in the city's atmosphere, and work off those calories from the rich food you are bound to eat. [See Bearings](#) for a layout of the town.

Bus The city bus route carries passengers between Kalinin p. and Karmir Khach Block, buses run every hour or half hour.

Taxis Dilijan has plenty of taxis, in the Old center, the roundabout and at pensionats and holiday houses. The services is good, the driver knowledgeable and willing to show off the city. The rate is 500 AMD to go from place to place in town, add 100 AMD per km thereafter. Taxis congregate at the Bus Station (Maxim Gorki), Town Center (Miasnikian) and in the old center (Miasnikian).



Near Region Taxis Taxis are a good way to explore the near region, and very reasonable if you are two or more and split costs, which are per vehicle. Negotiate before starting on your journey, figure 500 AMD plus 100 AMD/km as fair, add 1000 AMD per hour for waiting. Taxis can take you from the roundabout/center to Haghartsin (12.5 km), Parz Lich (17 km), Goshavank (21 km) and Jukhtak (5.9 km). Taxi rates in the region are 3000 AMD for up to 50 km, 1000 AMD to wait, and 100 AMD per km after the first 50 km. A full day's trip into region and back should cost around \$15-20, and you buy the driver's meal if you stay out past meal time.

Taxi Services

Look for taxi service ads at the center and area cafes, restaurants, holiday houses and pensionats. We lucked into Merujan Balinian (tel. 4005), who loves to share local gossip and lore while plying the roads of the region. Taxi M&M (tel. 7717, 7817), Universal (tel. 3929), Dili (tel. 2434, 4114), Kristal (tel. 5300), Tzaraiyutun (tel. 3747).

You might also try Dilitours (tel. 2680) which can arrange travel and touring. Also inquire at your lodging. Most offer the service or will find someone for you.

TRAVEL AGENCIES, BUSINESS CENTERS

Flights Throughout Armenia, 52 Miasnikian p. (tel. 5938), open 10.00-17.00 arranges local and regional tours.

Delta Armenia, 53 Miasnikian p. (tel. 7338), open 9.00-17.00 tickets and local and regional tours.

Aerotour, 54 Miasnikian p. (tel. 7249), open 10.00-16.00 tickets, local and regional tours.

Dilitours, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 2680, 7059, cell: +374 91 456164), E-mail: info@dilitours.de, Web: www.dilitours.de, arranges day trips and overnight in their B&B.

Nature Tours. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#).

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

Fire – 101

Police – 102

Ambulance service – 103

Gas emergency service – 104

Trunk Line – 107

Telephone directory information – 109

Phone, telegraphs

Dilijan is covered by both Armentel and Viva Cell mobile phone services. International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, 58 Miasnikian p. Two others are at 74 Getapnia p. and 26 Shahumian p. [See HayPost \(HyePost\) site for list.](#) The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 1500 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

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

Internet

Internet is spotty in Dilijan. If you do find it, expect dial up and slow. Venues and prices fluctuate, ask at your overnight for the latest best place.

Internet Access is at *Secondary School #2*, 137 Kalinin p. tel. 21-78, open 1300-18.00, has access for 500 AMD per hour.

There is also access at the *Human Rights Library*, also at School N 2, 2nd Floor, HR Library, 137 Kalinin (tel: 2364, e-mail: hrlibrary.dilijan@rin.ru), reserved for their clients, but you may be able to beg some for a smile and camaraderie.

Bank, Exchange

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

ArmSavingsBank, 19 Gorki p., tel. 3732

ASHB, 60 Miasnikian p., tel. 6264, 2342

Shopping

The town has *craft*, *furniture* and *carpet* shops, some attached to workshops. The venues can change from time to time, so ask around. Home studios will be your best bet, they furnish the larger shops in town and Yerevan.

There are *mtersks* and kiosks throughout the town, mostly congregated around the Center on Miasnikian, on Kalinini on the left bank and in residential areas. The *Shuka (market)* is on Miasnikian p. and sells fresh produce, meat and staples. Prices are cheaper than Yerevan, the food fresher in the summer, atmosphere is bustling with good natured haggling.



Aramo Trade Center, 38 Getapnia p. (tel. 4031)
Haik Trading Store, 5 Shahumian p. (tel. 4120)
Nverner Trading Store, 84 Miasnikian p. (tel. 7323)

Continent Clothing Store, 48 M. Gorki p. (tel. 2700)

Film, etc.

Kodak shops are in the center of town, on Miasnikian and Gorki pts.

Pharmacy

Apotekas (Armenian: deghatuner) can be found throughout the city. One is in the Center, "Dilijandegh". 78 Miasnikian p.

Hospital, Polyclinic

For a medical emergency, dial 103. Ask at your lodging for recommendation.

Central Hospital, 17 Sayat Nova p. tel. 6118, 7679, 6068, 5918.

Polyclinic, tel. 7365.

Dentist

Dilijan has no dental clinic, the nearest is in Ijevan: *Ijevan Dental Polyclinic*, 23 Abovian p., tel. (+263) 2165.

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL, MOTEL

Getap Motel and Restaurant, Ijevan highway, 1.9 km N of Dilijan center, right side of road, (tel. 5614, 4341) has four cottages and three suites in the restaurant building. The restaurant has been around for a dozen years, and serves good food using local produce and mountain mushrooms. The cottages have 2 doubles, bath and fireplace. Clean. SGL/Cottage at \$10/50.

Dzorapor Motel, Ijevan highway, 3.1 km N of Dilijan center, (90m up the hill across from Dzorapor Restaurant) has singles and doubles are clean and serviceable. Restaurant is across the highway on west side serves Armenian food. SGL/DBL at 8000/10,000 AMD

Sunk Motel and Restaurant, 14 Parz Lich p. (tel. 7496) has 4 rooms in a modern building with wood trim. SGL/DBL at 7000/10,000 AMD.

SANATORIUMS, PENSIONATS

Ararat Rest- House, Kamo p. (tel. 2687, 5675) is basic, but rooms have hot and cold water, bath, lavatory, refrigerator, telephone (in the lobby), buffet, playground, tennis. Doubles/Quads at 5000 AMD per person, +2000 AMD for 3 meals a day.

Bzhzhkakan Hamalsarani Hangestatun (Medical University Rest house), 400 m from bus station

(tel. 5566) 24/hr hot water, room heating. Cabins for up to 4 at 10000 AMD.



Cinematographers' Union House, Road to Parz Lich (tel. 6139, 2710) is in a forest clearing, in large lodge built on several floors sloping into the hillside. There are also cottages on the premises. The location is gorgeous, all around are forests. Amenities include cold and hot water, separate bath, refrigerator, cooking facilities, air-conditioner, TV set, telephone (in the lobby), buffet, playground, tennis, billiard, sauna, conference hall, cinema. Usually full July through August, call one month in advance. Triple/Double/Lux at 6000/8000/10,000 AMD per person. Cottages have same amenities and are \$40 (3-4 persons) and \$50 (8 persons). Three meals a day included in the price.

Dilijan Sanatorium, 14 Parz Lich p. (tel. 3944, 2124) is in a forest clearing, amenities include cold and hot water, heating, bath, TV set and telephone (in the lobby), tennis, billiard, bar, playground. Any room 6000 AMD per person, 3 meals a day included in the price. There are also 6 cottages with cold, hot water, heating, bath and refrigerator at the same price.

House of Composers and Musicians, Kamo p. (tel. 3032, 6241) can accommodate up to 150 visitors in basic rooms (some have hot water and new bathrooms) in a pretty location. Price includes 3 meals a day. Normally full July through August, call one month in advance. SGL/DBL/LUX at 6000/8000/10,000 AMD per person.

Haghartsin Holiday Home, Golovino District (tel. 3756, Yerevan: (010) 533790, cell: (091) 540044), fax: (010) 528856), www.spyur.am/haghartsin.htm, is located just

outside of town on the Sevan highway, and offers rooms with hot and cold water, TV and facilities. The resort has a restaurant, tea house, bars, cafes, canteen, Disco, horse riding, mountaineering, walking tours, billiards, soccer, table tennis. Also has a youth camp. SGL/DBL/LUX start at 5000/7500/10000 AMD a day, includes 3 meals.

Lernaiyin Hayastan, Dilijan (tel. 5940, 6632, 5944) has hot, cold water, pretty area. Rooms sparse. Single/Double/Triple at 6800 AMD (tourists), 6200 AMD (locals), Lux (3 rooms) at 15000 AMD (tourists), 9100 AMD (locals), De-Lux - 13000 AMD (tourists), 7800 AMD (locals). All prices per person.

Shushan Rest-House, 7 Getapnia p. (tel. 3793) has rooms with cold water, lavatory, bed, wardrobe and a chair in the basic rooms, Lux has TV, bathroom, refrigerator and hot water. Playground, tennis, swimming pool, billiards, buffet, 3 meals a day included in price. Single/Double/Triple at 4000 AMD per person, Lux at 5000 AMD per person.



GUEST HOUSE

Casanova Inn, 63 Hovsepian p. (tel. 4037, Yerevan: +374-10 561467, 284450), URL: www.users.freenet.am/~casanova, E-mail: casanova@freenet.am, is a three-story building with wood trim and balconies. There is an exercise room, sauna and bar, dining room and lounge open to a terrace. Lower level has a café and breakfast patio. The third floor has three rooms with their own design, verandas and facilities. Breakfast is included, dinner and supper extra, menus feature Armenian and Georgian food. Hot water and heating, international telephone, fax machine, satellite TV and internet. Sauna, swimming pool by order. Tour guides, cars with

drivers available (Chrysler Voyager van, Mercedes sedan, Niva off-road). DBL at \$50, additional bed \$15, lunch \$8, supper \$5.

Dili Villa, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 7059, cell. (374 91) 456164), URL: www.dilitours.de, E-mail: info@dilitours.de, is really a B&B run by local artists and the dean of the Fine Arts Academy, Ghazar Ghazarian. The latter shows with the expensive antiques in the house collected during her golden years in the Soviet period. It is a three-story house with a solarium ("winter garden"), loggia with a fireplace, studio and balcony with a views of mountains. 5 bedrooms (2 in attic), 2 bathrooms with constant hot and cold water supply, 2 lavatories, sitting room, dinner available. Some call this living the folk life. I think it's a little too precious; the B&B next door (Tamara's) is much more the real thing at a better price. Still if you like coming half way around the world to hang out with other tourists in a pseudo-village house, this is the ticket. \$20 overnight, \$25 B&B, \$30 half-board, \$35 full board, \$10 lunch or dinner. The house is also the office for DiliTours, a local guide and office.

Haik Rest House 137 Kamo p. (tel. 5237) rooms have hot and cold water, TV, heating, bathroom, toilet, VCR, refrigerator, telephone, tennis, bar, 4 meals a day, AND free excursions to Goshavank, etc. with Doubles at 3500 AMD per person.

Mush, 65 Tbilisi p. (tel. 2455), has decent rooms in a two story white house nested among some trees. Billiards, TV in central room, small pool. SGL/DBL at 8,000/10,000 AMD.



BED & BREAKFAST

Unless otherwise noted, price is per person.

**we liked when we were there.

Anahit Hovsepian, 12a Orjonokidze p., 1st lane (tel. 7533) is located on the slope of the hill surrounded by fruit trees. 3 bedrooms, kitchen bath, lavatory, dining room, natural gas, with water available in the morning, 2 telephones, TV & VCR, iron, teapot and tape recorder. 5000 AMD.

Arus Davtian, 13 1st p. (tel. 7252) two-story located on the edge of a forest in a flower garden. 2 bedrooms, kitchen, bath, lavatory, dining rooms, sport gym, 2 telephones, 2 TVs and other home appliances. 8000 AMD.

Ashot Markarian, 14a Hovsepian p. (tel. 2917) has 4 bedrooms, 1 bath with 24-hour water, kitchen, sitting room, TV, refrigerator. 6000 AMD.

"Ben-Fen", Benik Babinian, 8 Orjonokidze p. 1st lane (tel. 3330) is a two story house overlooking Dilijan and the surrounding forest. The house is provided with natural gas and has a constant hot and cold water supply. 4 doubles, 3 kitchens, 2 bathrooms/lavatories, dining room, 2 balconies, car garage for two vehicles, 2 telephones, TV. 6000 AMD.

"Dilijans," Varazdat Amian, 64a Kalinini p. (tel. 3147), is in the center of the town and has a small pool and garden. 3 doubles, 1 bath, kitchen, telephone, TV, VCR, tape-recorder, iron, hair drier, car, fax, washing machine. Lunch and dinner are served for additional pay. 7000 AMD.

Gretah Movsisian, 48 Hovsepian p. (tel. 4684) two-storied house with balcony is located near a forest. Fresh fruit served from the adjoining vineyard and orchard. 2 bedrooms, 1 bath/lavatory with constant water supply, kitchen, sitting room, TV, VCR, telephone, iron, washing machine. Meals and hiking expeditions available. 5000 AMD.

Greta Zargarian, 44 Hovsepian p. (tel. 4816) two-storied house is surrounded by trees. Breakfast includes homemade dairy products. 3 bedrooms, 1 bath/lavatory with constant water supply, kitchen, dining room, balcony, TV, telephone, car. Breakfast is made from natural ingredients. 5000 AMD.

Grinya, 1st lane, 1 Orjonokidze p. (tel. 2373) two-story house overlooking Dilijan with a garden. 3 bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, bath (water in the morning), TV, VCR, tape-recorder, garage. Car available. 4500 AMD.

***HALA*, 195 Kamo p. (tel. 2993, +091-498933) is a large house on top of a hill ascended by a series of steps and rose gardens. The house is decorated with mosaics made from local green and white stones, a unique touch. There is a large fireplace in the front room made from stone and marble, as well as wood trim throughout the large rambling house. The 2 floors can house up to 8 people, 2 Baths, kitchen, dining room and balconies overlooking the stunning scenery, the back balcony sidles up to the hill behind the house. Wonderful food and a relaxed, "civilized" atmosphere. 8000 AMD.

Hasmik Frangouljan, 8 1st p. (tel. 7456) three-story house with garden and pavilion for parties. 2 bedrooms for up to 5 people, kitchen, bath, dining room, telephone, TV with a satellite antenna. 10,000 AMD

Heghineh Alikhanian, 4th lane, 2 Orjonokidze Sp. (tel. 2797) is located on the side of a hill, surrounded by trees. Second floor balcony overlooks Dilijan. 4 bedrooms, 1 bath with hot and cold water, kitchen, dining room, TV, tape-recorder, telephone. Lunch and dinner available. 5000 AMD.

Hovsepi Hiuratun, 5 Lermontov p. (tel. 2307) has six rooms in an historic house with a pretty white balcony and steeple. TV in central room, double beds, kitchen. Armenian cuisine, hiking. 5000 AMD

Kakav, 53 Kamarini p. (tel. 2148) is built on a slope overlooking the town. 3 bedrooms, 1 bath, kitchen, TV, VCR, car garage. 5000 AMD.

Knarik, 16 Atabekian p. (tel. 2609) is a two-storied house near a forest and has a garden in front. Balcony, fireplace in sitting room, 2 bedrooms, 1 bath, 1 lavatory, kitchen, computer. 8000 AMD.

Leili, 1st lane, 5 Orjonokidze p. (tel. 2137, 4631) is a two-storied house located on the edge of the woods surrounded by an orchard. 1 bedroom for up to 3 people, 1 bath (water in the mornings), kitchen, dining room, library, TV, VCR, tape-recorder, iron, hairdryer, washing machine. Car available. 4000 AMD.

Levon Alikhanian, 62 Hovsepian p. (tel. 7184) is located in the Kaghni Khach district of town. Pretty views, indoor pool and sauna, park nearby. 3 bedrooms, kitchen, 1 bath, telephone, TV, VCR, tape-recorder, iron, hair drier, car, washing

machine. Lunch and dinner are served for additional pay. 5000 AMD.

Liana Mkhitarian, 203 Kamo p. (tel. 5580) overlooks Dilijan. Khachkar in the courtyard, piano, play area. 5 bedrooms, kitchen, 2 baths, 2 lavatories, 2 dining rooms (one large enough for a party of 25), Services: washing machine, telephone, TV & VCR, hairdryer, iron. 4000-5000 AMD.

Lyova Petrosian, 132 Kalinini p. (tel. 4137), has four rooms, fireplace, outdoor garden, near woods. Armenian cuisine, hiking. 5000 AMD.

Nina's, 18 Miasnikian p. (tel. 2330, 623849, 634833) is in a garden and overlooks the town. 5 rooms, play area for children, piano, courtyard with fireplace. Open year round. Contact Nina Hovhannisian.

Nunufar Ghazarian, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 7059) has a flower garden and balcony. 5 bedrooms, two in attic, 2 bathrooms with constant hot and cold water, kitchen, sitting room. Dinner available. 8000 AMD.

Nunufar Ghazumian, 1st lane; 17 Shahumian p. (tel. 5435) is a three-storied house with balconies on both sides and a flower garden in front. Fresh pastries are baked in a separate garden kitchen. 3 rooms, kitchen, 3 lavatories, 1 bath, ironing room. 6000 AMD.

Sofia, 249 Kamo p. (tel. 2366) is easy to find, on the edge of a forest. It has a garden in front and a natural spring. Balcony. English spoken. 1 double, 1 bath/lavatory, kitchen, TV, car, large room for parties available, swing for children. 5000 AMD.

Sunrise, 1st lane, 19 Orjonokidze p. (tel. 7620, 2425) is a two-storied cottage with a garden and balcony overlooking the town. 4 rooms, 2 baths, kitchen, garage, dinner available. The cottage can be rented entirely. 10,000 AMD.



****Tamara & Victoria Davtian**, 12 Miasnikian p. (tel. 5650, 5651), is a treat, a rambling house with large balconies overlooking the forested mountains and a pretty little garden in front. The design is decidedly eclectic, the house has its own mini car (built from spare parts from a variety of cars and carts) and a collection of miniature cars and trains, as well as primitive folk art available for sale. The village atmosphere is complemented by a collection of folk arts and crafts (Tamara was director of the ethnographic museum before it was closed) and visits by wood masters, lavash bakers and other craftsmen. She also has one of the only complete sets of topographic maps for the area, accurately showing hiking trails and historic monuments on the way. 4 rooms accommodating 8 people, kitchen, 1 bath, large balcony, 24 hours cold and hot water, CD player and music, car, garage, guided hiking tours available. 10,000 AMD includes 4 meals. Food is fresh, and if she knows your preferences ahead of time she will prepare menus to suit your needs. Also has camping space in private woods above the house.

Tate, 42h, 26 Komisarneri p. (tel. 2533) is located in a nice house with a pretty flower garden. 6 rooms, TV in central room, Armenian cuisine, hiking. 5000 AMD.

Vrazdat Amian, 64a Kalinin p. (tel. 3147) has a garden and a small pool, 3 bedrooms, kitchen bath, dining room. Services include TV, VCR, tape recorder, hair dryer, car, fax, washing machine. Lunch and diner available for extra fee. 7000 AMD.

Vrezh Frangoulyan, 3 Hovsepian p. (tel. 4192), e-mail: zarina21@rambler.ru, has a garden with flowers, fruit trees and grape vines and the owners make their own dairy products. There is another garden in front. 3 doubles, 1 bath, kitchen,

washing machine, telephone, TV, car. English & Russian spoken. Lunch and dinner are available. 5000 AMD.

Yeva Santrossyan, 4th lane, 4 Shahumian p. (tel. 7648), a two story house, has 2 doubles, 2 baths, TV, hairdryer, iron, car, breakfast, dinner made of natural ingredients available. 4000 - 5000 AMD.

****Zina Chiboukhchian**, 2nd lane, 19 Miasnikian p. (tel. 2504) is located in the center of the town in a wonderful stone and wood fantasy of a house and some wonderful kitsch. 5 rooms, 1 kitchen 2 dining rooms, telephone, TV, VCR, tape-recorder, iron, hair drier, car, washing machine, garage, billiards. Lunch and dinner served for additional pay. 8000 AMD.

Boarding/Apartment is a distinct possibility in Dilijan, though most already offer B&Bs. Ask around when you arrive. 5000-7000 AMD with breakfast.

SPA/SANATORIUM

Dilijan Sanatorium, 66 Getapnia p. (tel. 3927, 5142) has hot and cold water (morning and evening hours), TV, tennis, billiards. Double/Lux at 7500/9000 AMD, includes 3 meals a day and treatment (massage, hydrotherapy).

Children's Tubercular Sanatorium, Orjonokidze p. 5th Lane 1 (tel. 7048, 6179, 618, fax: 5892), is a real therapeutic sanatorium, but accepts paying guests to help defray costs. It is in a pleasant location, provides three meals a day and respiratory, tuberculosis treatments. Doubles at 5000-10000 AMD.

CAMPING

Redkin Camp is near the road to Parz Lich. The camp has cabins, dormitories and spaces for tents. Open May-October, space/bed/cabin at 2000/2500/12000 AMD per day, includes meals.

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 (food shops) and kiosks around town.

\$ = 2000 AMD or less for meal w/o drinks

\$\$ = 2000-3500 AMD

\$\$\$ = 3500 AMD or more

Hatsatun, 2 Sharambeian p. (tel. 5661) has decent food in nice atmosphere. \$\$

Rotund Café, 40 Miasnikian p. has cheap eats in the heart of town. \$

Khnkalianots Restaurant, 29 Miasnikian p, serves tasty and cheap Georgian food including its signature Khnkali. Excellent food, be ready to wait, they make by hand when you order. \$

Sunk, 14 Parz Lich p. (tel. 7496), serves Armenian food in a motel setting. Mushroom dishes. \$\$

Mimino, 30b Miasnikian p. (tel. 4147) is next to the Khnkalianots, a sit down place with excellent Georgian fare. Great prices too, \$-\$\$

Near Town

Getap Restaurant and Motel, Ijevan highway, 1.9 km N of Dilijan center, right side of road, (tel. 5614, 4341) We first discovered Getik/Getap in 1994 during a monitoring trip to Tavush and have been in love every since. Menu varies by the season, anything recommended by the chef is going to be good. In summer see if the local oyster mushrooms are on menu, always good khorovatz and homemade lemonade. Most of the fresh ingredients come from local farmers. Full meals are around 2500-3500 AMD. \$\$-\$\$\$



Getik, Redkin (road to Parz Lich), is in a beautiful old house off the Parz Lich road about 1.5-2 km after you cross the bridge from the highway (on the left). The restaurant is decked out with traditional folk art and handicrafts, plus some of the Bronze Age finds the owners discovered when digging a water line in the back yard, which happens to be part of the Redkin excavation area. Locals still uncover pots, figures and metal items in the area. The food is incredible, the menu varies according to the season and which foods are freshest. We ate like pigs for around 1500 AMD

each and waddled out the door satiated for the rest of the day. Amazing place. \$

Khortkaran, 104 Tbilisian p. (tel. 4844), outdoor khorovatz joint. Tasty and reasonable. \$-\$\$

Restaurant Idjevan Janaparin, 158 Tbilisian p. tasty Armenian cuisine in bungalows near the forest and river. \$\$



AROUND DILIJAN ▲

Dilijan has several sites nearby that are well worth visiting, including the monastery and royal retreat at Haghartsin, Mkhitar Gosh's monastic masterpiece Goshavank and Parz Lich, one of Tavush' natural splendors. Must see are Haghartsin, Goshavank and Parz Lich. All UPPER CASE sites can be done in one day with one or two of the (side sites) depending on how long you take at each site. Sevan Pass is probably best paired with a trip to Lake Sevan or entry to Dilijan.

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

HAGHARTSIN – GOSHAVANK – (Geghatap) - (Aghavnavank) - (Redkin) - PARZ LICH – JUKHTAK VANK – (Matosavank) – (Golovino) – SEVAN PASS

🌸 HAGHARTSIN - Հաղարծին ▲



➡ From the **Dilijan Roundabout**, take the **Ijevan Highway** about 7.5 km to an unmarked paved road to the left (N) at the railway flyover just before Teghut, follow that about 5 km as it climbs Mt. Haghartsin & crosses the river. The first warning of the monastery is about 1 km from the vank, where a small fish sign announces a "dzukhanots" café on the river. Down the path from the sign is an **open wing cross from the 13th c.** Next you will see the large unfinished funicular tower (DD 40.80390 x 44.09550) and then a little beyond as you round a bend and begin to descend a hill, some **khachkars** on the R and on the L, obscured

by trees, a small **stone shrine and khachkars**. Stop to visit the shrine, and continue on up the hill behind it for a beautiful view of the valley and the monastery, as well as a path to the top of the funicular, with its own observation platform. Continuing on, a little beyond you will see the monastery domes, just before the road makes a sharp steep turn to the monastery at **Haghartsin** (DD 40.80196 x 44.89042) 🏰

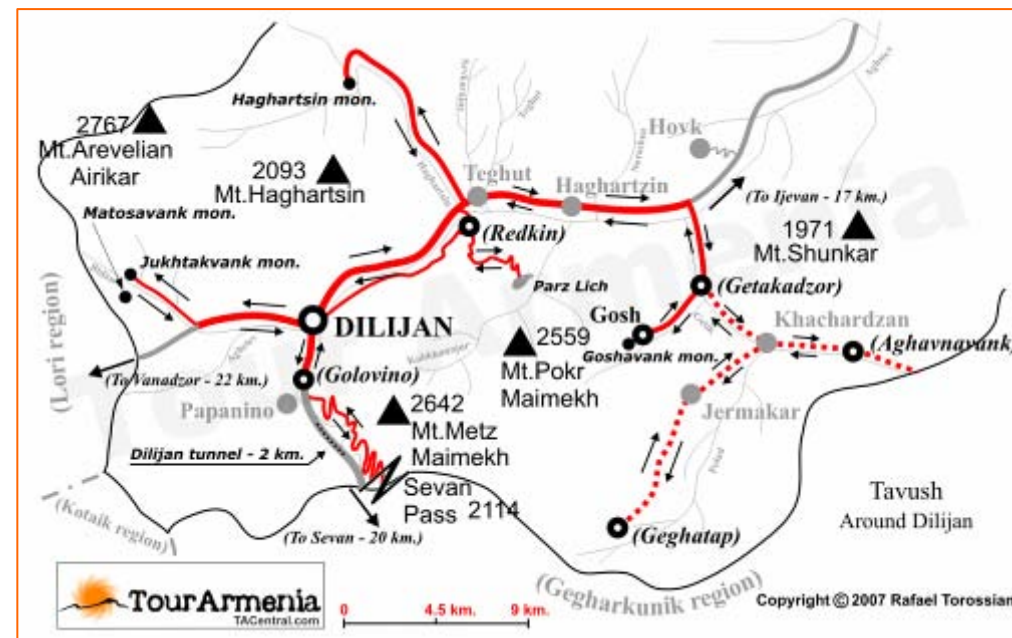
Haghartsin (elev. 1061m, pop. 1542) is one of Armenia's masterpieces of medieval architecture, a collection of buildings nestled in the cleft of the Haghartsin and Ijevan mountains, above the Haghartsin and Mets Aghbiur river gorges. Set in a beautiful natural setting, the three churches comprising the complex are well preserved examples of the mountain monasteries that proliferated in the forests of Northern Armenia. **The churches are locked, see the caretaker** (small house down a short path from the monastery, tip 500-1000 AMD).



History

The monastery was built on 6th century churches that were in turn built over a remote pagan temple, part of the Arshakuni (Arshacid) kingdom of Gugark, Dzorapor district. The area was a hunting ground for the Arshakunis, Bagratunis and Kiurikians and Zakarians who ruled in turn from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th c. As a royal church, the complex boasted a royal banquet hall, one of only two in Armenia (the other is at Haghpas).

The monastery you see today was built between the 11th-13th centuries by the Bagratuni Kiurikian family, the Orbelis and the Zakarian brothers Ivaneh and Zakareh who are featured in a bas relief on the eastern wall of Astvatsatsin Church in

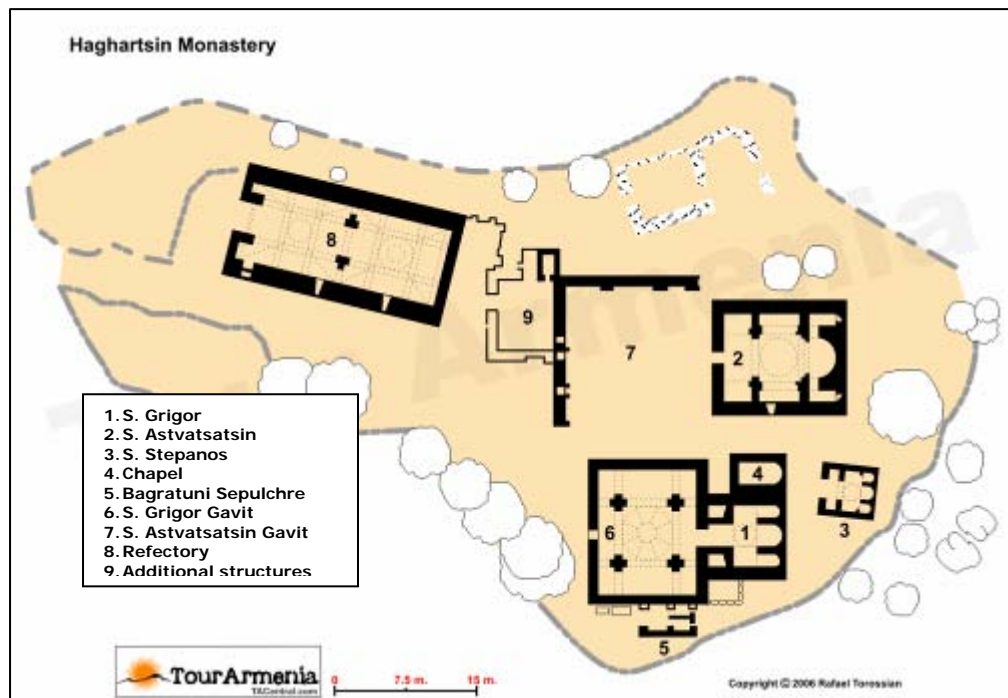


the complex. The most extensive buildings (Ss. Astvatsatsin, S. Grigor gavit, S. Stepanos and banquet hall) were built in the Golden Age of Lori-Berd, a brief time when architecture, art and sciences flourished in the region. Only one day's travel from Haghartsin was Mkhitar Gosh's great monastic academy at Goshavank and the monasteries at Jukhtak and Matosavank.

Built in a defensive position in a remote area far up the mountains, it nonetheless was ruined during Seljuk attacks begun in the late 11th c, and rebuilt beginning the mid 12th c. The monastery was able to hold out against the more lethal advances of Jalai-al-Adin in 1228 when the nakharar allegiances that held Gugark together began to crumble. Egged on by the Mongols, Zakarians, Kiurikians and Orbelis fought bitterly amongst themselves, to settle old scores and increase their lands. When a second invasion by the armies of Kublai Khan began in 1238, this time using sophisticated Chinese siege machinery, the allegiances collapsed, Haghartsin survived mostly due to the political machinations of the Kiurikians, who pledged allegiance to the Khan. This mostly explains the construction of the large royal banquet hall in 1248, well into the Mongol dynasty.



As Tavush crumbled in the 13th and 14th cc, Haghartsin survived, no doubt due to its location in the "royal hunting grounds" now inhabited by Mongols and used by the viziers of Ganjak as their own special preserve. It did not survive the Tatar invasions of Timur (Tamurlane) though, the buildings were burnt and the monks killed or exiled to Lesser Armenia. By the 15th century when the Ottoman Turks arrived, and the 17th c as Persia took possession of Gugark, the monastery was deserted, except for a few faithful praying at a ruined complex.



In the 18th c the region rebelled against the Shah in Iran, and a punitive expedition by the Persians was thwarted by Russian Imperial troops and the immigration of Armenians from Karabakh. Haghartsin was not renovated until the 1970s, a victim of forgotten lore and the push for modernity by the New Armenians in Tiflis. Ignored by Soviet Armenians until the 1970s the monastery was complete restored and studied as the country began a concerted effort to recover its history and culture.

The Complex

The complex comprises three churches, a gavit, dining hall, kitchen and service buildings, and sepulchres and cemetery khachkars. The buildings are covered with inscriptions, which tell something of the history of the monastery, focusing their reconstruction after Seljuk attacks in the mid-12th c. The inscriptions are also gifts to God, done to venerate Him, and as a kind of "flash card" or Indulgence for the Day of Judgment (a medieval

version of 'Hey God, remember me? I'm Ashot, I helped rebuild Haghartsin').



The first building, immediately to the left of the entry is the **refectory**, designed by the architect Minas and built in 1248. The building is a prototype of refectories throughout Armenia, like the one at Haghpata in Lori region. The building is

a large hall formed by the joining of two square rooms roofed by four sets of crossed arches with a small skylight at the top. The walls are lined with stone benches and on the western wall, next to the door, there is a broad archway for large numbers of visitors to get in and out. Towards the kitchen area the facade of the exterior ribbing and the gradual curvature of trefoils and quatrefoil stonework ease the transition of the rectangular walls to the octagonal dome. The **kitchen** (in ruins, with working oven) serviced the hall, and was able to cook for very large feasts, judging by the size of the hall, up to one hundred or more.



The oldest building is the **S. Grigor Lusavorich** church (10th c), built during the Bagratuni dynasty on the ruins of an earlier church. There are some interesting reliefs at the four corners of the roofing, Armenian 'gargoyles.' A small single apse **chapel** (called the **katoghike** or cathedral) is connected to S. Grigor on the N, in perfect alignment.

The standing **gavit** (end of 12th c) was built at the behest of Ivaneh Zakarian in front of S. Grigor. The gavit has a squat octahedral vaulted roofing above the central hall, supported on arches abutting the walls and ornamented corners, decorated with rosettes and sculptures of monks carrying crosses, staffs and birds. The central window is cross-shaped right above the main entry to the church.

Further to the north is the largest church, **S. Astvatsatsin**. The church is dated to 1071 and rebuilt in 1281 for Zakareh and Ivaneh Zakarian, and is a cruciform central dome type with annexes at the four corners. The church is easy to find, overshadowing the others, the dome resting on a tall hex-decahedral drum, faceted with columns

and arches on the sides and decorated with bands, trefoils and orbs. The structure is obviously quite heavy, though the protruding arches and columns create an optical illusion of lightness. The original stone roofing on the dome was covered by metal sheets in the 1970's renovation. The border on the southern entry is decorated with rows of trefoils, a popular design motif in the period, symbolically representing the Holy trinity.



The eastern façade of the church has a bas relief sculpture of two monks pointing to a model of the church with a winged dove in the middle. The unique feature of this wall sculpture, and what sets it apart from others (Sanahin, Haghpata, Harichavank) is the attention to detail, to making each figure more than a totem. Both figures are dressed in robes, but the one on the right is more richly attired, as are their faces, eyes and hair. This is a breakthrough in representative sculpture in Armenia, as iconography, while retaining formalized rules of iconography, also introduced a new naturalism and a more direct appeal to human emotion. In this, 13th c Armenians were exploring their own version of Renaissance Art being perfected in Northern Italy. The figures have been conjectured to represent the founders of the church, the Father Superior and an assistant, but others believe they represent prince Ivaneh, and important donor and patron of the monastery in the 13th c, and either the Father superior or Katolikos. The tent roofing on the model is believed to be the original 11th c church dome, which was replaced with the present one in the late 13th c.

The interior has a bas-relief of the Virgin and Child between two angels.

In front of the main entrance was a huge **gavit**, destroyed in the 15th c. and from which the NW wall remains.

A magnificent 13th c **Khachkar** stands next to the side entrance.

To the east is **S. Stepanos** (12th-13th cc), a cruciform dome type, once connected to the apse of the katoghike with a small colonnaded arcade. The interior is elaborately detailed with delicate vaulting ribbing and ornamental angle moldings.



There is an old nut tree just E of Astvatsatsin, which some say is as old as the monastery itself, others as old as the pre-Christian temple that once stood here. From here there is a fantastic view of the forests, rover canyons and the remains of a cemetery including the **Bagratuni patriarchal sepulchres** and khachkars south of S. Grigor. The burial vaults have two separate chapels, common for the time (10th c).

The **Khachkars** on the road to Haghartsin were made for supplicants to the monastery in the 12th-13th cc. Their position is not haphazard, the road is on the original trail leading into the monastery and faithful would, depending on their spiritual and social position, have their khachkars nearer or farther from the monastery. Done to commemorate a donation, as penance, or in memory of one of the monastery's members, the khachkars are remarkable for both their intricate beauty and their stunning location.

Monastery surroundings are worth exploring, the area is surrounded by forests, a meadow, two river canyons (Haghartsin and Mets Aghbiur) and a cliff side.

Camping is possible in the area, ask the caretaker first (a tip is helpful). Note area is frequented by tourists.

✦ GOSHAVANK - Գոշավանք ▲

➡ From the **Dilijan** Roundabout, take the Ijevan highway NE about 7.5 km past the Haghartsin turnoff, continue another 2 km (past Teghut and Haghartsin Village) to a R (S) turnoff (signposted: a large sign for "Chambarak" and a small one for "Gosh, 7 km") towards Nerkin Gosh. Take that road 2.8 km S into the small hamlet of Nerkin Gosh (formerly Alachukh) and then right at the sign marked "Gosh 4 km" and continue for another 2 km through a river canyon to Gosh Village (DD 40.7225 x 45.033333 elev. 1215m, pop. 1554) limits and a final 1 km to **Goshavank** (DD 40.72932 x 44.99731) 🏰 🏠 🌿



Goshavank (Nor Getik, elev. 1252m) is on the opposite mountain range from Haghartsin, and is famous for its founder, Mkhitar Gosh, scholar and author of Armenia's first criminal code and for its intricate 13th c khachkars and reading room, Armenia's first law library. The monastery is inside The Dilijan forest preserve, but the area has long since been cleared of trees, it sits on a hill slope in a wildflower meadow, starkly different but equally evocative as its sister vank to the north.

History

The monastery was built for the Armenian scholar, legal expert and fabulist, Mkhitar Gosh on the ruins of an older monastery, Getik, which was destroyed by an earthquake in 1188. It is also referred to as Nor Getik. Little is known of Getik, but that it was probably built in the 4th-5th cc,

under the patronage of the Arshakuni kings, and may have been erected on a pre-Christian temple or altar. This would be in character with other pagan sites in the region, outdoor altars or shrines that venerated woodland spirits believed to inhabit the forests. Certain mushrooms in the area are known to induce euphoria and "visions," and some scholarly study has been done on the influence of these [hallucinogenic mushrooms](#) (p. 12) on ancestral Armenian religion (lucky sod).

Soon after its reincarnation in the late 12th c. as Goshavank, the monastery became one of the most famous religious and scholarly centers in medieval Armenia, led by one of Armenia's most accomplished scholars, legal experts and scientists. Mkhitar Gosh (Mkhitar of Gosh). Mkhitar Gosh (1130-1140? – 1213) was one of the greatest intellectual powers of his day, authoring more than a dozen works including the codification of Armenian law, the Fables, a number of prayers, sermons, theological treatises and a chronicle of Armenian history. He was twice awarded the title **Vardapet** (doctor of theology), was confidant and advisor to the most important nakharars and the king of Georgia, and taught a generation of scholars, historians and theologians at his college at Goshavank, a who's who of intellectual thought in the 13th century.

Born in the city of Gandzak (modern Kirovabad) in Azerbaijan, in his early teens Mkhitar was ordained a celibate priest and began his studies with the 12th c. Vardapet Hovhannes Tavushetsi, from whom he earned his first Vardapet. His second was earned when he entered a monastic community on Black Mountain in Cilicia, according to legend being too modest to tell the monks he already had earned one doctorate. From there he lived in Erzerum, where he befriended and became an advisor to Prince Kurd Artsruni of Gugark, who had been exiled by the Georgian king. This wealthy prince was to become one of his most important patrons. Returning to Gandzak, jealous clerics precipitated his leaving to Khachen, where he found patrons in Prince Vakhtank and his brothers.

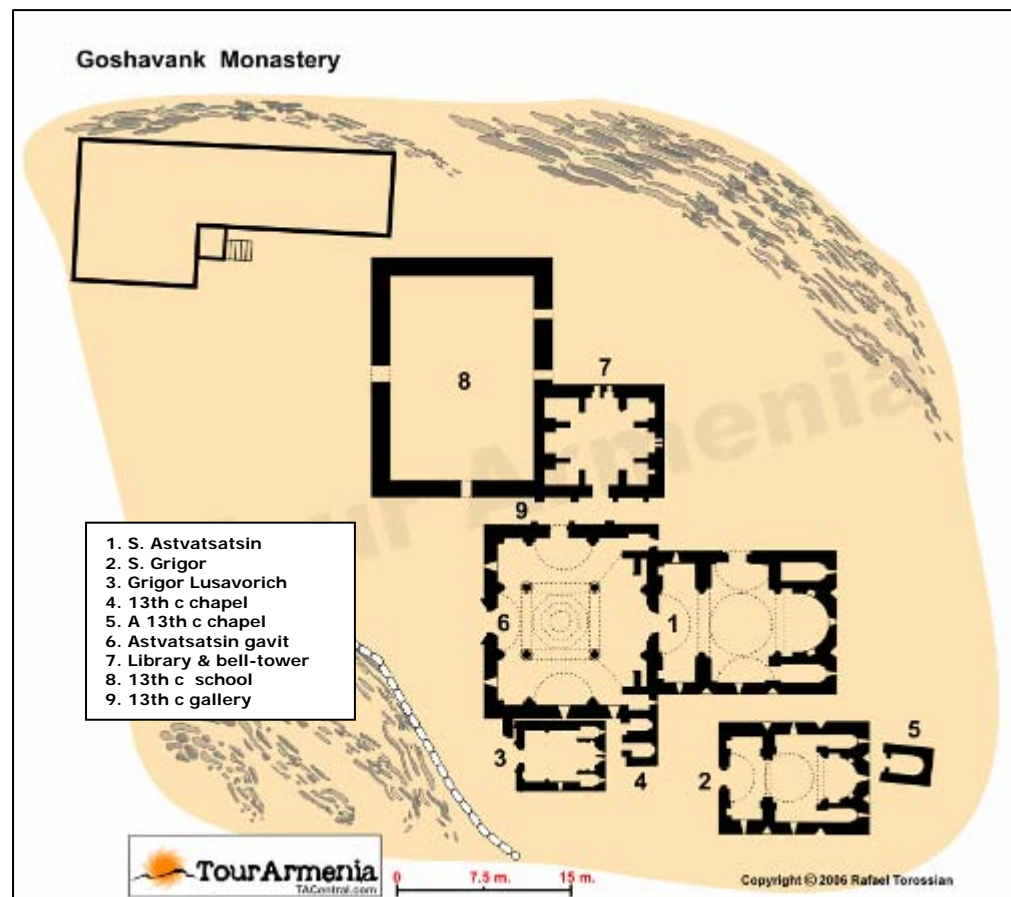
Prince Kurd Artsruni was reinstated in his lands in Kaiyen around 1184 and Mkhitar joined him, teaching at Getik until its destruction by earthquake. By now renowned throughout Armenia, Mkhitar had the monastery rebuilt with the help of his powerful supporters: the general Ivaneh Zakarian, the Khachen princes and the Artsrunis. An ascetic, Mkhitar lived some distance from the monastery, visiting the monastery to teach and supervise its research.

His era was one of great aspirations for the Armenians, who hoped to re-establish their hegemony over the Armenian Highlands as the Arshacids and Bagratunis once had. Surviving the Seljuk attacks, Armenians began the process of defeating the invaders and to establish the Armenian kingdom anew. It was also a complicated time of shifting alliances and petty feuds, and Mkhitar was sought on several occasions to resolve disputes and advise councils. In 1205 and 1207, Mkhitar was key to councils called by the Sparapet Zakareh Zakarian, which created the successful alliance of the Georgian kingdom and Armenian princely families to resist and drive Seljuk forces from eastern Armenia. Commander in chief of the joint Armenian-Georgian forces, Zakarian led an expedition that drove Seljuks from all of Eastern Armenia, establishing a new Golden Age in Armenia and the incredible flowering of culture that took place during the next 40 years. His father-confessor, Mkhitar's and Zakareh's lives intertwined throughout this period, one of the most dangerous, heady and exciting of Armenia's history, the military prowess of the Armenians reigned supreme in their new alliance with Georgia, and the sciences, theology and rule of law were expanded and accepted as essential components to society. In one of life's little twists of fate, both men died in the same year (1213).



Mkhitar Gosh was known for many accomplishments, but to Goshavank, none is as important as his compilation of Armenian Law, and establishing Armenia's first law library, organized to rest the rise of Islamic law in the region.

A man of his times, which were, frankly, feudal, Mkhitar stood for order, his work reflecting this



desire for order and rule. His writings reflect this, the codification of Armenian law obviously slanted towards the rich and powerful at the expense of peasants. His Fables were a series of lessons, admonishing peasants to respect their betters, the poor the wealthy, the young their elders. Finding divine wisdom on all things, all things led to God through obedience and compliance. Conventional wisdom, they were a product of the times, it is no surprise Mkhitar and the nakharars were so concerned with order and obedience, only by forging allegiance could they hope to rebuild their kingdom after the destruction wrought by the Seljuks. And they were doing it too! By Mkhitar's death, Armenians believed they had survived the worst, that God at last showed favor on them, endowing them with the intellectual, military and

culture powers to create the Elysian Fields in Gugark.

To get a taste of Gosh's philosophy, read R. Bedrossian's wonderful translation of Mkhitar's [The Fables](#). And source chronicle for the building of the monastery is Bedrossian's translation of Kirakos Gandzaketsi's [History of Armenia](#).

The monastery was built between 1188 and the late 13th century, and was the work of many talented architects, carpenters and stone masons. Most were not recorded, or lost to the anonymity imposed on them by Feudal tradition and early Church doctrine (the soul is counted by God while the individual is not). Exceptions were made for great masters, and we are lucky at Goshavank that

three great masters of their art form are recognized: the architect Mkhitar (the Carpenter) and his disciple Hovhannes and the great sculptor Pavgos, the creator of some of Armenia's most beautiful khachkars.

Patrons of the project are recorded (the rich getting their just rewards, at least on earth), including the Princes Kurd Artsruni and Zakareh Zakarian, along with others: Lord Vakhtang Khachenatsi (Haterketsi), his brothers Grigor, Grigoris and Khoidan, the Prince Vasak, Davit and Sadun (the sons of Kurd) and their sister Arzu Khatun (Vakhtang Haterketsi's wife).

The Complex

The monastery includes the churches of St. Astvatsatsin (1196), St. Grigor (1231), St. Grigor Lusavorich (1241), a scriptorium (1291) and a school (XIII century). Historical sources also mention the existence of a university and a seminary, where manuscripts were created and preserved.



The chronicles mention that Mkhitar and his supporters began their reconstruction of the monastery not with Astvatsatsin, but by building a smaller church in the name of *Saint John the Baptist*, which location has not been conclusively found, but which some think became the foundations of the small basilica S. Grigor.

Following, they began the foundations of Astvatsatsin in 1191 and a refectory and the university.

The main church, **S. Astvatsatsin** (1191-1196) was built by the founder of the new monastery, Mkhitar Gosh, and belongs to the types widespread in the tenth to the thirteenth centuries — a domed

square or cross-winged domed building with annexes in the corners of the central cross. It has one small chapel with a semi-circular apse on the eastern side and vaulted roofing. The façade's niches have quatrefoil and scalloped tops and arched facets. The front portal was added in 1197, built by the architect Mkhitar and is an elaborate mix of protruding columns, archways and frames decorated with conches, rosettes, geometric patterns and an oriental arch above the church door with an elaborate ornamental relief using a stylized sun. The sides of the church are carved with many crosses and inscriptions by supplicants and donors to the monastery.

There is an unusual framed sun dial on the southern façade.



The large **gavit** (1197-1203) overwhelms the church in size, if not height. It is a large square space with arched octahedral ribbing above the central area, braced by four central columns and wall abutments. The squat building and centralized arched roof is close to peasant house of the time ("glkhatun"), a squat structure with tented roofing and central skylight. At Goshavank, the gavit has small annexes in the corners of its eastern end.

Close by and south of Astvatsatsin are two other churches.

S. Grigor (1208-1241) is an almost identical design to Astvatsatsin, except smaller, with a different detailing. Like the larger church is a cross-winged dome with four annexes in its corners, a chapel on the east end having semi-circular apses in its thick wall. It is missing its original cupola, the current is a 20th century apparition.

The remarkable, small **S. Grigor Lusavorich**, church was started in 1237 and finished by Prince Grigor-Tkha in 1241. The church, a single-nave basilica is unique for its time, based on 5-6th c. basilicas (on which it may very well have been built) but set off from the earlier structures by its elaborate decoration.



The exterior of the church is richly detailed with spans of arches, spandrels and half-arches topping the building at the corners. This is similar to the motif found at the mina church at Tekhtsenut vank. Leading historians to believe both churches were done by the same stone masters.

The intricate patterns serve as a transition between the arcature of the facades, and on the western wall the whole thing creates an illusion of size, adding weight and drawing the eyes upward and outward with the spanning arch lines.

The windows on the eastern and western walls are unique, their shape, border and design unlike other structures of the time. Note the tympanum (the space between the lintel and arch) over the western windows. They are filled with detailed carvings and interlacing floral stems and rosettes. Similar patterns cover the lintels themselves, column abaci (slab above the capital), the decorative molding carried around arched wall openings and the border of eight-pointed stars on the portal frame.

The *eight-pointed star* is a symbolic function, coming from sacred geometry used at the time. Handed down from the time of Pythagoras, the geometric dimensions and designs on sacred edifices were considered spiritually powerful, in older times the shape, pattern and numbering of

items were thought to physically evoke the powers of the spiritual world, and while this direct connection with God was less believed in Medieval Armenia, it was respected nonetheless with the number of steps (3, 6 or 9), columns and arches, and their dimensions, carried forth from Classical sacred geometric rules.

Following the rules of sacred geometry practiced in Armenia, the eight pointed star was a specific spiritual sign, the number eight represents rebirth and rejuvenation; eight following seven, which represented completion, the end of a cycle, thus, eight meant beginning again. The resurrection of Christ happened on the eight day of the passion, so the number eight would pronounce to the faithful (many of whom could not read, but were taught signs and the meaning of symbols, much of which came down from pagan times in folklore, myths and legends) that this was the place of rebirth, the home of the one who cancelled death.

See our [Sacred Geometry web site](#) for more information about sacred geometry.

The carving of the exterior is so carefully done, it has the impression of lacework, a painstaking process and one traced to masters like Pavgos, who carved the incredible Lace Khachkar nearby (see below).

Inside the small space, the intricate patterns continue. The wall of the altar apron has an explosion of design motifs; arches, detailed geometric patterns, trefoils and globes. The support columns for the apse, lining its walls are carved with twisted fluting and fillets. Floral patterns continue in the church décor, over doors especially.



The **library / scriptorium** (1241-1291) is north of Astvatsatsin. Built long after Mkhitar's death, it nonetheless is directly descended from a book depository that stood at that spot during his time. The structure is unique. The older building was small with niches in the walls for keeping books and parchments, and was designed in the peasant "glkhatun" style (arched roofing leading to a central skylight).

Next to it was a very large building probably used as the refectory and as **Mkhitar's university**. Historical sources mention the existence of a **university / seminary** from the early 13th century, and here is where it stood. The university trained a number of important scholars, vardapets and scientists in the next century, among them the Martiros, his student the scientists and historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi (13th c. "The History of Armenia"), Gandzaketsi's teacher Yovhannes Vanakan (d. 1251) and his classmate Vartan Areveltsi ("Song of Songs").

It was also roofed with wooden beams, and judging by the huge span of the room, was made from three connecting "tent roofs" supported by central columns.



When it was decided to add a two-story **bell-tower**, both structures were rebuilt, the construction done in two stages; eight wall abutments were added to support a new stone roof held by two pairs of cross-arches that covered the new library cruciform superstructure. The second floor was halted (due to Mongol incursions in the area begun in 1238), with barely two rows of stone and half columns completed before construction stopped.

The second floor was completed in 1291, after the nakharars made compact with their now ruling Mongols lords, and, funded by patrons Dasapet and Karapet (inscribed on the walls), was crowned with a small chapel with two altar apses and a multicolumn rotunda belfry, the base for which is a modified "glkhatun", albeit in stone rather than the traditional wood and its height dominated all other structures in the compound. Entry to the second floor chapel was from the roof of the auditorium on a cantilever staircase.

The library is in a central plan, with annexes on the four corners and each cardinal direction. This gave additional space for various activities: study, lectures and manuscript writing, for which the monastery was renowned. Décor is plain, reflecting the tenuous times and its purpose as a place of work and study. Its rounded and grooved abutments were topped with plain abaci, trefoils on the lower angles their only adornment. The false vaulting above the room is composed of various triangular pieces, a mosaic that ends in the shape of an eight-pointed star.

SW of the main group of buildings is the **S. Hripsimeh chapel** (1254), a domed building, with a square plan of unique composition, the dome drum rising from the square roof, supported by the interior walls of the tiny space. This may be the location of the original S. John the Baptist, but it is under dispute. A khachkar and base are on the front of the building, which is closely in size and form to pre-Christian shrines.

Khachkars The khachkars created by master carver Pavgos in Goshavank stand out among khachkars of the 13th c. The best is the 1291 "Aserghnagords" (embroidered) khachkar with the maker's name carved in the bottom left star. This is a true masterpiece, a stunning work of art. It's lacy pattern and ornaments are carved in layers in a complicated design that seems to lift the stone from its base, the lace pattern delicately shifting as you move around the cross.

The complex pattern delineates the basic forms of the carving, a cross on a shield of rosettes with six-pointed stars on the borders and corners, the cross resting on a mind-boggling solar orb in even more intricately carved lace, the tree of life reduced to four Seed pods also carved as lace, one for each of the evangelists. All of the intricately carved figures and objects are impressive, the lace patterns interwoven between them representing floral and geometrical ornaments never repeats

itself. There were originally two copies, the second is in the State History Museum in Yerevan.



In the **village**, W of the monastery, there is a small **museum** with artifacts from the area. The village also has the reputed remnants of **Mkhitar's house** and his **mausoleum**, constructed in his old age.

Hiking: from Gosh, there are a number of hikes into the surrounding forests. From the eastern edge of the village (about 1 km from the monastery), cross the Gosh river at the tributary of the mountain stream and follow the first SE fork up Mt. Gei about 1.7 km to Gei Lich, the deep, clear lake mentioned in the chronicles of the monastery. It's a steep climb, the stream ends about 500m short of the lake. Another mountain hike is S/SW of the monastery, following the S mountain stream then at 500m the S/SE fork to the top of Mt. Maraldag (2126m), or the SW fork to the S (at 1.09 km) fork to the 2357m crown of the same mountain. It is 9.5 km from Goshavank to Parz Lich on the NE slope of Kazakh-Bek.

Camping in the area. **Overnight** possible in the village, very rustic. Note area is frequented by tourists.

SIDE TRIP: (Geghatap - Գեղաթափ)

➡ From **Gosh**, backtrack to Nerkin Gosh, then go S about 4.2 km to the bridge over the Getik River to Kachardzan (old Polad), cross the bridge and in the SW edge of the village take the W mountain road (Jeeps and Vilis/UAZ only) about 3.9 km to Jermakar, continue S through the village and follow the road another 7.8 km or so as it winds along the SE face of Mt. Maraldag to (**Geghatap**)



(**Geghatap - Գեղաթափ** formerly Murtel) is in an alpine village with shepherds to keep you company. The ruined 11-13th c. church nearby is not worth a trip in itself, but the gorgeous alpine meadows, ablaze with poppies, daisies, mountain iris and tulips and black-eyed Susan's in the summer is, especially for hikers and campers. The setting is stunning, you can easily imagine yourself Heidi romping through the meadows or Julie Andrews running across the German Alps here. Cold weather reigns except for the warmest months (late June – early August).

SIDE TRIP: (Aghavnavank - Աղավնավանք)

➡ From **Geghatap** backtrack to Kachardzan (old Polad) and from the bridge proceed E on the larger (but still poor) road about 3 km to the (**Aghavnavank** DD 40.7308333 x 45.0933333)



(**Aghavnavank - Աղավնավանք** formerly Salakh elev. 1443m, pop. 1978) is something else, another alpine village, but, situated on the mountain road to Gegharkunik and Lake Sevan, something of a provincial village, locals fancy themselves a little more sophisticated than the shepherds at Geghatap, they are on the road to Sevan, after all! About 200 m south of the bridge into the village, E of the road is the 11th-13th cc **Anapat-Astvatsatsin church**, a cross-form dome type with annexes in the corners. There is also an early (12th c) bridge on the Getik river.

SIDE TRIP: (SE route to Sevan)

➡ On a very rough road (Jeep/Vilis/UAZ), going southeast from (**Aghavnavank**) it is about 2.2 km to the bridge crossing the Getik river and Dzoravank (old Gharaghaya), 14 km to Martuni and another 11.5 km to Chamarak and from there 15 km SW to Shorzhah on Lake Sevan. The road is terrible, but the nature and solitude is incredible. Do note you are close to the Azerbaijan border for much of this route, take precautions.

SIDE TRIP: (Redkin excavation - Ռեդկին պեղում)

➡ Easiest way to the site is to head NE on the Ijevan (Tbilisi) Hwy from the Dilijan roundabout for about 6.7 km to a sign-posted ("Parz Lich", "Cinema House", "Sunk Restaurant Hotel") R turn to a road that crosses the river and then heads R again (S/SW) for about 1.5 m to the Getik Restaurant (large house with balcony on L) and **Redkin Excavation site**. Alternately from Dilijan, beginning from the town square, take Miasnikian street E for about 5.9 km as it leaves town and winds along the South bank of the river to the Parz Lich exit, and just nearby, on the R a large house with wooden balcony; the Getik Restaurant and **Redkin Excavation site** (DD 40.76561 x 44.92130)

(**Redkin excavation - Ռեդկին պեղում**) is actually all around you, beginning from a camp site about 600m S of the bridge. The excavation is named after a highway contractor who, along with his fellow workers, uncovered Iron Age artifacts while working on the Dilijan-Tbilisi road. At the original spot there is a small monument to the excavation, plus almost invisible evidences of


the excavation that revealed a large settlement in the area in the Bronze-Iron Ages.

A 'working dig' continues in the area, albeit unofficially by local dwellers. The **Getik Restaurant**, about 600m beyond the original site has a number of items found in a large pit (shaft tomb) while digging for water pipes. The finds include ceramic vases and some iron and bronze items. Artifacts are on display at the Local Tradition Museum.



Food. **Getik**, is in a beautiful old house off the Parz Lich road about 1.5-2 km after you cross the bridge from the highway (on the left). The restaurant is decked out with traditional folk art and handicrafts, plus some of the Bronze Age finds the owners discovered when digging a water line in the back yard, which happens to be part of the Redkin excavation area. Locals still uncover pots, figures and metal items in the area. The food is incredible, the menu varies according to the season and which foods are freshest. We ate like pigs for around 1500 AMD each and waddled out the door satiated for the rest of the day. Amazing place. \$

PARZ LICH - ՊԱՐԶ ԼԻԽ

➡ From the **Redkin Excavation** (see above) go SW 700 m on the Dilijan road and then E on the Parz Lich road about 8.2 km as it winds and switchbacks up the Kazakh Bek mountain to **Parz Lich** (DD 40.75331 x 44.96194) 

Parz Lich (Clear Lake) is in a clearing in the forest, and is an ideal locale for a picnic and

hiking. The water, unlike its name, is not clear like Sevan, it changes colors according to the season (green in the summer when algae blooms are prevalent, gray or brown in autumn, glassy gray or blue in the stillness of a sunny day). The shoreline is well kept, a Hangestan Goti (Rest Area) with picnic tables, khorovatz grills and a simple café for Saturday-Sunday frolickers. Tables are 5000 AMD, parking on site is 1000 AMD, camping at the rest area is 3000 AMD. You can park before the gate for free and as long as you don't use the table, the lake shore is free. Camp beyond the rest area and it is free too (and more secluded, take the path on the far end of the lake)



Taxis from Dilijan to the site are 3000 AMD, the same price taxi drivers to anywhere within 50 km from town. Taxi drivers usually charge 1000 AMD extra to wait while you frolic in the woods. One taxi service we found at the site is Meruju Balinian (tel. 40-05), who offered to discount a bit for longer trips.



Hikes. The area is great for the casual or avid hiker. There are trails leading into the forest all around the lake, plus some half day hikes of worth. From Parz Lich you can hike down the NE slope of Kazakh-Bek to Goshavank (9.5 km); NE following the Kobkhanajur river to the Aghtsev river near the village of Haghartsin (3.5 km); and SW across Kazakh-Bek to climb Mt. Mets Maimekh (2559m, 10 km).

Camping at the lake or on one of the mountain trails.

✦ JUKHTAK VANK - ԶՈՒԽՏԱԿ ՎԱՆԷ

➡ From the **Dilijan** roundabout take the Vanadzor highway (Kalinini p.) about 3.3 km to a right fork off the road (a large metal container/kiosk is at the opposite right corner), take that road about 2.8 km (under the tall rail bridge & past the sports sanatorium on the left) to a spot about 100m before the gates to the Dilijan Frolova Balka Mineral Water bottling plant where a large metal sign in Armenian declares the area a nature preserve under the protection of the Soviet Armenia government (forbidding hunting, collecting of medicinal herbs, building campfires, driving over or otherwise spoiling nature—oh, those were the days!) and where a dirt path forks to the right and sharply uphill, leading in about 500m to a dead end (gully wash) and in another 300m by foot to **Jukhtak Vank** (DD 40.75798 x 44.80708) 🏰 🌿



Jukhtak Vank - ԶՈՒԽՏԱԿ ՎԱՆԷ (*S. Petros monastery*) is in the western forests of Dilijan, on a rump of land surrounded on three sides by a ridge of mountains. To the SW, below the

monastery, is the B'l'dan River, running towards the Aghstev. The site is popular with campers and "woodsmen" (read: illegal loggers), both sets of whom leave their marks on the hillside. The site is otherwise dramatic and inviting, with thick stands of trees towering over the ancient sacred site, streams of spring water trickling down the trail.

The name Jukhtak means twin springs, and we're not sure if this reflects two springs on the monastery grounds or the spring-fed B'l'dan River downhill. One of the names for the monastery that comes to us from an inscription on the basilica wall, erroneously used to date the entire complex:

"In the year 1201, in the (Emir's lands) of Lasha and the Khanate of (missing), I Hairapet, abbot of S. Petros Monastery, built S. Astvatsatsin with the hope that every sunrise in both vestibules one mass will be offered for me and one for my brother Shmavon, and in all the churches for my parents."

The churches are in fact built over much older foundations. Note the stepped platforms, their positioning and use of older cyclopean stones in the walls.



The small basilica church, *S. Astvatsatsin*, is finely built using local basalt, a single nave hall type reminiscent of much earlier churches from the 5th-6th cc. It is built on a stele, a hallmark of pre-Christian foundation design; it certainly has the same dimensions as the Hellenistic temples of the early Arshakuni era.



Also note outside the basilica and the main church are some very ancient gravestones, if not of the Pagan era, then just after, strongly pointing to the site's pre-Christian use before the Grigor Lusavorich Brigade arrived to 'straighten things out among the heathens'. On the western wall, either side of the entry are a row of khachkars (11th-13th cc) and the high window has an interesting arch detail, an stylized orb with grooved borders flowing over and aside it, two rosettes on either side at the top. It is most unusual for Armenian art, and almost looks like an Egyptian Anks.



The main church, *S. Grigor* (12th-13th c), is a cruciform dome type in its latest incarnation, with annexes in the four corners. The dome, which rested on the walls and four arch spans in the central hall has long since fallen with nary a stone remaining to show its existence. Probably succumbing to the same earthquake that toppled Getik Monastery 17 km to the east, the loss of the dome and continued earth tremors weakened the walls of the building so they must be held together

with iron bands. Placed in the latter 20th c. In having this problem, the church reveals some of the engineering prevalent in Armenian churches at the time. Domes did not merely rest on their central walls, they were an integral part of the building, acting like keystones in a window arch.



The arch distributes the force of the wall away from the window hole, allowing it to remain open. Domes certainly depended on their support walls and abutments, but they also served to spread weight evenly across the substructure, as well as tying the walls together, preventing them from leaning outwards. Without the dome, S. Grigor's walls were susceptible to both the elements and to their natural outward force, in effect pulling the walls away from each other.



The church was built with finely hewn stone, the western wall features a full arch way over the portal, framed with a rectangular set of bands. The eastern apse on the inside displays a nicely carved 12th c khachkar on the altar floor, the tall

central arches rest directly on the walls of the space, with two sets of false columns to act as transition from one wall to another. The high eastern window has a scallop arch, but the walls are otherwise simple, even severe, there are no signs of frescos or decorative carvings. A multitude of stone khachkars adorn the eastern walls, testaments to the faithful and donors to the church. Without its dome, grass and wild flowers grow in the upper crevices of the church, adding to its forlorn, poetic nature.

There are picnic tables on the monastery grounds. **Camping** possible, on the premises or in the nearby forests.

SIDE TRIP: (Matosavank - Մաթոսավանք)

➡ This Monastery is on the hill **opposite Jukhtak**, if you cross the river and begin climbing up the vehicle path, you'll have to wind about 5-6 times, then (if you're looking up the hill) go left about 120 m and you should find the hidden **Matosavank Monastery**. 🏰



Matosavank was a walled monastery butting against a hill slope of Mt. Bunduk. Not much remains of the monastery, the forest has all but claimed this outcropping of religious life in the mid 13th century, except half-ruins showing its former grandeur. Inside the monastery, the smaller church, S. Astvatsatsin Pghendzahanki (1247) was built during the first years of the Mongol suzerainty in the area, for Avak, the son of the great Zakarian Prince Ivanek.

Facing superior numbers and Chinese siege machines, Avak, like so many of his counterparts, surrendered rather than face annihilation, making separate peace with the Mongols and serving with their armies as they moved westward in their invasion. Often betraying their own cousins, they nonetheless retained their lands, sometimes expanding their holdings. Mongols, keenly aware of their ambitions and the tenuous nature of the nakharar (princely) alliance, used this to their advantage, feeding jealousies and egging them on in their petty fights. It is said the Armenian's worst enemy in these times were not their invaders, but rather themselves. Avak himself became, like his uncle the great general Zakareh, head of the Georgian/Armenian army, only rather than fight for freedom as his uncle had, he fought instead for Mangu Khan, grandson of the great Genghis Khan.

Despite his high position, Avak must not have had much faith in his situation, building Matosavank in an even more remote location than Jukhtak. His fears were correct, the monastery did not long survive the Tatar attacks during the 14th and 15th centuries and was already deserted by the time the Ottomans appeared on the scene.

The church is succumbing to the seeping soil, its cross form with elongated hall and gavit partially submerged on one side. Inside you can get a better feel for the church, which was admittedly smaller and less grand than its cousins at Haghartsin and Goshavank. What is most remarkable about the place, and what makes it worth the trudge up the ravine, are the numerous and intricately carved khachkars in and around the church. They proliferate, one large khachkar outside the entry, numerous on the walls of the interior. The half-ruined walls, covered with lichen and the encroaching forest grass, are a romantic yes sad reminder of the last golden age of Armenia's history, twilight of culture and science in a country about to be doomed to 400 years of subservience to outside invaders.

Camping in the area, no one will bother you.

SIDE TRIP: (Golovino excavation - Գոլովինո պեղում)

➡ From the **Dilijan** roundabout take the South road to Sevan (Gorki, then Kamo pts.) about 3 km to **Golovino** district. The excavation is on the side of the road.

(**Golovino excavation - Գոլովինո պեղում**) has not even a mound to show where the famous excavation revealed Iron Age shaft graves, and later digs uncovered traces of Bronze Age activity. Artifacts are on display at the Local Tradition Museum.

✧ SEVAN PASS - Սևանի Լեռնանցք

➡ From **Golovino** (see above), continue S on the Sevan highway about 12 km (15 km from the Dilijan roundabout) and bypass the new tunnel to take the road as it winds and switchbacks up the W face of Mets Maimekh to **Sevan Pass**

Sevan Pass. The mountain pass is at 2260 m above sea level, but the trip up is one of the most beautiful and exhilarating in Armenia. If you are going to Sevan in a hurry, take the new tunnel, which cuts 45 minutes off your drive, but if you want to see the top of Tavush, take the mountain road rising through the forests in a steady climb with 15 switchbacks (count 'em) to the top. As you near the top, the forests give way to mountain meadow and even a bit of alpine country, a dramatic contrast of geographic zones, each fostering its own flora and fauna; forest flowers quickly give way to mountain daisies, tulips and iris as you ascend hills and where the woodpecker and owl give way to the red hawk and mountain eagle. Looking back you can see the entire Dilijan valley.

At the tunnel entrance you will find the "Barrel" - a cold spring and local farmers selling seasonal fruits and boiled corn. Make sure you try the water, it is very cold and refreshing. On the other side of the tunnel you will find more roadside sellers hawking fresh and dried fruit, grilled food and handmade souvenirs, and, in Semenovka village (Russian Molokan), there is a cold spring famous with locals, who swear by its healthy properties.



EXPLORING THE REGION ▲

Most of these can be done in a single day by car, depending on how many sites you visit and how long you take at each site. 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 single day trip, and may have to be skipped if you want to finish in the same day. Berd/Shamshadin may require two days to take in all the sites.

Decent to good overnights are available at Dilijan and Ijevan, basic or minimal service overnights are at Berd and Noyemberian.

- camping possible
- overnight
- food and drink
- thermal, mineral spring

TRIP 1: DILIJAN TO IJEVAN ▲

DILIJAN – (Teghut) – (Aghjkaberd) – (Hovk) – (Mantash) – (Alpine Area) – **IJEVAN** – (Getahovit) – **YENOKAVAN** – **IJEVAN**

UPPER CASE destinations are worth a longer visit while (**SIDE TRIPS**) are worth the stop if you have

the time. **Trip 1 travels the “highway of ancient Dzorapor, the Aghstev river for a little over 30 km, but several thousands years of history.** Caravans have plied this route from the Copper Age, each epoch leaving its mark indelibly on the landscape with fortresses, castles, churches and tombs. The trip features the incredible river gorge at Yenokavan with its cave chapel and hideouts for Armenians escaping Mongols and Seljuks, and its teeming wildlife. It ends at Ijevan, the regional capital and host to artists for hundreds of years. Here is where you will find your handcrafts, that great landscape from the balcony of your B&B, and artists who have been making Ijevan and nearby Getahovit their summer retreat for over a hundred years.



Stay: Overnight in Ijevan, Yenokavan, Getahovit, village home (rustic).

Eat: Ijevan restaurants and cafes, roadside stands, Yenokavan.

Springs: Yenokavan, Ijevan.

➡ From Dilijan roundabout take the Ijevan Highway NE about 7.7 km to (Teghut DD 41.1180556 x 44.8458333). About 200 m before Teghut, on the left is the unmarked road to Haghartsin. Take that road for about 1.8 km to the first of three streams on the right (E) that flow under the road. Between the 1st and 2nd stream--or another 100-200m--on the right at the end of an uphill 600m hike is the location of the (Teghut-1 Cave site)

SIDE TRIP: (Teghut-1 cave site) was discovered during exploratory digs in the region by the Paleolithic Project, which aims to establish the first prehistoric archaeological sequence for Armenia. Both to get there and understand its significance requires a trained guide from the Project (see inset box). The cave still waits a complete dig, but already evidences of habitation from the Bronze and Stone Ages have been uncovered.

The nearby (village of Teghut (elev. 823m, pop. 2933) facing the Aghstev River is a decent stop for village overnight (rustic, 3000 AMD fair price for B&B) or camping near the river, though the Cave site is a better camping spot.

➡ From the Haghartsin turnoff at Teghut continue E/NE on the Ijevan Highway about 12.1 km (past Teghut, Haghartsin and the Goshavank/Nerkin Gosh turnoff) to a NW bend in the highway about

The Paleolithic Project

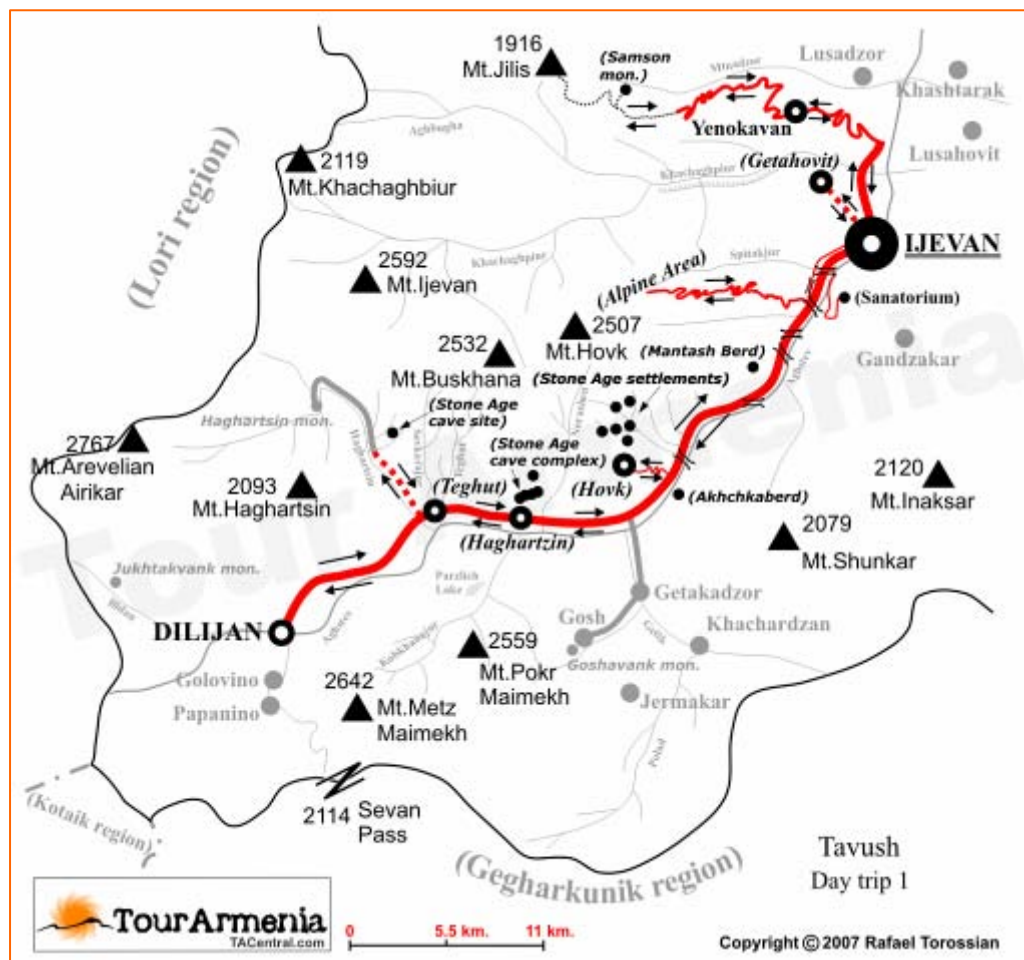
Tavush is a rich archeological source, and may well go down as the cradle of the Prehistoric Caucasus. The Paleolithic project, a joint project between Armenian and British archeologists, have begun to unearth some of the extraordinary Paleolithic finds in the area, with recent focus on Hovk. The region is a wealth of caves, rock shelters and open air sites showing Middle Paleolithic, Upper Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Eneolithic and Bronze Age occupation. It is the hope of the Project to establish the first archeological sequence for Armenia, and to ascertain the extent of archaic H. Sapiens, early modern humans and Neolithic interaction.

To do this, the team began trial excavations in 2005 at Stone Age sites near Haghartsin and north of the village of Hovk. Excavations are ongoing, led by Dr. Boris Gasparyan of the Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia and Dr Ron Pinhasi of Roehampton University. Excavations continue, with the best chance to observe work or visit with the archeologists in the mid summer. Contact Dr. Boris Gasparyan (borisg@arminco.com) for more information.





500 m shy of lower Hovk. On the hill to your right, between the Aghstev and Desteb rivers are the ruins of (Aghjkaberd)

SIDE TRIP: (Aghjkaberd - Աղջկաբերդ formerly Ghzghala) is on a steep climb, with foundations and ruins of a church and other buildings at the end of the climb. It is a



beautiful look out, nonetheless, with good views to the SE.

Camping on the river bed.

➡ Continue on the Ijevan Highway about 500 m. to lower (**Hovk** DD 40.7911111 x 45.0225) 


SIDE TRIP: (**Hovk** - Հովք - before Samed Vurghun elev. 1118m, pop. 1542) until recently named after an Azerbaijan poet, dramatist and deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet, was asked to read his poems before Stalin and to offer a toast at a banquet with Winston Churchill. The naming of the village was part of an carefully orchestrated "rapprochement" between the Caucasus foes in the 1930s, quickly dropped when fighting broke out in 1990. The shame of the conflict being that some sincere and good friendships between Armenians and Azeris tragically ended.



Vurghun is not a great poet, his fame seems rooted in his ability to know the right people. Churning out approved heroic and saccharine sweet odes in equal doses, he managed to live to a ripe old age, dying in 1965. There is no other connection between the village and him.

Sights. Nearby are the **ruins** of a medieval church and cemetery. The hills E of Hovk have three ruined berds. Ask locals to point them out, they make great hiking and camping sites.

Hovk is also the location of an exciting archeological project, **The Paleolithic Project**, a series of current excavations by Armenian and British archeologists working to establish the first prehistoric archaeological sequence for Armenia. 2005 digs by the joint project has already indicated the area played a central role in the prehistory of the Caucasus. Digs are ongoing. **Teghut-1** cave site is about 2 km up the Haghartsin road from the Dilijan highway, between the first two of three streams feeding the Haghartsin River, about 800 m from the road uphill. **Haghartsin-1** cave complex is just north of Haghartsin village. **Surface findings** of stone artifacts were found on both sides the Norashen River, which flows just east of Haghartsin Village, about 1.8 on a dirt track from the NE end. Right off the main highway about 1.5 km east of the Goshavank turnoff on the banks of a stream feeding the Aghstev is **Hovk-1 settlement**, but the greatest number of sites

are a **series of open air and rock-shelter sites** north of Hovk, on a 6 km northerly arc of mountain terrain rising to the Ijevan Mountain Range. Artifacts uncovered at these sites include Upper Paleolithic tools, Mousterian blade, a Bronze Age fireplace, Neolithic pottery, Mesolithic microlith made from obsidian, Mousterian limestone flakes & nucleus, Mousterian point from obsidian & additional flakes and scrapers from the Stone Age Open-Air site.

Camping in the area, and **overnight** in village homes (rustic). 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair.


➡ Continue NE on the highway about 2.8 km to a railway overpass. Continue another 3.9 km past four rivers and forest land shielding some ruins on the left and another railway bridge (**motel-restaurant just after, 5000 AMD**) to a third railway bridge. Immediately to your left on top of the precipice (hidden by trees) is one of the candidates for (**Mantash Berd / Kaiyan Berd**)  

SIDE TRIP: (**Mantash** - Մանթաշ) or Karakala is one of the places the legendary Kaiyan Berd may have been, which presided over the historic Tavush district of Dzorapor. If so, these 7th-9th cc ruins are all that remain from a once substantial citadel and bustling trade center. Kaiyan Berd is attributed to the Arshacid King Ashot Yerkat (Ashot the Iron willed) in the 10th c, which would suggest he built over or expanded the earlier structure. Destroyed by Seljuk Turks, it was rebuilt by the Atabeg (governor) Ivaneh Zakarian in the 12th c. and is where his son Avak, under siege by Mongols in 1236, judiciously sold out to his captors and joined their army against his fellow Armenian nakharars.

The four river valleys are great hiking trails, the first (starting at the rail flyover) climbs about 2.5 km before it branches off. Take the right branch to go to Mt. Jurantslan (1984 m) and the left, then left again to Mt. Hakhkukhli (1797.5 m).


Camping on the Aghstev or the area.

➡ From the railway flyover continue NE on the highway about 6.3 km to an intersection at a railway bridge over the river. There is a road first turns SW off the highway then heads up the mountains. The road winds and switchbacks





westward for about 12.4 km to a lovely (**Alpine area**) 

SIDE TRIP: the **alpine area** between Mts. Jurantslan and Hasnaiya, shared by shepherds and military outposts makes for a stunning nature trip, especially in the spring time and early summer, when the mountain Iris, Tulips and Fritilaria are in bloom.



Camping in the area, cold nights.

➡ Backtrack to the highway and continue N for about 800 m to an E road over a bridge and continuing for 2 km to a (**Sanatorium**) 

SIDE TRIP: Overnight. The Sanatorium is on the S end of the town, in a woody area. They seem to work in the summers, and can provide overnights that include treatments, normally sold in 2-4 week slots, overnights vary from 2000-10,000 AMD per person.

➡ From the highway bridge continue on the highway for about 3.6 km to the center of (**IJEVAN**, DD 40.87617 x 45.14394)   


(**IJEVAN**) is a good place to service your vehicle and grab supplies/food. Since it is the final stop for this Day trip **details are at the end of this itinerary.**

➡ From the downtown Ijevan bridge, go N on the highway (Yerevanian p.) out of town about 2 km to the left (W) entry into (**Getahovit** DD 40.8961111 x 45.1261111)  

SIDE TRIP: (**Getahovit** - Գետահովիտ - till 1978 Tala elev. 777m, pop. 5292) is best known as an artist retreat and "suburb" of Ijevan. A number of B&B's are nestled in this beautiful hamlet just N of Ijevan, on a natural clearing on hills overlooking the Aghtsev River valley. This is another possible location for **Kaiyan Berd**, as is Ijevan.

The village overlooks the Khachaghbiur river gorge, where to the W is the ruined Iritsi Aghbiur medieval settlement with church and cemetery. There is a road on the NW of town leading to the site, another (jeeps) on the S side passes the settlement on its S and then continues for about 6.8 km to a ridge overlooking Getahovit, Ijevan and the Khachaghbiur and Aghstev rivers.

Alternate Hiking Routes to Yenokavan Canyons: The Yenokavan canyons are spectacular hiking trails into deprive gorges, with cave shrines, churches and water falls for those willing to hike its 4-8 hour trails. The hikes usually begin from Yenokavan, but Getahovit is a good alternate starting point, possibly cheaper than the 20,000 AMD price the Tour Camp in Yenokavan charges for its services (which includes camping overnight and 3 meals)

Hike. The Khachaghbiur runs into the Sarnaghbiur, which runs along the North face of Mt. Khashtarak (1528 m.) for about 12 km to Mt. Sharukar (1696.5 m. – take the right fork at km 9.7)

OVERNIGHT B&Bs

Tigran Davtian, Getahovit village (tel. 36106), 3 rooms, piano, tennis, garden, car. 5000 AMD.




Rafael Ghazarian, Getahovit village (tel. 32101) is located near the river and has 4 rooms, a fireplace in guest house, beekeeping.

Sirush Khalatian, Center of Getahovit village, (tel. 32763) is a two-storied house with beautiful views 10 min. drive from Ijevan Center. 5 bedrooms, 3 lavatories, 2 baths, 2 dining rooms. 5000 AMD.

Manya Zalinian, Getahovit village (tel. 32101) has balconies, 4 bedrooms, 1 bath, 2 lavatories, breakfast, TV, iron. Lunch and dinner available for extra pay. 5000 AMD.

Anahit Mkrtumian, Getahovit village (tel. 36106) Tufa stone house surrounded by a flower garden and trees. About 10 min. drive from Ijevan Center. 3 bedrooms, bath, 2 lavatories, TV, car, 2 hairdryers. 5000 AMD.

Camping possible in the area, on the mountains, riverbed.

➡ From the highway continue N and in about 800 m you will see the Ijevan Railroad station on the right. Continue N on the highway another 200 m or so to just before the Ijevan Mineral Water Plant, where a road meeting the Hwy on the left (W). Take that road for about 5.5 km to **YENOKAVAN VILLAGE** (DD 40.9136111 x 45.0994444)  


✧ **YENOKAVAN - Ենոկավան** ▲ (till 1935 Krdevan elev. 1064m, pop. 3886) is on the N side of the Sarnaghbiur river gorge, which plunges more than 100 meters down into a forest-covered valley. To the north is the Mtnadzor River. The village is poorly maintained, despite its newly found fame and wealth from the newly established nearby Tour Camp. Village roads are pot mocked and rocky and villagers—while complaining about their poor state, still insist it is the government's job to do it for them (in this case the village government, which cannot collect taxes from the villagers themselves).



Despite the poor state of the roads and houses, the location is beautiful, perched over two river gorges with towering hills laden with forests on two sides. Overlook the village trash and the villager's lethargy and you have a great jumping off point for some prime hiking and camping.



To the S of town, on a rock overlooking the river is a small medieval (9th-10th cc) **church** and

tombstones. To the NE, overlooking another gorge is the 6th-5th BCE **Astghi Blur - Աստղի Բլուր** (Star Hill) with cyclopean walls and a huge tomb field. The Urartian era settlement lies on earlier Bronze and Copper Age sites. The location is ideally situated for overlooking the Aghstev River valley as it narrows into a "pincher" just before Ijevan. Artifacts from the site include skeletons, vases, bronze and iron objects, on display at the State History Museum in Yerevan and Local Tradition Museum in Ijevan.

Tour Camp at Gomer Hill (DD 40.91570 x 45.07912) has put the village on the map, with adventure tours into the area (hiking, climbing, and horseback riding). The camp is about 4 km to the west of the village at the end of a terribly rough road (our Lada barely made it, and we had to chuck rocks off the road in the going). The camp includes horse stables made from converted cattle sheds, new (under construction) stone cabins and sleeping quarters, camp sites and a bathing facilities. It is run by Irina and Artak, Armenian Expats from Georgia/Russia who are slowly building the camp into a year round destination from its current summer season venue.

The focus is on hosting visitors wanting to hike or ride on horseback into the steep river canyon below, while providing more comfortable digs for the night. The camp currently provides all the equipment for camping and hiking in its 20,000 AMD per person per day price; pick up in central Ijevan (central Hotel/fountain square), tent, sleeping bag, 3 meals plus guided excursions into the ravine and near regions (see hikes below).

The camp is self-sufficient; food is grown at their village base, from which they begin hikes (the first starting at the garden, then climbing to the Gomer Camp). Most hikes are 4 hours, though they can arrange full day hikes into the mountains. See below for practical details.

Hikes. The two hikes described here reward hikers with caves, mineral springs, deep forestland, a midway camp and a rushing waterfall where you can take a 'water massage'.

The most popular canyon hikes used to begin in the village, just to the west, where a trail leads into the steep gorge. Villagers are not very helpful in locating starting points or giving directions, preferring to direct hikers to the Gomer Tour Camp (which prefers to charge their day rate for guided tours in the overnight package). Another option is to enlist the services of **Ashot Levonian** (tel.

+374 10 57 03 28 home, mob. +374 91 49 58 34), e-mail: levash77@mail.ru, an expert guide who can arrange the same camping as the Tour Camp, in the wilderness, for comparable or cheaper prices.



On your own. While a guide is recommended to navigate this forested area (and local villagers seem programmed to direct you only to the Tour Camp), you can attempt it on your own, once you have your initial bearings. Be persistent in asking villagers for the paths listed below and you can get off to a start.

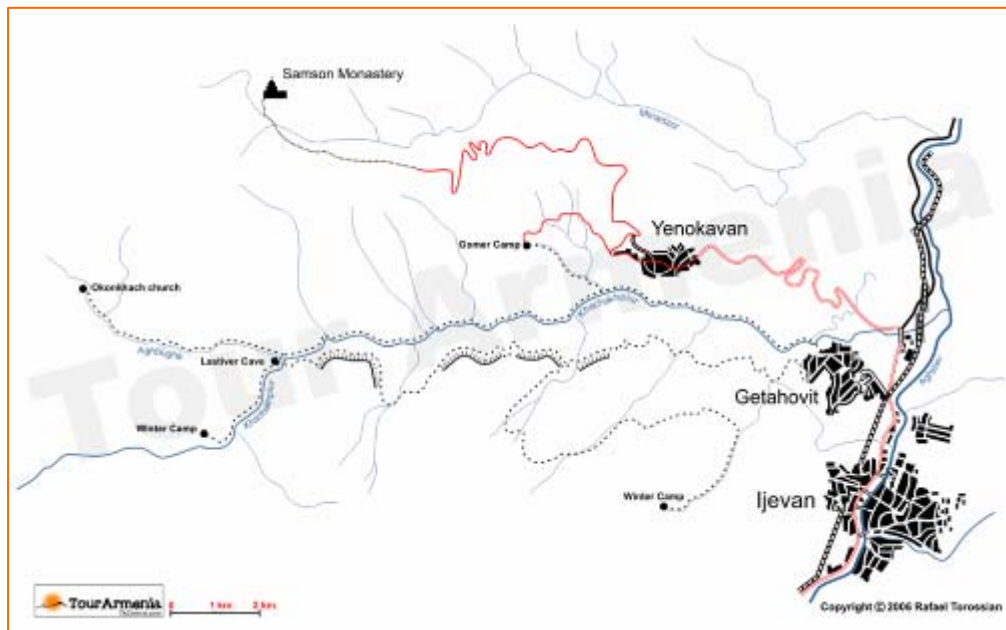
Alternate Trail Hikes from Getahovit: Longer hikes adding about 4 km to the hike (full day) begin from Getahovit Village, where the river gorge begins and more receptive locals are willing to serve as guides (negotiate; 5000 AMD is fair for one day hike in and out, 10,000 if they provide food and tent). With off-road vehicle you can navigate the river gorge on the south side from Getahovit all the way to Lastiver area.

The "**Lastiver/Anapat trail**" begins at a "**pulek**", a large landfall formed at the beginning of the 20th c. when massive stones separated from their "mother rock." The hike quickly descends into the canyon through a teeming forest with wild pear, plum, cherry trees, raspberry bushes and wild strawberry that villagers use to make jams, juice (compote) and potent local vodka no one drinks and walks away from. Forest animals include badger, fox, wildcat, lynx, weasel, and wolves and brown bears in the upper elevations. Birds include the gray partridge and the linnet, as well as eagle, hawk, black eagle and others. This path was used by hermits and Armenian militia, whose lookouts and sniper nests can still be seen on the rocky cliffs. Crossing into the Khachaghbiur canyon, the

path is hemmed in on one side by sheer cliffs of rock projections and the deep forest on the other side. Crossing from forest to a stone plateau ("Karaet"), the trail soon enters the forest again and a high point overlooking rocky grottoes and a steep canyon called the **Eshi Dzor** ("Donkey Gorge").

About 1 km in the gorge is the 13th c. **Astvatsatsin church**. Continuing on for about 11 km, after the Sarnajur River forks into the Aghbuga (right fork) and Khachaghbiur (left fork), on the Aghbuga, past the "**Diablo Bridge**" a natural rock formation, there is a set of caves, called the **Anapat or Lastiver Caves**, ranging from 10 to 30 meters deep to about 15 meters wide overlooking the Khachaghbiur river waterfalls. In these caves Armenia's early Anapatsi (hermits) devoted themselves to solitude, prayer and writing from the earliest times of Christianity, but most famously during the 12th-13th cc. The **Anapat / Lastiver Caves** in particular were a pilgrimage stop, its interior carved with inscriptions beginning in the Iron Age, with most from the time of the Mongol invasions. Inscriptions include animal symbols of Christianity (the lamb, the lion) as well as pagan themes of the "good (honourable) lacerations" incorporated into Christian themes. The number and quality of the carvings is stunning. Nearby is the **Okonkhach Church**. At the widest point in the trail is a rest area/camp.

The "**Red Rocks**" route enters the same canyon but from a different direction and covers the big Yenokavan Canyon with stunning views of the red rock formations in the opposite canyon. The route begins at the 10th-12th cc S. Sarkis Chapel, on the Southern outskirts of the village. The chapel, built on an old necropolis of gravestones dating to the 12th c, has 10 khachkars of distinction as part of its construction. The deep precipice starts just a few meters from S. Sarkis, passing over several abysses called "snake tracks" by locals. This is a good rock-climbing area. The first platform of rock overlooks the Khachaghbiur canyon then the trail passes through the narrow "Cyclops' Corridor" surrounded by huge rock monoliths. From here the trail is a little treacherous and should be continued with a guide, the canyon depth is 300 m at this point, the second platform, from which it is possible to sight hawks, golden and black eagles entering the canyon from hunting forays beyond the canyon rim. From here the trail passes over the "**Diablo Bridge**" and a half-meter chasm diving the canyon walls, there is an alternate route that bypasses the yawning chasm and meets up on



➡ Backtrack to the highway then go S about 2.8 km, to the center of **IJEVAN** 🏰 🏠 📶 🌊

➡ END OF TRIP 1



the third platform, with a panoramic view of two rocky mountains polished and cut by fierce canyon winds. The end of the path is the Ar Cave, inhabited by humans from the Stone Age.

Guides are strongly recommended, there are dangerous side trails ("Eshi dzor" or Donkey gorge being one), and it is easy to get lost.

Alternate Mountain Track to Noyemberian. To the NW of town, there is a dirt road that navigates between the Mtnadzor and feeder streams to the Khachaghbiur/Sarnaghbiur for about 2.8 km to a medieval chapel. The road continues for another 4.2 km to a dirt track, that, in summer months with a good Vilis/UAZ or Jeep, you can use to cross the western Tavush mountains for about 58 km (6-8 hours) to Jjevan just below Noyemberian, an excellent nature, hiking and camping route that goes right by Kirants and Deghdznut Vanks.

Alternate Route to Samson Vank: Also from Yenokavan is access to the 13th c. **Samson Vank**. From Yenokavan village take the Noyemberian road as it peters out into a dirt road and crosses the Mtnadzor River (9.6 km from the village), and just above a dirt track branches off to the right

(N). Take that as it winds up to the Khndzorkut River to the monastery (about 3 km) and in another 6 km through the spectacular but difficult Samson Gorge to Deghdznut Vank and the Jilis River valley. This is also an excellent day hike.

Guide Services. The camp offers tourists several sight-seeing tours on horseback or on foot. Locals can guide you in a very basic way, also see *Apaga Tours* and *Ashot Levonian*, who set the camp up and provide full support hikes throughout Armenia ([Adventure Tour Operators](#)).

Overnight. *Gomer Tour Camp*, run by Artak and Irina, currently provides full camping facilities (tent, bags, meals, guided hikes and horseback tours). They are building stone cabins and "sleeping huts" which will be ready for the 2007 season. For reservations contact Guyaneh at (tel. 091-797402), or Apaga Tours (tel. . You can contact Artak directly at artak@artak.net or in Russia at (+7-495- 790-2905). This is not cheap camping, the cost is 20,000 AMD per person per day, a bit steep for what they currently offer, and a price we hope will be somehow reduced to allow more visitors to enjoy the gorgeous area Artak and Irina call their backyard.

IJEVAN

(DD 40.87617 x 45.14394)

[Detailed Map](#)

✿ **IJEVAN - ԻՋԵՎԱՆ** (before, Caravanserai, elev. 679m, pop. 3292) The name means "Inn", befitting its historic place as a stop on caravan roads between Central Asia and the Near East. Now the administrative center for Tavush Marz, Ijevan has been from time immemorial a gateway to Armenia, the first major stop on the road from the Caspian and the Kura river valley. While more important (princely) villages and monasteries lie to the east, Ijevan grew to be the historic capital of the area. Judging by the large number of archeological excavations in the area, the city has been serving as a gateway for many thousands of years.



Like Dilijan, Ijevan's growth was fueled by tourism, but unlike its more aggressive (some say excessive) neighbor to the south, visitors go the extra distance to Ijevan partake of nature, pure and simple. It is not a resort city in any modern sense of the word, it is, pure and simple, a rest area, a nature romp, and more come back to its simpler charms year after year than in "Dili".

Ijevan was also the artistic capital for Tavush, and some say, Armenia, having played host to over 200 years of artists who came to partake of the forests, clean air and numerous mineral springs in the area, then returning or staying to capture the incredible scenery. Considering the number of artists (from both the Soviet and modern periods) who still use Ijevan as a summer retreat or even a home, the town can still be considered an artist hamlet, more serious than Dilijan.

Background. Ijevan is a part of the complex network of routes that comprised the Silk Road (sometimes called the Spice Trail), linking Asia with the West. Before roads, valleys and rivers were the natural routes for trade, and the Aghstev River in Tavush is one of the easiest to walk. Along the route locals built small inns ("caravanserai" in Turkish, "Ijevan" in Armenian), offering travelers a hot meal and a place to rest. One such caravanserai stood on the banks of the Aghstev River, where one finds the center of Ijevan today. This was its purpose, though its history is more complex.

Ijevan stands on land that has for millennia been a crossroads for traders, evidence of which is found in Stone Age (Paleolithic, Mesolithic), Copper and Bronze Age excavations scattered throughout the region, along the Aghstev River.

By the Iron Age (2nd m BCE) the river was a well-known and well-used caravan route, on one of the networks of routes that comprised the Great Silk Road, cutting right through present-day Ijevan. Skeletons of camels and pack-animals show the extent of the trade, and Ijevan's location became a natural stopping point in the heavily wooded river valley; about a days walk from the Kura river valley by pack animal, fresh water and the last open area before the river narrows, another day's walk, from Dilijan.



The area around Ijevan long been a disputed borderland, becoming part of Gugark province during the reign of the Armenian king Tigran Mets (95-55 BC); a part of Georgia after the division of the Armenian kingdom between Rome and Persia (387); a part of the Arab empire in the 7th c; rebounding under the Bagratunis in the 9th-10 cc

only to fall again to Seljuk Turks in the 10th c; only to rebound again under Georgian suzerainty and the Armenian Zakarians in the 12th-13th cc, only to fall again to the armies of Kublai Khan in the mid 13th, to the second Tatar invasion under Timur (Tamurlane) in the 14th c, to the Ottoman Turks in the 15th c and ceded to the Persian Empire in the Turkish-Persian split of Armenia of 1639.

At the start of the 18th century, Armenians from Karabagh, Giulistan and Jraberd came to the Aghstev river valley and settled in the region, which had begun to fall under the protection of the Russian empire, seeking to increase its holdings in the area. Refugees from Karabakh especially continued to pour into the region, running from the military campaigns of the Iranian Shah, who sought to punish Armenians for rebelling against his rule, contributing to a widespread famine in the southern areas.

The shortage of arable land in Tavush caused tensions in the Eastern areas of the region, where they had first migrated, and the immigrants petitioned the Tsar to establish their own village elsewhere (felling trees, tilling the soil and building their homes in the Ijevan area while waiting). The petition was granted, admitting a de facto situation and in 1778, the village of Caravanserai was founded on the banks of the Aghstev. In 1805, the area officially came under the control of the Russian empire after the first Russo-Persian war.

The village grew rapidly, fed by a new road between Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Yerevan in the mid-19th c and most explosively when the new Tiflis-Yerevan railroad line was laid through town in 1870. The village, lying directly on the route, took an active role in trade between the two administrative centers, and it grew larger than the surrounding villages.

In 1921, Ijevan (Caravanserai) became part of the Soviet Union, maintaining its role as a trade center, developing light industry (rug-making, lumber mill, winery) in the 20th c.

In 1973, the city of Caravanserai was renamed Ijevan.

Crafts. Historically Ijevan has been a center for handcrafted items, perhaps best known for traditional Armenian rugs. The Ijevan rug factory was the largest in the USSR, and remains one of the lone survivors of the old period which still works. But handcrafted carpets remain a vital craft

as well, you can find carpet weavers using hand looms throughout the town, their intricately designed knotted carpets adorning the homes all over the world. Other crafts include the several wood-working workshops and studios (furniture is a hot commodity now) and the Ijevan Wine factory, which uses the area's vineyards to produce some pretty good wines that are getting notice abroad.

Character: Like the Deep South of America, people here are friendlier, the custom being to stop and say hello when passing others, even if you do not know them. This is the first place I have been where I felt so welcome, the people so down home and warm, I thought I was back in the Hill Country and wanted to look for the local diner with big-haired waitresses, a slab of pecan pie and local gossip! Substitute a walnut torte for the pecan pie and I might could have done!



Ecology. Ijevan is in the Aghstev river valley between the Ijevan and Hakhum mountain ranges, both covered with forests. The river courses in a wide stretch, fed by over a thousand and springs from the Azeri border alone, as well as mountain rain and snow runoff. The area is a part of the Dilijan Forest Preserve. The climate is mild, in the summer days are warm and nights cool, winters even milder than Dilijan, with snow falling only four or five times each season. It is warm enough that the city manages to grow palmettos in the town center! Average temperature is 25 c in summer and 0 c in winter.

Ijevan is made for nature lovers: the area is stunning, imminently more beautiful than Dilijan, which has "gentrified" itself to haul in the summer trade. The surrounding **forests** are simply breathtaking, and the hiking opportunities are

endless. **Flora** enthusiasts will find themselves in a kind of Armenian heaven. Over 1000 species are represented in the forests: oak (*Quercus iberica*), beech (*Fagus orientalis*), different types of hornbeam (*Carpinus caucasicus*, *C.orientalis*), as well as ash-tree, some types of lime tree, maple, caprifoli, spindle tree and others (*Fraxinus*, *Tilia*, *Acer*, *Lonicera*, *Euonymus*). Numerous plants like rare Job's tears (*Lycnthis flos-cuculi*), different orchids, and fritillaria are included in the Red Book of Endangered Species.

The park's 107 species of **birds** are distinguished such as Common Buzzard, Goshawk, Sparrow hawk, Black Kite, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Wood Pigeon, Eagle Owl, Tawny Owl, Caspian Snow Cock, Caucasian Black Grouse, Golden Eagle, Lammergeier, Griffon Vulture, Quail, Grey Partridge, Twit, Red-fronted Serin, Rock Sparrow, Rock Bunting, Skylark, Crested and Horned Larks, Chough, Raven, Western Rock Nuthatch, Hoopoe, Kingfisher, White and Grey Wagtails, Dipper, Black-necked Grebe, Great White Egret.

There are 45 species of **mammals** such as brown bear, wolf, fox, badger, beech marten, vair, bobcat, and even a small number of leopards. Very common are wood mice, Persian squirrel, loir, door mouse, brown hare, wild boar, axis deer and roe deer.

The **risks** to this beautiful area are real and quickly coming: the trees are a magnet for every corrupt official in sight, who salivates at the thought of the easy money. Illegal logging is actually supervised by Ministry of Nature Protection and national park staff, taking their piece of the action. The old growth trees, once gone, do not grow back, and the stripped areas create a tremendously difficult situation, soil erosion and mud slides are increasing at an alarming rate. There are serious attempts to try and stop it ([Armenia Tree Project](#), Greens), but the government is not yet willing to part with such easy money. What is particularly galling is that the largest purchasers of the illegal timber are from the EU countries that have stringent laws against this kind of land rape in their own territory, but who do not seem to mind buying the last species of trees from Armenia; France, Germany and Italy buy huge amounts of hard wood from Armenia, the French wanting it for their cognac barrels (The French conglomerate Pernod Ricard is a large buyer of endangered tree lumber for this purpose, even promoted by the EBRD).

Other risks are the local need for employment of any kind and a lack of serious thought towards sustainable industries to provide that. The EU, USAID and other international agencies, when focusing on economic development in the region (when they do focus), look primarily to the extraction of raw materials in the area (*Marble*, *Basalt*, *Granite*, *Quartzite*, *And Marble*, *As Well As Bentonite*, *Mineral Paints*, *Semiprecious Stones*, *Coal*, *Dolomite and Gyps*), and continuation of old technologies that have a high pollution level, rather than to sustainable industries that preserve the natural surroundings while providing employment. They have even entertained strip-mining old growth forests. Perhaps the Europeans and America, having lost their own wilderness, won't be happy unless they lose another's.

Information.

Beware the brochures published by the Armenia Information Center in Yerevan! Woefully out of date but still distributed when we visited the center in 2006, there is not one valid phone number for the (now defunct) Tourist Information Center in Ijevan and other information in the pamphlet was poorly organized with inaccurate or missing information. And the US govt. paid for this mess! If you like dialing wrong numbers and getting lost, this is the brochure for you!

To be fair, the Center in Yerevan is negotiating with local officials for a new center and the local staff did their best to try and find someone who could help us in Ijevan. Sadly, no luck.

Bearings

The pine tree-lined river runs through the center of town, making a charming and easy to navigate street system. Most services are on the left (W) bank, while the old neighborhoods, studios and B&Bs are on both sides. The main street is Yerevanian, which is also the highway. Here you will find the shuka, culture center (good for finding a local guide and overnight options), cafes, restaurants and government buildings.

The southern bridge faces a roundabout and fountain, connecting with the parallel Valansi p. and the Northwards Ankakhutian (Independence) p. Leading inward from the roundabout is Ijevanian which intersects with the northwards Maiysi X'san Uti (May 28th) and S. Olianian and E with Blbulian and Aslaniani pt. Leading SE is Miasnikian and Mehrabian, which is the highway to Gandzak (1.9 km). The central bridge leads to the parallel Valansi (S) and Abovian (N) pts. The north bridge heads to Ankakhutian p. is 100 m S of

W Nalbandian, where the Local Tradition Museum is.

Asking directions is not a problem, locals will drop whatever they are doing to help you out. Unfortunately the Armenian inability to give directions is not improved for their eagerness to help. "Gagik's house" and "over there" may be the best you can hope for, unless they show you the way. Still, the layout is simple, the town is small enough (the town is 3 km from top to bottom and averages 1.5 km side to side) and with such a gorgeous location, who minds getting lost a little?

SIGHTS

The town and nature itself are the real destinations, the traditional architecture is well preserved (more so than Dilijan, and less cloying) with red tile roofs and beautifully carved wooden balconies and verandas.

Along the **river promenade** (Yerevanian on the left bank, Valansi and Abovian on the right bank), which is lined with red stone walls and thick stands of drooping pine trees, you will find cafes, fountains, and sculptures.



The **Sculpture Garden** is in the center, just below the central bridge. It has a collection of sculptures erected from the 1980s to the 1992, the result of an ambitious annual International Open Air Sculpture Competition held during those years. The city, once the summer home to prominent artists from around the world, obviously prided itself on its artistic heritage. Sadly, judging from the parched, ill-kept gardens and the crumbling statues, it no longer seems to care much about the fact of its former glory. This is a shame. Once handsomely kept and a green haven for art lovers,

the park is no rather like stumbling upon a Picasso or a Henry Moore in the middle of a slum area. The remaining sculptures are by some of Armenia's most important sculptors ([Mariam Hakobian](#)), as well as students and avid artisans. Sculptures are scattered around the downtown area as well.

On the bank of the Aghstev are remains of a medieval **caravanserai** (Hamam-Jala).

Museums, Art, Crafts

Ijevan Historical and Local Tradition Museum, Yerevanian p. Ijevanatun complex, is on the N end of town (look for cannon out front). Open 10-5, the museum was founded in 1955 as a museum of the Revolution and has some interesting displays of the Soviet era (getting harder to come by in modern Armenia). In 1990 it was reorganized in its present location and given its current name. The collection includes about 300 items.



Ijevan "Vernatun" Gallery of Art, Yerevanian p. center of town (open 10-5). Founded in 1998 as Ijevan community museum, the collection of 400 items is mainly composed of acquisitions from the Culture Fund. Aside from the permanent exhibition, the museum also hosts guest exhibition and cultural event throughout the year.

Ijevan Culture Center (tel. 34649) is located in the town center. Connected to the Art Academy, the center hosts occasional exhibitions and performances.

An Artist retreat is at **Getahovit**, which also has B&Bs, a few of which face glorious landscapes, and from which hikers can begin day long hikes into the Kachaghbiur River Canyon.

Churches

Take the street opposite the bridge to reach the *new church*, a nondescript copy of more ancient and beautiful edifices. The church was donated by a rich Armenian living abroad.

SW of town is *S. Hovhannes*, a 19th c church.

Excavations

Chamber tombs are near the city hospital.

A **Bronze age cemetery** on the left bank of river is one of the most important in Armenia. Among the artifacts found is a 2nd millennium BCE medallion inscribed with the four cardinal peripheral points, and eight cardinal directions leading to a central spot, symbolizing a single source. Most of the artifacts are at the Yerevan State History Museum, few are on display.

Parks

Ijevan botanical gardens (Dendro Park) is on the S of town. It has a Ferris wheel (not working) and a collection of trees, bushes and flower beds, many untended. There are picnic tables and locals like to stroll the park or play *nardi* (a lightening fast version of backgammon) in the park.

Hiking trails ▲

There are a number of trails leading out of Ijevan, most at the ends of the outlying poghots (which quickly turn into muddy paths after the asphalt runs out). One is on the E of town, following Blbulian p. as it climbs the mountain side to a hospital, and then beyond into the forests. On the S of town, the Sevan Lich Hotel (Tavush Teacher Training retreat) has a trail into the forests. Trails on the W of town climb Mt. Henja (1.5 km) and to the NW to Getahovit (1 km).

For the real enthusiast, follow the Ijevan river E to the top of the eastern hills, where a monadnock (rock protrusion) lies (about 4.5 km), from which you can follow the mountain ridge S to the Gandzakar-Berd road (H45) or N/NE to Mt. Kalacha (1722 m). Don't try this if you are not experienced or without a guide!

Other

Visiting a local factory is not as crazy as it sounds. Because of the vagaries of the Armenian economy, what would normally seem closed territory is actually open to polite enquiries, security personnel able to make a few calls and bring in more senior staff for serious enquires for goods. If they cannot help, they can tell you where to find products. They are quite proud of what they have

achieved, even if it was long ago, and there is just something about visiting an industrial dinosaur in the age of nanoprocessors that is sweetly sad, like the Heroic posters from the age of Lenin.

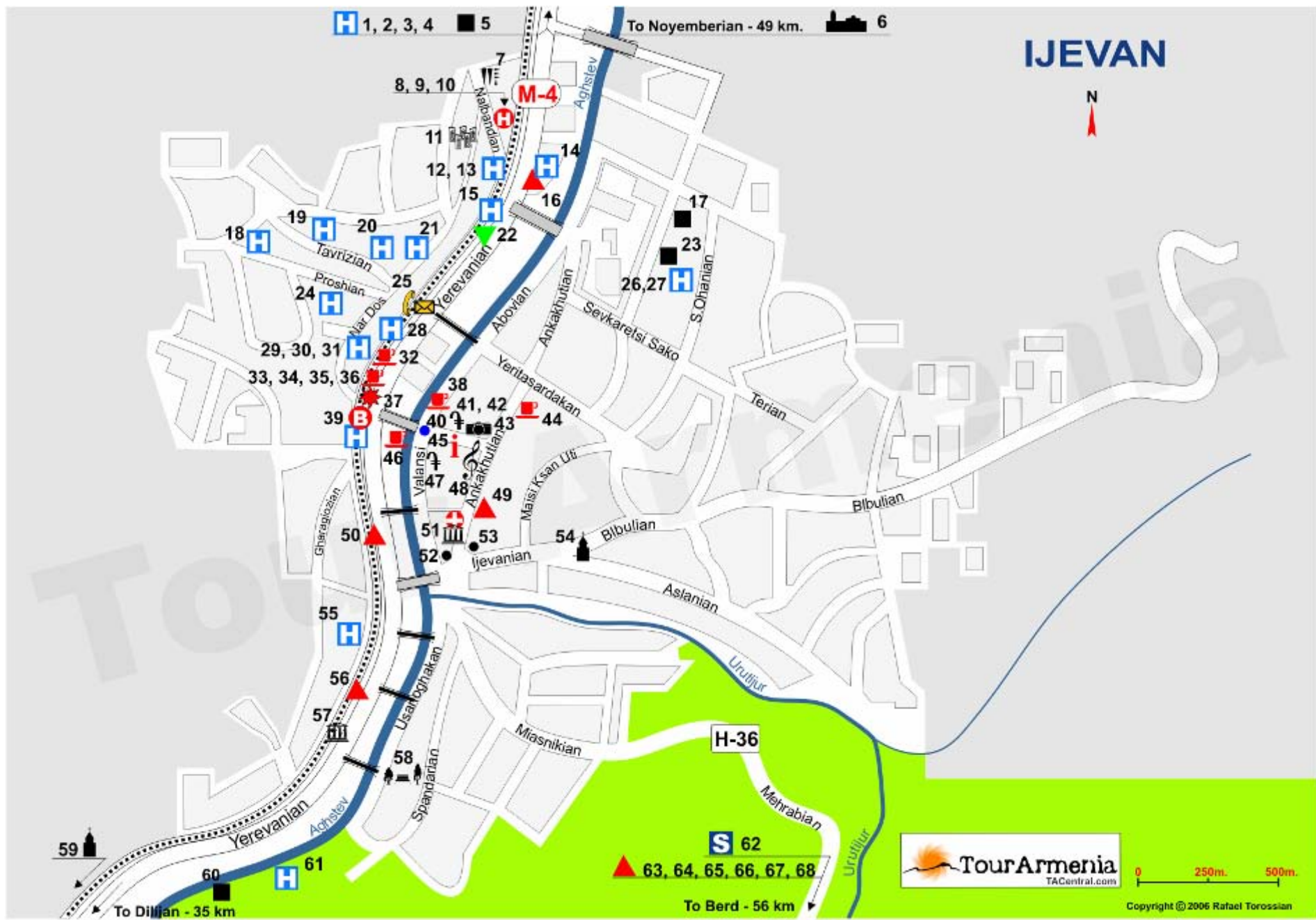
The **Ijevan Wine Factory** ▲, 9 Yerevanian p. (tel. 33953) at S end of town, offers an assortment of red, rose and white wines made from grapes grown in Tavush vineyards. Several of the wines have won awards, look for *White Ijevan*, *Old Ijevan*, *Armenian Saperavi*, *Guyaneh* and the deliciously sweet *Pomegranate wine*.

Ijevan Carpet Factory, 4/1 Vasilian p. (tel. 32498) was the largest carpet maker in the Soviet Union, exporting much of its carpets to Arab nations. It works intermittently, waiting for investor and better transport. If someone is there, ask and they may show you around. They also have samples of rugs and with a few phone calls, someone will come running to sell you a rug or two.



Ijevan Wood Manufacturing Industry, 38 Yerevanian p. (tel. 37463, 31829, 31416) also works off and on, making furniture and other wood products for local consumption. This is probably good since the wood comes from quickly disappearing forests in the area, bad because of the unemployed. If they don't have goods for sell they can lead you to local artists who do.

Ijevan Mineral Water 66 Artsakh p. (tel. 36457, 35250) bottles a rival to the better known Dilijan Mineral Water to the South. Both are wonderful and hands on the best in Armenia, despite Jermuk's current popularity.



IJEVAN Map Key

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL, GUEST HOUSE

1. Milena Guest House, Getahovit village
15. Mush Hotel, 3 Yerevanian p.
39. Hotel Ijevan
61. Ijevan Tour Bazaar

B&B

1. Geghetsik Edilian, Spitak L., Gandzak V.
2. Sergey Eghikian, 8a Metaghagortsneri
3. Hovhannes Afian, 9 Metaghagortsneri
4. Armineh Sargsian, 54 Metaghagortsneri
12. Misha Hamzian, 2 Nalbandian
13. Giulnara Meliksetian, 2 Nalbandian
14. Mets Mher, 1 Yerevanian
18. Anahit Mkrtoumian, 18 Gharagiozian
19. Olia Eghikian, 23 Tavrizian
20. Anahit Alaverdian, 4 Tavrizyan
21. Artem Iskandarian, 28 Nar-Dos
24. Vardan Vardanian, 25 Proshian
26. Lusia Atabekian, 4 Nar-Dos
27. Blboulia, 70 Ohanian
28. Svetlana Antonian, 3 Yerevanian
29. Lusia Atabekian, 1 Terian
30. Levon Karapetian, 4 Nar-Dos
31. Aida Sarhatyan, Nar-Dos
55. Sofia Sargsyan, 10a Yerevanian

PENSIONAT

62. Teachers' Retraining Centre Rest-House, Spitak Lake

FOOD & DRINK

15. Mush Hotel
16. Mets Mher Restaurant
32. Café Vardenank
49. Café Yeritasatakan
50. Danelianots Restaurant
56. Bar Retaurant

Near Ijevan

63. Barekamutiun
64. Artsakh
65. Armenian Cuisine
66. Israeliian
67. Yura Tumanian
68. Marmara

CAFÉ

33. Urenu Hovit
34. Shant
35. Lusineh
36. Dghiak
38. Handipum
44. Partez
46. Night Club 777

BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

39. Aftokaiyan

TRAIN

6. Railroad Station

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY

51. "Vernatun" Gallery of Art
57. Ijevan Historical and Local Tradition Museum

MONUMENTS - SITES

7. Chamber tombs
11. Bronze Age cemetery
40. Fountain Square

CHURCHES

54. New Church
59. S. Hovhannes

THEATRES, MUSIC

48. Culture House

SHOPS, SHUKA

22. Shuka (Market)
43. Konika Photo

OTHER

5. Ijevan Mineral Water
17. Ijevan Carpet Factory
23. Ijevan Woodcraft
60. Ijevan Winery

STADIUM

INTERNET, PHONE, POST

25. Post Office

GOVT. OFFICES, INFO

37. Ijevan Mayor's Office
45. Business and Tourism Info Office
53. Government Offices

BANK, ATM

41. Hayeconombank
42. ARDSHININVESTBANK
47. ACBA Bank

APOTEKAS

CLINICS - HOSPITALS

8. Ijevan Hospital #2
9. Ijevan Hospital Medical Center
10. Ijevan Dental Polyclinic, 23 Abovian

PARKS

52. Sculpture garden
58. Ijevan botanical gardens (Dendro Park)

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 263

Long Distance: 0263 + local number

From abroad: +(374) 263+ local number

Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell

International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + number

Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0263) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 263 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Rail

The quickest rail link between Yerevan and Tbilisi/Baku runs through town but is now closed. It might reopen if a treaty is made between Armenia and Azerbaijan (don't hold your breath). The rail station is located 2 km north of Ijevan.

By Bus, Minivan

The bus station (aftokaiyeran) and Marshrutni taxi (minivan) stop are located in the center of town (Yerevanian p.)

Yerevan buses run daily between the Northern Bus Station, 1 Sevan Highway. One bus a day at 1000 AMD.

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) connect Ijevan with Dilijan (200 AMD), Berd (500 AMD), Vanadzor (800 AMD), Noyemberian (600 AMD) and Yerevan (1250 AMD). Minivans wait until they are full before leaving and can pack em in on a busy day.

By Taxi

Yerevan-Ijevan The street taxi from Yerevan will be expensive, around \$40-50 for 4 persons. From Yerevan, the taxis to Ijevan are located in the

parking lot beside (*Kino Rossiya*) at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi Pts. A call taxi will be around 12,000 AMD at 100 AMD per km. Most Yerevan taxi services provide this service, but we called Voyage tel: (010) 54-54-05, 54-54-06).

Dilijan-Ijevan taxis run on order, around 3000 AMD.

Ijevan-Berd taxis run on order, around 5000 AMD each way.

Ijevan-Noyemberian taxis are on order, around 7000 AMD each way (pay two ways if you are getting off in Noyemberian)

By Car

Ijevan is located on the M24 highway, on the main highway linking Yerevan with Tbilisi/Baku, and used to be the quickest route, but owing to the Azerbaijan conflict, it is closed at the border, 20

km NE. The M24 intersects with the H36/P45 to Berd.

Ijevan is 129 km north of Yerevan, 30 kilometers north of Dilijan, 36 km from Berd and 49 km south of Noyemberian. Other destinations are Vanadzor (70 km) and Lake Sevan (76 km).

It takes about 2 hours to Yerevan, 30 minutes to Ijevan, 30 minutes to the border. To go to Berd, connect with the H36/P45 at Ijevan (36 km, 1-2 hours). To go to Noyemberian, connect with the H46 at Azatamut (35 km, 2.5 hours).

Petrol stations and rest stops/kebab stands proliferate on the entries to town and the Dilijan highway.

AROUND

On foot is the best way to savor the city's unique atmosphere and hospitality. It is a small city, 3 km from north to south, and 1.5 across. The center can be crossed in 10 minutes. See [Bearings](#).

Taxis There are taxis in town, hail them on Yerevanian Street in the center of town and across the river in the same area. Rate is 500 AMD anywhere in town, thereafter 100 AMD per km. You can also use these to travel the region (Dilijan – 1500 AMD, Berd – 2500 AMD, Getahovit – 500 AMD, Yenokavan – 1000 AMD), negotiate ahead of time, and expect to pay for the driver waiting at a stop and his meal if you take him past mealtime. One taxi service is *Kamurdj* (tel. 34684, 32962, 32138). Others are (tel. 34000) & (tel. 34666)

Minivans (Marshrutni Taxis) travel three routes in Ijevan; #1 Bibulian takes the uphill route to the East (100 AMD), the Metaghagortsner minivan travels N between center and Metaghagortsner district (100 MAD) and the Getahovit Minivan travels between Ijevan center and Getahovit Village (150 AMD)

TOUR AGENCIES, GUIDES, BUS. CENTER

An English Speaking Guide is *Diana Avetisian* (tel. 351113); French speaking is *Sofia Sargsian*, 10z Yerevanian (tel. 32316).

Tours/camping/transportation/food can be arranged by Vahagn (0 263) 3-14-65 Ijevan land line (091) 36-54-37 mobile.

Apaga Tour at (+ 374 10) 57 03 28, (+374 91) 49 58 34, www.apaga.info. Operates an interesting series of nature tours, including one to Yenokavan Canyon, where they have renovated village buildings into stables and surrounded by wooden chalets, tents, a bathhouse and facilities and offer horse-back or hiking expeditions into the canyon.

Ashot Levonian, (tel. +374 10 57 03 28 home, mob. +374 91 49 58 34), e-mail: levash77@mail.ru specializes in hiking, camping, mountain climbing, nature and geology trips. See his full listing in [Adventure Tour Operators](#).

Vahagn and Tatul Tananian ("Peace to the World", ask around town or go to Yenokavan and inquire there) operate a camp near the river Khachaghbiur in the Yenokavan canyon, with an eclectic mix of tree stumps, chairs, wardrobes and tents.

Nature Tours. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#).

Ijevan Business Support Center, 5 Ashot Melikbekian p. (tel. 31457) is a small NGO to promote business opportunities Ijevan, may be a good source of basic information to lead you towards guides or local overnights. Too bad closed on weekends.

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

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

Post, phone, telegraphs

Ijevan is covered by both Armentel and Viva Cell mobile phone services. International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, at 10 Yerevanian p. [See HayPost site for list](#). The main post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

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

Armentel is at 2 Yerevanian p. (tel. 31111)

Internet

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

Freenet has Internet service at the Marzpetaran (Regional Office, Town square, Yerevanian p.) though the [UNDP](#), which built it, has threatened to pull the rug out from under the only reliable service around.

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, 6/4 Valans
ARDSHININVESTBANK, 10 Melikbekian, tel. 32448

Shopping

The *Shuka* is dead center, opposite the central bridge. Fresh fruits, vegetables, meats. Mterks and kiosks are in the center of town, easy to find.

The *Arts And Crafts Center*, 42-31 Maiysi X'san Uti p. (tel. 34214) has Carpet Weaving, Embroidery,

Exposition of Works of Arts and Crafts, rugs, Knitting and Crocheting, Macramé, Clothing, Dolls, Embroidery, Furniture, Souvenirs, Puppets, Wood Engraving.

Film

Shops in town sell film and batteries, but batteries are useless for anything more than a travel alarm clock. Bring plenty from home, use rechargeable batteries (220v charger) or buy carefully in Yerevan.

Hospital, Clinic, Dental

The *hospital* phone is at 1 Nalbandian p. (tel. 32167, 32179)

The *polyclinic* is at 1 Yeritasardakan (tel. 34619)

Dental Polyclinic is at 3 Abovian p. (tel. 31511)

Apotekas in town center, Yerevanian p. ask at your overnight for recommendation.

NGO

Bridge of Hope established a community for 150 children with disabilities who are improving their skills and abilities while their self-esteem is raised.

Addresses

Armenian Young Lawyers Assoc. Branch Office, Town Hall Building (tel. 62499, fax: 62499), e-mail: ijevan@ayla.am free legal services to the population of Tavush region.

Tavush Marzpetaran, Constitution Square, 5 Yerevanian p. (tel. 32356, 32138)

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL

Ijevan Hotel and Restaurant, Yerevanian p. (Spitak Lake, Gndzakar Village), 4 km from Ijevan on way to Dilijan (tel. 34377, 33422) has 6 rooms, baths and hot water. Large restaurant caters to local celebrations plus tourists. Price person is 10,000 AMD.

Mosh Hotel, 3 Yerevanian p. (tel. 35611) is a high rise in the center of town is run down and mostly attracts the hourly trade. Rooms have no hot water, cold water by schedule, rooms are the most basic, but cheap with Singles/Doubles/Lux at 2000/3000/5000 AMD.

Milena Guest House, Getahovit village (tel. 3 21 01) is a 2 story house with 4 bedrooms, 8 beds, 3 balconies with picturesque scenery. 5000 AMD per person.

REST HOUSE, PENSIONAT

Tavush Teachers' Retraining Centre Rest-House, Spitak Lake (tel. 311 96, 321 95) is on the SW end of town, about 500 m from the town limits. Rooms have bed, wardrobe, chair, cold water, heating, bathroom, toilet, TV (in some rooms), hot water by schedule, 2 TV sets in the lobby, tennis, billiards, café-bar, conference hall. Buffet, light breakfast and supper included in price with 1st class Double/Triple/Lux at 4000 AMD, 2nd class Doubles at 3000 AMD and 3rd class Triples/Quads at 2000 AMD. All prices are per person.

B&B

Unless otherwise noted, price is per person.

Aida Sarhatyan, Nar-Dos p. (tel. 32383, 34245) is located in the center of the town with beautiful view. 3 bedrooms, bath, lavatory, telephone, TV, chess, table tennis, computer, lunch and dinner available. 5000 AMD

Anahit Alaverdian, 4 Tavrizian p. (tel. 32274) house with flower garden is located in the center of the town, near a market, café, service stations. 3 bedrooms, bath, lavatory, sitting room, lunch and dinner available, telephone, TV, chess, table tennis. 5000 AMD

Anahit Mkrtoumian, 18 Gharagiozian p. (tel. 32437) tufa stone house located in the center of town, surrounded by a flower garden. Three cafes within walking distance. 5 bedrooms, bath, laundry, telephone, TV. 5000 AMD.

Armineh Sargsian, 54 Metaghagortsneri p. (tel. 36222) stone house with small adjoining garden located in quiet area near the river. 3 bedrooms, bath, laundry, telephone, TV, iron, hairdryer. 5000 AMD.

Artem Iskandarian, 28 Nar-Dos p. (tel. 34570) in the former Soonk Restaurant building, this guest house is situated in the center of the town surrounded by trees. Nearby are fountain square and a large outdoor café. 5 bedrooms, large hall, bath, 5 lavatories, bar, 2 cars, 2500 AMD.

Bibouljian, 70 Ohanian p. (tel. 31585) is located on the right bank of Aghstev Lake, with a large flower garden. 3 bedrooms, 1 bath, 2 lavatories, TV, telephone, garden, car garage, swimming pool. 5000 AMD.

Geghetsik Edilian, Spitak Lake, Gandzakar Village (tel. 32195, 34603) is a large house (16 rooms, 7

bathrooms, 7 lavatories) on a hillside overlooking a forest. Five kilometers from Ijevan, the B&B has 24 hour water, hot water on schedule. Other services include extra meals and excursions. 5000 AMD.

Giulnara Meliksetian, 2 Nalbandian p. (tel. 31554,34105) has 4 bedrooms (2 twins, 2 doubles), 1 bath, guest room, laundry, hairdryer, TV, photo camera, lunch and dinner available. 5000 AMD.

Hovhannes Afian, 9 Metaghagortsneri p. (tel. 33177) is a small house with a courtyard. The house has great views of the area. 1 bedroom, 1 bath, car and car garage. 5000 AMD.

Levon Karapetian, 4 Nar-Dos p. (tel. 33609) 3 bedrooms, living room, telephone, TV set, hot and cold water, garden, beekeeping.

Lusia Atabekian, 4 Nar-Dos p. (tel. 33609) is two-stories with 1 bedroom, 1 bath. 5000 AMD.

Lusia Atabekian, 1 Terian p. (tel. 33947) is situated in the center of the town and has a flower garden with trees. Play area for kids, 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, TV, telephone, hairdryer, iron. 5000 AMD.

Mania Zalinian, Getahovit Village (tel. 32101) is about 10 min drive from Ijevan, and has 4 bedrooms, 2 dining rooms, 3 balconies, 1 bath and 2 lavatories. Breakfast, TV, iron included. Extra services include lunch and dinner. 5000 AMD.

Mets Mher, 1 Yerevanian p. (tel. 31472) has 4 rooms, bedrooms, two baths. 5000 AMD.

Misha Hamzian, 2 Nalbandian p. (tel. 31554) has 4 rooms, bakery, barbeque place, tennis. 5000 AMD.

Olia Eghikian, 23 Tavrizian p. (tel. 34626) is a stone house with a large courtyard, located in the center of the town. It is close to service stations and a grocery. 3 rooms, 1 bath, 1 lavatory, TV, car, hairdryer. 5000 AMD.

Sergey Eghikian, 8a Metaghagortsneri p. (tel. 35000) is located on the right bank of Aghstev Lake. It has a garden and is surrounded with wildflowers. 5 rooms, 1 bath, 1 lavatory, 24 hour hot and cold water, natural gas, heating system, TV, telephone, car garage, car. 5000 AMD.

Sirush Khalatian, Getahovit Village Center (tel. 32763) is in a two story house with large balconies overlooking the area. 5 bedrooms, 2 baths, 3 lavatories, 2 dining rooms. 5000 AMD.

Sofia Sargsyan, 10a Yerevanian p. (tel. 32316) is a stone house located in the South of town, surrounded by trees and flowers. 3 rooms, 1 bath, 1 lavatory, laundry, telephone, TV and etc. 5000 AMD.

Svetlana Antonian, 3 Yerevanian p. (tel. 32174) has a small courtyard and garden, as well as an adjoining bakery. The owner is a beekeeper, and provides fresh honey. The house is located near the center of the town, in a neighborhood with a canteen, children's clinic, regional hospital, gas station and a car repair shop. 5000 AMD.

Vardan Vardanian, 25 Proshian p. (tel. 33695) has 6 bedrooms on 3 floors, kitchen, bath, natural gas and 24 hour water. 5000 AMD.

Boarding is a distinct possibility in Ijevan, 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. 5000 AMD a night and breakfast is fair.

FOOD AND DRINK

Cafes and bistros are throughout the city, as are khorovatz joints in town and on the highway to Dilijan. Food can also be bought at Mterks (food shops) and kiosks around town.

\$ = 2000 AMD or less for meal w/o drinks

\$\$ = 2000-3500 AMD

\$\$\$ = 3500 AMD or more

Restaurants

Bar-Restaurant, next to the History Museum on Yerevanian, has decent Armenian food from cheap to moderate. \$-\$\$

Mets Mher Restaurant, is on the river, at the north bridge (N of the shuka), with pretty good food on site next to river. \$-\$\$

Café Vardenank, 3 Yerevanian (tel. 33695), just S of the shuka, basic food, basic service. \$-\$\$

Danelianots Restaurant, Yerevanian p. after the Wine Factory, white building on the right. Considered one of the best in town, locals like it. \$\$

Mush Hotel, Good food, popular with locals. \$\$

Restaurants Near Town

Barekamutian, Yerevanian Hwy, 9.5 km from Ijevan

Artsakh, Yerevanian Hwy, 3 km from Ijevan

Armenian Cuisine, 1 km from Ijevan

Israeli, Yerevanian Hwy, 3.5 km from Ijevan

Yura Tumanian, Yerevanian Hwy, 3.7 km from Ijevan

Marmara, Yerevanian Hwy, 2.7 km from Ijevan

Cafes

Café Yeritasardakan Ankakhutian just north of Ijevanian, basic good eats. \$

Ijevan Central Hotel Café, base of the central hotel building. Decent, pretty location. \$

Fountain Café, Central Square, coffee, sandwiches, \$

Urenu Hovit, 3 Yerevanian p, café fare at decent price. \$

Shant, Yerevanian p. (tel. 32576), café fare, good grill food. \$-\$\$

Lusineh, Yerevanian p. café fare, good grill food. \$

Dghiak, 29 Yerevanian p. café fare, good grill food. \$

Partez, 2 Ankakhutian p. café fare, good grill food. \$

Handipum, Valansi p. café fare, good grill food. \$

Night Club 777, Valansi p. local 'businessmen' thrive in this rabiz space. \$\$



TRIP 2: IJEVAN EAST ▲

IJEVAN - **GANDZAKAR** - (Sarum Pass) - (Tsaghkut Pass) - **NAVUR** - (Murghuz - Chambarak - Sevan) - (Chinchin) - **BERD**

Trip 2 takes you into Shamshadin, Armenia's "Shangri-La," a rich land of forests, meadows, farmlands and vineyards rolling from the Hamza, Miapor and Sevan Mountain ranges to the Kura River in Azerbaijan. Rarely visited for its remote location, the valley (actually a set of three deep river valleys: the Hakhum, Tavush, and Khndzorut) is one of Armenia's richest, both in nature and in the incredible number of archeological sites in the region; Copper and Bronze Age sites vie with Iron Age cyclopean fortresses and Medieval castles for dominance on the landscape, with churches from Armenia's earliest Christian era thrust against Medieval glories, all of it set against stunning displays of wild flowers, forests, undulating farmlands and rugged river gorges dotted with caves and sheer cliffs. It's off the beaten path, visitors need to figure on a little extra time to get in and to around, but the time is worth it to feel yourself completely absorbed in an ancient world.

Getting In: There are three ways into Shamshadin, one of which skirts the Azerbaijan border from Azatamut in the NE of Tavush. Of the other two, the one linking **Chambarak and Lake Sevan with Navur**, SW of Berd, is a beautiful 3-4 hour ride on top of the Murghuz mountains and between the Hairum and Tavush river gorges. The trip is a great summer ride, impassable in winter months. The **third**, which starts off this trip, winds and switchbacks for 90 minutes to 2 hours through two mountain passes from Ijevan.



Stay: Overnight in Berd hotel and village homes (both are rustic). Camping throughout the area, on river beds, in forests, near villages (ask first).

Eat: Berd cafes, bistros and restaurants, roadside stands, village homes.

Springs: Gandzakar, Navur, Chinchin.

Note: The trip from Ijevan to Berd (without stops in good conditions) takes 1.5- 2 hours over difficult terrain and bad roads. Road cars do make it (just watch the locals), but a Niva or Jeep is strongly advised for getting in and around Shamshadin, it will make the going easier and increase the number of places you can visit.

➔ From the Ijevan south bridge/roundabout go SE on Miasnikian, which turns into Mehrabian as it

leaves town and follows the Urutijur/Nalteket river for about 2.3 km to a bridge over the river to **GANDZAKAR** (DD 40.84 x 45.1630556) 📍 🗺

✦ **GANDZAKAR - ԳԱՆԶԱԿԱՐ** ▲ (till 1978 Aghdan elev. 1258m, pop. 1452) is in the Nalteket River valley where it meets the Urutijur River, with forested mountains on three sides. The village is 3 km long, but barely 500 m at its widest point. In the village there is a **S. Gevorg** church of a domed cross form type, and a **S. Kiraki chapel** (1286), built during the late Mongol era, a last flowering of culture in Armenia before Timur and the Ottomans ended the Medieval period.

On the north end of the village, to the East on Mt. Budur (1371.9 m) there is an **Iron Age cyclopean fort** with two 12-13th c. **churches** and khachkars in the nearby forest. The churches are cross form domed hall types, with interesting ornamentation in geometric and flower patterns (rosettes, geometric lines) and a number of Khach carvings on the walls.

3 km on, at the upper (S) end of the village the ruined **Medieval Tanik fort** lies on a western hill.

Hikes. There are two good hiking trails from Gandzakar. *One* starts at the SW tip of the village and follows the Urutijur/Nalteket river about 12 km to Mt. Inaksar (2144 m). A *second* begins on the SE edge of the village, following the Gelatanget (1971 m) river about 6 km to Mt. Itsakar, 6 km to Kazanuchan (2070.9 m) and 6 km to Mt. Inakdag. A *third* follows the Leginchai river E past Budur to just above Mt. Sargsi (1952.3 m).

OVERNIGHT B&B

Geghetsk Edilian, Spitak Lich; Gandzakar village (tel. 32195, 34603) is situated on a hillside, overlooking a forest. Five kilometers from Ijevan. Visitors can avail themselves of the many mountain hiking trails in the area. 16 rooms, 7 baths, 7 lavatories, 24 hour cold water supply, hot water at select times, meals, excursions. 5000 AMD.

Camping in the area and on the river beds.

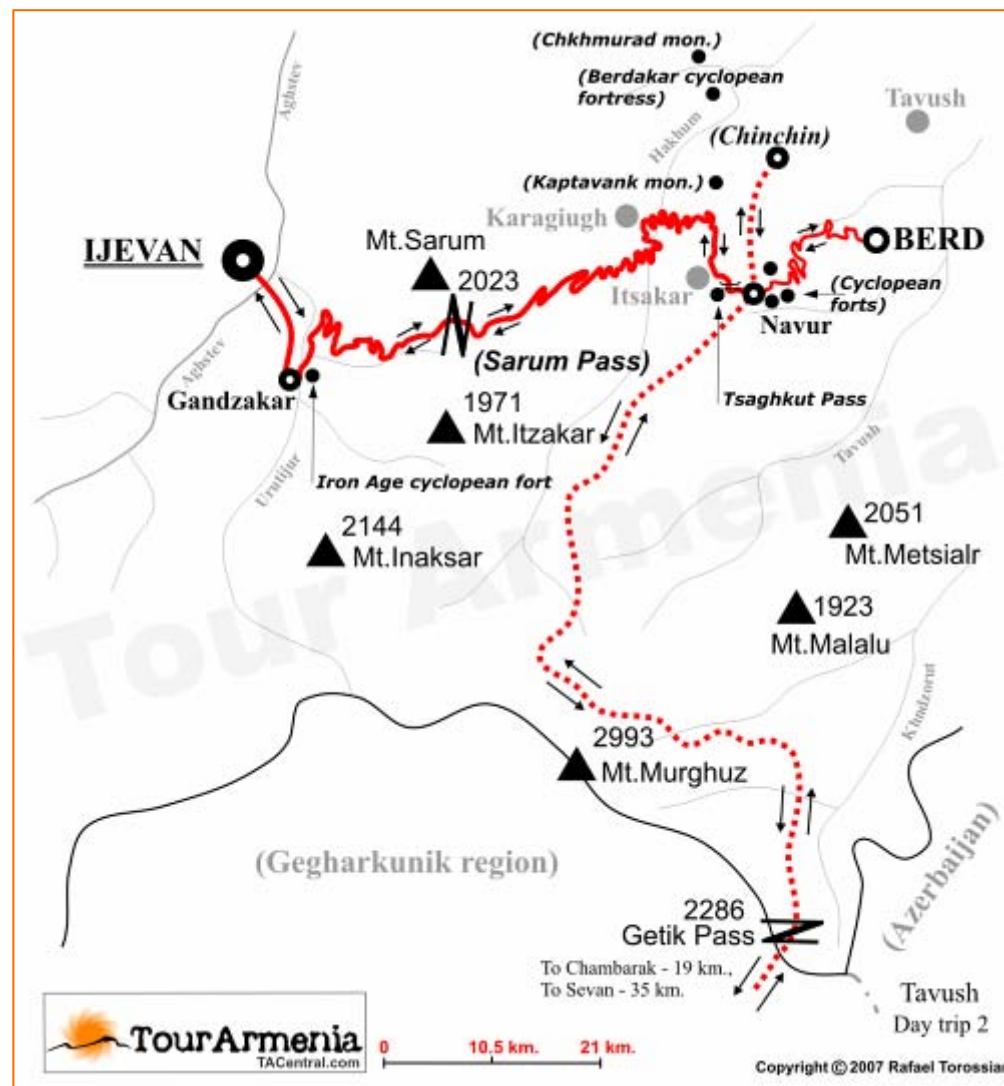
➔ From the Gandzakar entry bridge follow the main road into the village about 600 m to a large intersection, and turn left (E) and follow it as it turns left after about 100 m then right after 400 m and exits the village. This is the Berd road, a

winding, high mountain road that navigates between mountains and rivers for 36 km between Ijevan and Berd. Follow it about 11.5 km to the (Sarum Pass)

SIDE TRIP: (Sarum Pass – Սարմու Լեռնանով) lies just past a high alpine dairy farm and a series of dramatic switchbacks above Gandzakar

and Ijevan to the pass, just below Mt. Sarum (2023.8 m). The view is breathtaking, overlooking the Leginchai river and its tributaries 2000 m below and S to Mt. Sargsi (2023.8 m).

➔ Continue E on the road another 12 km over numerous switchbacks down the mountain to the Karakamurdj bridge / (Teghut Pass)



SIDE TRIP: (Tsaghkut Pass Ծաղկուտ Լեռանձկ) the bridge is over the Hakhum river, one of the main valleys in Shamshadin. The pass begins the final descent to Berd, just before the narrowest point in the gorge. Mountains plunge towards you from seemingly all directions at this point. Somewhere to the S on a hill overlooking the river valley is the 6th-4th BCE Sehtner ("heart" or central) fortress.

➡ Continue about 8 km through Itsakar village to **NAVUR** (DD 40.8613889 x 45.3175) center 🏰

✂ **NAVUR – ՆԱՎՈՐ** 📍 (elev. 1598m, pop. 2223) is at the crossroads of four mountain passes, and, sitting on top of their fulcrum has been "gatekeeper" for thousands of years.

The village has the Kari Glugh cyclopean fort and the 1st m BCE Berdi Glugh ("main fortress") on its southern edge. 5 km S of the village, on the Tavush is the 1st m BCE Tandzut fortress.

Navur is also the starting point for visiting Chin Chin and Kaputak Vank (Kaptavank), both to the N, as well as the Southern Road out of Tavush, to Lake Sevan.

➡ Take the N road to Chin Chin for about 4 km and just outside the village (just before a set of barns) a road angles back sharply to the L into the fields. Take that road between the fields for about 2 km to a small stream. Cross the stream and as you rise on the other side, take a L path that leads uphill and then angle R on the path and continue another 2 km to the 4th clearing of woods and **KAPUTAKVANK** (DD 40.89467 x 45.31052).

✂ **KAPUTAK VANK (Kaptavank - Կապտականք)** The 10th-13th cc **Kaputak vank (Kaptavank - blue monastery)** is in a clearing in the woods also ideal for camping. The small church covered with wild growth is what remains from the once proud monastic complex. The dome and its drum have survive with some of the sandstone ornamental carvings on the drum remaining. The remains of the blue sandstone popular in richer churches of the time can be found here and there. The bluish stone is probably the reason for its name.

The monastery was surrounded by a **wall**, 3 meters thick at points, is in ruins, its stones long since taken away to build houses, sheds and to repair more important churches elsewhere.



The 10th or 12th c **Astvatsatsin or Mariam church** is a Tetraconch (a building composed of four conchs; *conch*: a semicircular niche surmounted by a half-dome) with an almost square exterior but an elongated hall. The conchs meet under the central dome, supported by flying arches with protruding columns on the corners. The **drum** has a series of neo-classical bands rising to the dome roof. Damaged during Seljuk and Mongol attacks, the church and dome were reconstructed over time, note pieces of khachkars and different stones in the walls, they are not original but used by parishioners attempting to rebuild their monastery church. The church was built of Medieval 'concrete,' a common construction method, building walls with lime and rough stone, then sheathing the walls with thinly sliced tufa or sandstone. Astvatsatsin has lost much of its exterior sheathing, what remains are the support walls, the hexahedral drum and the pointed dome, all in stone. Some restoration work has been done, primarily to prevent further damage.

The Volga That Could

We left Kaptavank via the one lane road we had lurched across to reach the vank, a rutted path barely wide enough for our little Lada, let alone the mammoth combines plying the wheat fields on either side, up an embankment of grassy slopes laden with late wild flowers. I even mused another Lada meeting us would have to engage in a game of chicken to see who would back up first.

Half way up the road, we met not a Lada but an old Volga; a hulking hump-backed creature nicknamed the Soviet Tank by locals. I soon found out why as we approached each other in the one-lane path, the Volga blinking its lights for us to somehow give way or go into reverse. Ashot, in true Armenian fashion, blinked his little Lada lights back and threw up his hands as if to say, "in your dreams."

Both drivers made that ubiquitous hand gesture in Armenia that symbolizes so much at the same time; frustration, anger and in this case, bemusement at our predicament. We had each gone too far to back off, yet someone had to give way. But there was not an inch to give; I could not even open my door to get out of the car.

Then the amazing happened, as only it does in Armenia: The Volga driver smiled, winked, glanced over his shoulder at a tall ridge that poured into the one lane path at a 30 degrees angle and—despite our loud protests it was impossible for such a huge vehicle to find space on that narrow ridge and we would rather lift our Lada out of the road than watch him attempt the impossible!! he simply smiled again, lurched into reverse and steered up and onto the ridge, perching that huge tank like a sparrow on a twig.

We passed within inches of each other, and I looked into the proudest face I have seen in Armenia; a sly gold toothed smile, a wink and a twist of the wrist with the finger pointing to his head, then flipping his hand so the palm cradled the sky, tickling it with delight and amazement at the Volga that could

There is an **inscription** on the W wall dating the frescoes to 1151, the name Church of the Holy Virgin. An inscription on the W wall mentions

frescoes on the walls, and some traces of them survive, from the 10th, 12th and 13th cc.

To the SE is a **medieval cemetery**, resting place for monks & lords of the early ages, peasants later on. The custom on its N edge are three lime kilns.

To the SW there are some **ravines**, inaccessible except with rope gear. Among them are some rough structures built from lime and stone, thought to be **sanctuaries**, but oddly placed to be so. Another thought is that they in fact are shrines to hermits that once inhabited these remote craggy places, or were domiciles for the hermit monks themselves.

The ascetic monk or hermit has along tradition in the Armenian church, beginning from the great Syrian and Greek ascetics of the Levant. Their ability to not just live alone, but to suffer the ravages of the elements with only their rags and faith, were particularly attractive to the faithful. There are records of ascetics living for years on the tops of columns, exposed to the elements and preaching to the masses as they slowly wasted away. The freezing winter cold and blistering summer heat reinforced their status as holy men, and they commanded huge audiences as they preached (mostly) the evils of man, the terrors of hell and the impending End of Time. Ascetic monks, if they were here, would have welcomed the remote and harsh condition of the ravines, caves, or even trees, studying, preaching and praying while waiting their eternal reward.



Camping in the area. **Overnight** in village possible, 3000 AMD with breakfast fair.

➡ *Backtrack to the Navur road, turn L (N) and continue for about 1.5 km to (Chinchin DD 40.9116667 x 45.3541667) center* 🏰 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (Chinchin –Չինչին elev. 1104m, pop. 2231) About 3 km W of Chinchin, overlooking the Hakhum river is the 6-4th c. cyclopean fortress of Berdakar.

➡ *Backtrack to Navur from where you can take the Alternate SW Mountain road to **Mt. Murghuz, Chambarak and Lake Sevan** in Gegharkunik marz.*



🌸 ROAD TO CHAMBARAK / LAKE SEVAN: 📍

This has to be one of Armenia's most beautiful roads, easily surpassing the rest of the country for its views and windswept grandeur. The area is simply breathtaking, its cool mountain breeze flowing over breathtaking views of tree-laden mountains flowing into velvet carpets of alpine grass on huge rolling hills, toed by humongous 'curtains' of stone. Once inhabited by Azeris, the area is mostly deserted during the cold months and sparsely occupied during the short growing (and tree cutting) season, leaving a haven for the soul craving some peace and quiet in pristine nature. This is the only area of the country we have visited where the only sound we heard when we turned off our engine and got out of the car was absolute natural silence. Come before the new Armenians discover it and turn it into a new dacha town. Hard to imagine in such a small, loud country.

About 60% of the road from the Navur end is quite good. Maintenance consists of laying soft gravel into pot holes, and it works surprisingly well, at least when we were there the end of August. The other 40% is less maintained, but still

passable (if bumpy). From the Navur side the most spectacular views begin in about 8 km, continuing for another 10 or 15 km. It gradually transitions into rolling mountains of velvet grass and wild flowers until it descends into the Chambarak valley floor, less green, but still lush along the river side. The closer you get to Chambarak the more cold it gets, Sevan's chilly waters peppering the wind with crystalline energy even in the heat of summer.



Figure 2 hours for a nice leisurely drive through this wonderful area, stopping along the way for coffee breaks (bring your thermos), pictures, conversations with the few refugees that inhabit the tiny huts along the way (this is also one of the most vulnerable areas of the country; those who live here year round are virtually cut off 4 months of the year), and to experience that wonderful sound of silence only nature can provide.

The road rides the high ridge between the Hairum and Tavush rivers before ascending Mt. Murghuz at

the top of the Miapor mountain range into the Sevan mountains then into Gegharkunik to T'tujur, Chambarak and Lake Sevan. The ride from Chambarak opens suddenly into the Lake Sevan basin, a gorgeous blue color in the afternoon sun. From Navur it is 43.5 km to Chambarak and 59.5 km to Lake Sevan. The whole trip takes 2-3 hours to Chambarak and is impassable in the winter months.

➡ *From Navur take the road at the S end of town towards the southern mountains.*

About 700 m from the village is a 1990's equestrian statue of General Andranik holding a sword. The statue faces Azerbaijan, a none-too-subtle message. Andranik led resistance in the area in the 1910's, succeeding in rousting Azeri/Red Army fighters in 1920, only to watch them re-infiltrate in 1921 after the truce. Next to the statue is the grave for Mushegh "Papo" Asrian, commander of the Navur self-defense forces in 1990. Navur was under attack during the conflict, but Asrian was killed in a car wreck.

Continue for about 2.5-3 km, and over to your right (obscured by trees) is the **Dashti Berd (Ղաշտի Բերդ) cyclopean fort**, with wall remains.

Continuing on you pass through gorgeous high alpine country, with thick stands of forests, summer pastures, mountain meadows and rugged landscapes. The road passes the previous Azeri villages of Yeghishavin, Armenasar, Arturasar (renamed for Armenian heroes from the Karabakh conflict) as well as picnic areas, a modern Vishap Stone and stunning landscapes of forest covered mountains, spectacular peaks of granite and tuff, and rolling mountains covered with velvet grasslands. This is excellent hiking country in any direction.

Skirting the north face of Mt. Murghuz (2992.4 m) and continuing on for about 13 km you reach the Getik pass (2286 m) and Gegharkunik marz, about 6 km from **T'tujur** (DD 40.6508333 x 45.305 elev. 1792m, pop. 1219).

At T'tujur take the left (SE) turn on the highway for 6 km to **Chambarak** center (DD 40.5952778 x 45.3475 elev. 1875m, pop. 1304), from which the road continues SW 8.1 km to a fork, the left going 2.5 km to **Aghbulakh** (DD 40.5263889 x 45.2772222 elev. 2142m, pop. 1053) and another 3 km to **Shorza** (DD 40.5030556 x 45.2702778

elev. 1897m, pop. 1053), the right 6 km to Lake Sevan shoreline.




➡ *From Navur go E on the Berd Hwy for about 5.8 km down some switchbacks to the Tavush river valley floor and **BERD*** 🏰 🗺️

➡ **END OF TRIP 2**



BERD

(DD 40.87718 x 45.40211)

 **BERD** - ԲԵՐԴ (formerly Tavush, Turkish Tovuzghala elev. 1080m, pop. 2242) is located on the left bank of the river, at the confluence of one of its tributaries. The small city is one of Armenia's most impoverished, but locals are extremely friendly and duly proud of their small city, surrounded by stunning nature and on top of some of the most archeologically important sits in Armenia.



Background. At Berd you are on the great Tavush River valley, one of the oldest agricultural centers on earth. The precursor to domesticated grain was found here, as are wild variants of domesticated fruits and cereals. Settlements have been traced to the Paleolithic era (15,000-12,000 BCE), with the greatest concentration in and around Berd in the Copper, Bronze and Iron Ages.

Strategically located on a key route from the Caspian region and Central Asia, the valley, and city, have been fortified and invaded innumerable times, those we remember merely the last of millennium of conflict. The name means Fortress, and no name is more suited; within the confines of the city are the 9th c Tslik Amram (Tavush) fortress rock, an impregnable fortress in its day, rung round by a dozen or more fortresses and towers in the area. This was one of the fulcrums through which invaders entered Gugark and Anatolia, it was paramount to defend.

During the Arshacid and Zakarian eras (9th and 13th cc respectively), the area was breeding ground for power alliances, nakharar fortunes were won on the battlegrounds and beds of this region.

The region was abandoned after the Mongol invasion of 1236 and especially after their census of 1251, incorporating the area into the *Kurjistan vilayet of the Atarpatakan province*, the region's pastureland becoming the personal estates of Mongol princes who used it for summer grazing. As a result most Armenians left the area, driven out by Tatar nomads. The city changed owners again in the 14th (Timur), 15th (Ottoman Turks) and 16th (Persian Iran) cc, before settling in to 200 years of impoverished peace.

The situation came to a head again in the late 18th century when the Shah Agha Mahmad of Iran, bent on punishing rebellious Armenians in Karabakh and Giulagarak, mounted a military expedition. At first he seemed to have succeeded, burning cities and villages (Vanadzor among them) and killing Armenians, but in 1795 the Russian Imperial Army, having won decisive battles against Turkey in the Crimea, began to focus on the resource rich Caucasus, and attacked back, to 'protect' their Christian brethren. By 1801 the region was ceded to Russia, and farmers and peasants from Karabakh and Siunik began to flood into Tavush. Berd was officially founded in this period.

In the 19th c. Berd grew, benefited by the new immigrant farmers and the Russian Empire, a few buildings surviving from this period, including a school founded in 1871. The area was key to Socialist uprising of the late 19th-early 20th cc. and Berd was among the towns that supported the rebellion against the First Republic, believing Armenia's only salvation against Turkish aggression to be their Russian brothers. The Red army marched through the region and the town in 1920-1921, following in reverse the same mountain passes you just drove through to get here.

Berd, perhaps because of ties to relatives in Karabakh as well as its remote location next to the Azerbaijan frontier, experienced some of the worst fighting in Armenia proper during the 1991-1994 conflict, which in fact still simmers, locals still defiantly threatening to take historic Armenian lands up to the Kura River.

Berd now suffers from its remote location and failed economy. Except for farming, which is still a very difficult proposition, all other businesses are virtually at a standstill. Coops and micro-manufacturing keep people going, as do remittances from family members working in Yerevan and abroad.

There is a lot of petty corruption, the local police particularly on the take for small bribes. Normally shielding tourists from these activities, Armenians

in Berd unfortunately do not seem to care, more interested in lining their pockets than protecting their reputations. By all means do not avoid Berd because of this, it is a fascinating place and your main overnight in Shamshadin. Just be aware of it and resist as best you can.

Bearings. The town is 1.5 km between its furthest distances, no spot more than 15 minutes walk. The town square has the old administrative center buildings, offices and the Berd Hotel, a sad, dreary Soviet relic. All cafes, restaurants and sights are within this area or nearby. Main streets are Mashtots, Aiygestan and Sayat Nova.

SIGHTS

The town has both drab Soviet blocks and stunning natural surroundings. There are several historic sites in the town, but spend some time just walking the streets and meeting the locals. You are by far a rare commodity here, and their shyness soon gives way to gushing laughter and queries (You are from Texas? Well I have a cousin in Detroit named Arsen, do you know him?)

SIGHTS



Tslik Amram (Յիկ Ամրամ) Castle / Tavush Fortress (DD 40.87718 x 45.40211, elev. 1080m) is on the E edge of town, off the Chinari Road. To get there turn R to the bus station, then take the first L and follow that to the Chinari Road (ask) and take that as it sweeps around the town and up to the fortress, across from an old Pensionat and restaurant. The 9th-10th cc castle is on a huge rock precipice overlooking the town, with settlement foundations at the bottom. Some of the original wall and ramparts can be detected on

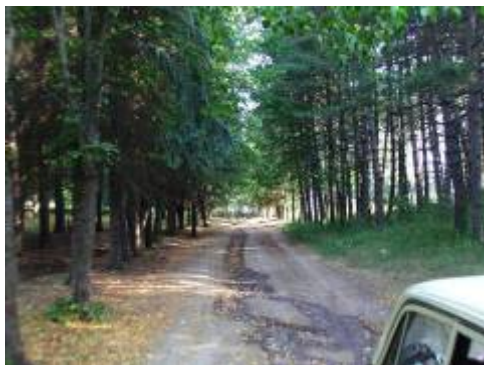
the top ridge, but unless you climb up on top (a staggering challenge), you can't really see the extent of this once impregnable fortress, which guarded the pass into Giulagarak for hundreds of years.

The castle is named after its most famous tenants, Tslik Amram, a powerful lord in the 8th-9th cc. Legend has it his wife, Aspram, was secretly in love with the great Ashot Yerkat (Ashot Iron, Iron-willed or made of Iron), who ruled all of Giulagarak, Gegharkunik and Kotaik, but who had designs on rousting the Arab Caliphate from Vaspurakan and Shirak. Ashot Yerkat, suffering through an arranged marriage to the daughter of another nakharar (Sahak Seveda), reciprocated her love. Of course Tslik found out and imprisoned his wife in the castle where she committed suicide. In revenge, he had Ashot's wife's brother and cousin blinded in revenge, their eyes gouged out with burning iron. In true Armenian nakharar fashion, as son a s a mutual threat came along in this case the Arabs) Tslik, Ashot and Sahak banded together to fight and defeat the invading force, establishing the kingdom of Ani and the second Golden Age of Armenia.



Continue on the dirt track that skirts the N end of the Berd (leading into the countryside and river valley) for about 1 km, past small garden plots and bushes laden with black berries to a black khachkar on the left side of the path. This marks the entry into **Old Berd** (DD 40.86775 x 45.39735, 953m), now overgrown with vegetation, but once Tslik Amram's medieval city. A little beyond, down a slight incline, also to the L, is a spring with a small unprepossessing stone. The stone is a fragment of the great Berd khachkar, probably from an old Vishap, which still guards the spring, the water source for Old Berd.

The water is cold and refreshing, and the area a nice place to rest from the hot sun.



The **Botanical Park** at the top of the town has traces of **cyclopean walls** from the 2nd-1st millennium BCE. Otherwise it is a welcome respite from the dusty streets below, despite its worn condition, and is a magnet for Saturday-Sunday local revelers. The old café, a Soviet era curved structure, sells sandwiches and coffee (in season, weekends).



Nearby on the road going uphill from the Park (behind you as you face the park gates) is the small **Hachik Tumanian Ethnographic ("Azgarakan") museum** (officially open 10-5). You will need to ask for someone to roust the museum staff (ask at the Mayor's Office) with a small but solid collection of artifacts uncovered in the area. The building has good views of the town and region.

Closer in town behind the Police Station is the **Central Park** and the location of a **proto-Armenian cemetery** (5th-4th cc BCE) with shaft graves. The graves are nary in sight; look for slight depressions in the ground and for the industrious, under the large outdoor café complex, Artifacts included vases, prayer totems and bronze idols and jewelry.

Berd is located in **wine country** and there is an Aigepar centre for processing grapes (ask for instructions how to get there). Nothing much to look at until mid August, when the grape crops are blessed (Feast of the Ascension) and truckloads of grapes are brought in to be pressed.

Outside of town, in the hills east of town are two undated **shrines, S. Sarkis and S. N'shan**. Both are located on the top of tall hills, each a steep 20-30 minute climb. The shrines (more properly called Tuxh Manukhs), are hallmarks of an earlier age, when the site was settled by Paleolithic, Copper and Bronze Age civilizations, and the river the primary conduit into the interior mountains from the Kura River Plain. Now they are pilgrimage sites for locals seeking intercession, blessing their sheep before sacrifice, or making the ubiquitous journey around the shrine 7 times, each time praying for their cause. In the spring and autumn these are lovely spots to rest at, pray or contemplate one's existence.

Tavush River Hike ▲ Berd is on the Tavush River, which has some excellent hiking potential. **Follow the river upstream** through a dramatic ravine (about 2.3 km) past the Madanidzor (2nd after ravine, 3 km), the Navur (R) and Kachadar (L) River forks (3.6 km) and continue about 13.8 past several streams and rivers to the Tavush Delta, a two prong fork (the R fork breaks into two again) that leads up (following the right fork, then right again) in another 1.7 km to the Navur-Sevan mountain road.

Follow the river downstream to Tavush Reservoir (1.7 km from the N end of Berd), Agepar (7.5 km) and the Azerbaijan border (8 km).

NGO's

Not normally on a tourist's radar, the several NGO's in Berd are real destinations. They cater to the average person who has fallen through the cracks and give real insight into Armenia's challenges. They also are the best way we know of to get to know locals on a more personal level.

If you have the chance, be sure to visit with **Sister Hanna**, a German nun who runs the local **soup kitchen** for the elderly. Ask any local and they will take you. She welcomes help, but does not press. Her faith and tenacity are inspiring as she caters to the needs of Berd's forgotten, working to fulfill her dream to open a small senior citizens home in Berd.

Kaghni (tel. (374 67) 2 14 33; 2 31 00) provides job training and an employment network for the fractured region. Good source of information for those seeking a deeper understanding of the situation in the area.

Women of Utik (Central Berd) works to protect women's rights and solving the problem of homeless children. Another excellent source of information for those wanting a deeper understanding of the place they are visiting. Also delightful women to visit and share coffee with.

Bridge of Hope (Central Berd) Development Center for Children with Disabilities Center.

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 267
Long Distance: 0267 + local number
From abroad: +(374) 267+ local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell
International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + number
Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0267) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 267 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Bus, Minivan

There are no buses into Berd, the nearest goes into Ijevan (1200 AMD from Yerevan), from which you can catch a minivan (3000 AMD).

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) connect Berd with Ijevan (500 AMD) caught in the town square, and from Yerevan (3000 AMD) at the Northern Bus Station, 1 Sevan Highway. The minivan stops in Berd in the town center. In addition, minivans make a circular route, connecting Berd with Verin Karmiraghbiur, Artsvaber, Chinari, Choratan, Mosesgegh, Tsaghkavan, Varagavan, Parakavar and Aigehovit. Fares range from 50-500 AMD depending on the length of the trip. There is generally one minivan leaving in the morning and one returning in the afternoon. Ask at each locality for the general time a minivan passes

through. Note this is a very long, arduous trip on rough roads, not for those on a tight schedule.

By Taxi

From Ijevan, taxis to Berd are located in Ijevan center and in front of the Shuka. Taxis to Berd cost around 1000 AMD for up to 4. If you want to spend the night and explore the area before returning to Ijevan, ask for a driver with family in Berd, there are few, and it is cheaper than putting them up overnight. *Yerevan taxi* is 20,000 AMD for up to 4 people or the same for 16,000 AMD if you find a private car going to Yerevan (negotiated price). Ask around.

By Car

Berd is located on the H45/P45 (between Ijevan and Alibelli at the Azerbaijan border) and at the northern terminus of the H48/P48 which circles eastwards and north to the H45/P45 at Agelar. Berd is 56 km from Ijevan; 78 km from Lake Sevan via the H45/P45 to Navur, then S on the Chambarak road; 158 km from Yerevan via Sevan, 165 km from Yerevan via Ijevan; 12 km from the Azeri border at Alibelli.

Berd has a few service stations, fill up in Ijevan.

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 5 minutes. Mashtots, Aiygestan and Sayat Nova are main streets.

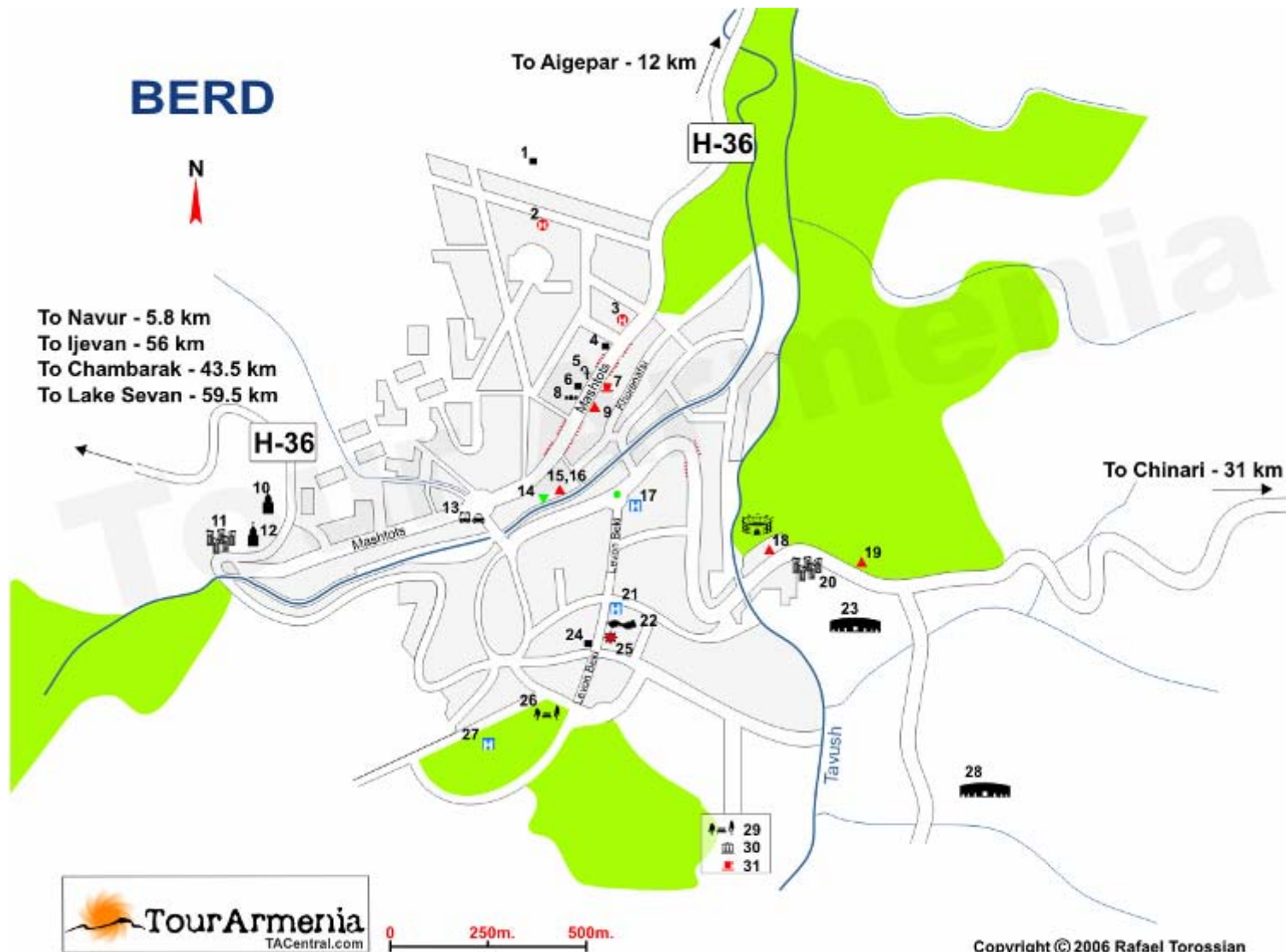
Taxis There are few taxis in town, hail them on the street. Rate is 300 AMD plus 100 AMD per km. Can be used to explore the region, same rate applies, though they may bargain a bit for half-day or full-day excursions (5000-10,000 AMD). Call taxi services can be reached by dialing (tel. 22898, 1007, 1107, 1150).

TOUR AGENCIES, BUSINESS CENTER

Tours/camping/transportation/food can be arranged in Ijevan by Vahagn (0 263) 3-14-65 Ijevan landline (091) 36-54-37 mobile.

Also see [Adventure Tour Operators](#).

Artik Business, 82 Mashtots p. (tel. 21433) promotes business interests, but is also a source of local info and can find alternate lodging and local guides, drivers.



OVERNIGHT

- 17. Hotel
- 21. Berd Hotel, Sh'rchkap Hotel
- 27. Ashot & Raisa's B&B

FOOD & DRINK

- 20. Jasharan
- 22. Tea House
- 24. Bistro
- 27. Berd Restaurant

CAFÉ

- 7, 31. Café
- 9. Bistro
- 15, 18, 19. Restaurant
- 16. Tea House

BUSES - MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

- 13. Aftokaiyan

MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY

- 30. Ethnographic Museum

MONUMENTS - SITES

- 11. Medieval cemetery
- 20. Cemetery
- 23. Berd Amrots
- 26. Central Park
- 28. Old Berd

CHURCHES

- 10. Church
- 12. S. Sarkis

THEATRES, MUSIC

- 22. Cinema House

SHOPS, SHUKA

- 4. Kodak / Air Tickets
- 6. Mterks
- 14. Shuka (Market)

PHONE, POST

GOVT. OFFICES

- 24. Police Department
- 25. Berd Mayor's Office

BANK, ATM

- 5. ARDSHINIINVESTBANK

APOTEKAS

CLINICS - HOSPITALS

- 2, 3. Berd Hospital Polyclinic

OTHER

- 1. Cheese Factory

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

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

Post, phone, telegraphs

International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, at 29 Mashtots p. [See HayPost site for list](#). The post office has trunk line phone service, and can deliver telegraphs.

Berd is not covered by Viva Cell, and has spotty Armentel cell coverage.

Armentel is at 29 Mashtots p. (tel. 22104)

Internet

There are no Internet cafes in Berd though [Berd College](#) 2 Sayat Nova p. (tel. 23319), e-Mail: berdcollege@ac2k.am, does have a connection as part of the Internet Connectivity Program sponsored by the US embassy. Visit the college and smile, they may take pity on you and the students will be thrilled to have a newcomer to talk to.

Bank, Exchange

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

ArmSavingsBank, 2a Aiygestan (tel. 21528)

Ardshininvestbank, Mashtots p.

Film

Shops in town sell film and batteries, but the batteries are useless for anything more than a travel alarm clock. Bring plenty from home, use rechargeable batteries (220v charger) or buy carefully in Yerevan.

Hospital, Clinic, Dental

Main hospital, 25a Manukian (tel. 22589, 21414)

Polyclinic, 25a Manukian (tel. 21401)

Dental Polyclinic, phone is (tel. 22132)

Apotekas are in the center of town, ask at your overnight. Two are *Trashushan Apoteka*, 3 Manukian (tel. 21302) and *Kalin Apoteka*, 3 Manukian (tel. 22302)

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL

Berd Hotel is in the tall building in the town center. It is pure Soviet chic, meaning no running water, run down, dingy rooms and some of the toilets you can use for biology experiments. Still, it is cheap, and certain rooms are tolerable, others if you bring your own bedding. Hard to beat the 2000 AMD.

Sh'rchkap Hotel, located next to Berd Hotel (tel. 21426), has five clean rooms in the former Farmer's Association Bldg. at 2000 AMD per person. Worn, shared shower and toilet but clean.

B&B

Ashot & Raisa Kosakian, 43 Isahakian (off of Sayat Nova, R after central park), tel. 23343, has a large comfortable two story home with 4 rooms able to sleep 7 people. Facilities include toilet and bath downstairs (currently water on schedule, buckets and tipidelnik for baths), dining room, TV upstairs. The real draw are the wonderful evening teas with fresh fruit, baked bread and choice of black or local herbal tea and the large breakfasts with organically grown food (eggs, bread, fruit, honey and jam) and the best compote we have had in the area! 3000 AMD per person now / 5000 AMD per person once they finish renovating the bath.

Apartments, Boarding are distinct possibilities in Berd, the locals are in need of the money. Ask around for rooms or apartments. 3000 AMD a night with breakfast is fair, though they may want more.

FOOD AND DRINK

Berd has several cafes and bistros, all in the center of town. There are also khorovatz joints and roadside cafes coming in and out of town.



TRIP 3: SHAMSHADIN ▲

A. BERD - (Verin Karmiraghbiur) - (Norashen) - (Mamaslu cyclopean fort) - (Artsvaberd) - **KHNDZORUT RIVER** - (Aigedzor) - **CHINARI** - (Artsvaberd) - (Norashen) - (Choratan) - (Mosesgegh) - **BERD**

B. BERD - (Zavenavan) - (Nerkin Karmiraghbiur) - **TZAGHKAVAN** - **VARAGAVAN** - (Parakavar) - (Vazashen) - (Aigehovit)

This trip is divided into two sections, you can combine the UPPER CASE sights into one long day trip (allow much time for poor roads) or take two days and visit most every sight. Even if you visit only UPPER CASE sights you may have a hard time doing it in one day, there are just too many opportunities to stop and take in the incredible views.



This trip explores Armenia's "Shangri-La" an enchanting set of valleys and mountains in the most remote part of the country. Roads are pot-holed or dirt tracks, the going is rough, but the rewards are many. Shamshadin is an explosion of ancient structures, with the largest concentration of Bronze Age excavations outside of the Ararat Valley. On the western edge of the Kura River (in Azerbaijan), Shamshadin's rich pasturelands and fertile river valleys have been magnets to millennia of civilizations who have called this home. Next to Azerbaijan, the area bore the brunt of Azeri attacks on Armenia proper in the 1992-95 conflict, and evidences of this struggle remain. Living under a truce, the area is peaceful (most of the time) and welcoming.

A land of history, Shamshadin is also a land of plenty, the local produce and dairy products are

not to be missed, nor are the great monasteries at Khoranashat, Honut, Kaputak, Nor Varagavank and Shkhmuradi, or archeological sites at Artsvaberd, Aigedzor, Norashen, Zavenavan, Chinchin, Kalkar, Sevkareri Blur and Sevkareri Takht.



Stay: Hotel in Berd, overnights in village and town homes everywhere. Camping throughout the route.

Eat: Berd, Artsvaberd, a few roadside joints in and out of Berd, kiosks in villages.

Springs: Hundreds throughout the marz, including Khndzorut, Tavush, Hakhum rivers, Verin Karmiraghbiur, Nerkin Karmiraghbiur, Aigepar, Tzaghkavan, Parakavar, Vazashen, Chinari.

A. ITINERARY

➡ From Berd Castle, take the eastbound H48/P4 (unmarked) about 5 km to (Verin Karmiraghbiur DD 40.8841667 x 45.4413889) 🏠 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (Verin Karmiraghbiur - Վերին Կարմիրաղբյուր elev. 1263m, pop. 1331) was officially founded in 1860, but has a S. Hovhannes church of 1701, cross form central dome type erected during the Iranian Safavid dynasty.

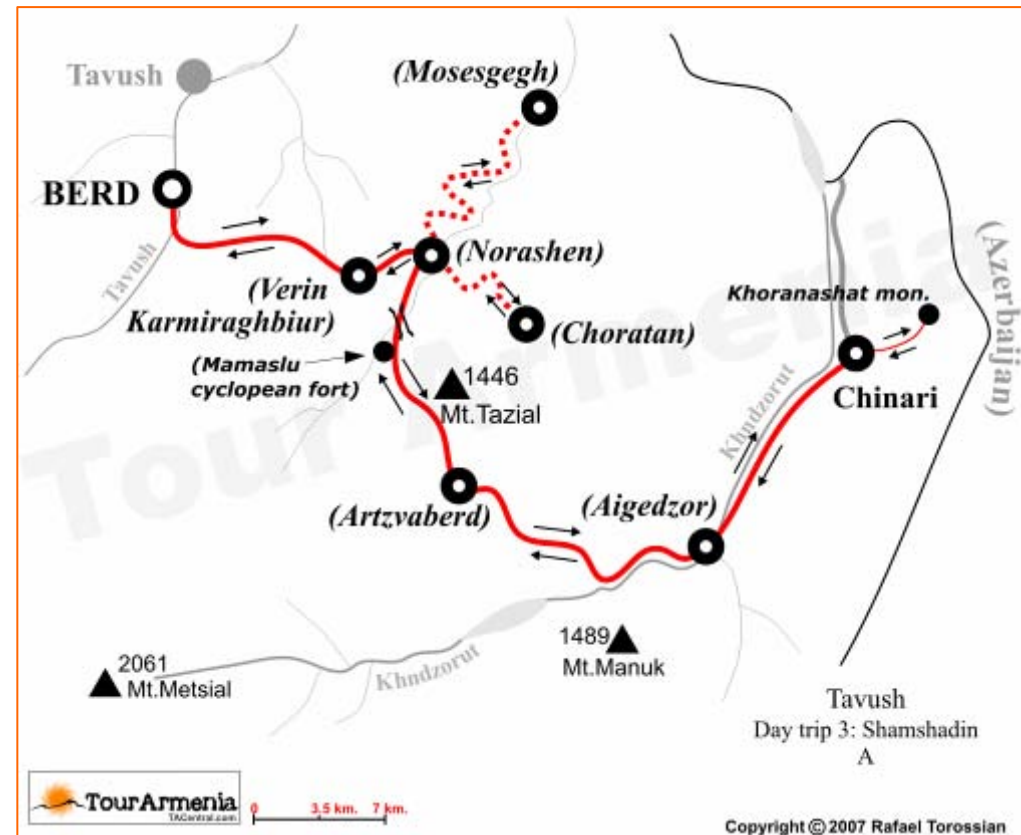
Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (3000-4000 AMD B&B fair).

➡ Continue on the road S through Verin Karmiraghbiur and at the very end of the village, in less than 50 m, is the beginning of the village of (Norashen DD 40.6622222 x 44.0736111) 🏠 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (Norashen – Նորաշեն elev. 2005m, pop. 2792) birthplace of the Soviet Biologist A. Avagian, has a small local museum with a few artifacts but mostly folk costumes and handicraft items. On the S end of the village, near where you entered, is the 1st millennium BCE **Pilor Pat** cyclopean fort.

Camping near the village and at the fort, in the mountains. **Overnight** in village possible, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair. **Spring** in the village.

➡ As you take the road S from Norashen (turn right at the village entry rather than into the village) about 900 m south just before the bridge



there is a mountain road on the right (SW). Take it about 3.5 km.

SIDE TRIP: On your left, on the edge of the river gorge is the medieval **S. Zoravar church**, reachable on foot only.

➡ Continue another 1.5 km leading to mountains and on the left side is a ruined fort.

SIDE TRIP: Excavations of the **5-4th c BCE fort** and graves yielded numerous artifacts, including pottery, bronze and iron utensils, weapons and religious totems based on sun symbolism.

Hiking. Continue into the forest on the road, which soon turns into a path. Continuing due SW you will climb to a ridge that you can follow

5 km on rugged terrain until you meet some power lines, follow them and in 6 km you are on the face of **Mt. Metsial** (2061.7 m)


Camping in the area. Springs in the area.

➡ Backtrack to the bridge and turn SE (right) on the road and just across the bridge, in the near vicinity is (**Mamaslu cyclopean fort**) 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (**Mamaslu cyclopean fort – Մամալույուն**) remains overlook the river valley at a strategic point on the hill. Later additions enlarged the fortress, which was replaced with ramparts in the area. Excavations included utensils, pottery shards and weapons.

Camping in the rest area nearby.


➡ Continue SE on the road for about 2.8 km, skirting the S edge of Mt. Tazial (1446.5) to (Artsvaberd DD 40.8336111 x 45.4711111) 🏰🗿🌊

SIDE TRIP: (Artsvaberd - Արծաթեղի ) formerly Ghighi or Gharaghaya elev. 966m, pop. 1261) is hemmed in with woodlands on the rising mountains to the south. Another strategic spot, you can get a good idea of just how important it was in the Bronze and later ages by the number of forts here: As you enter the village you pass is a Late Bronze Age **tomb field**. One km S the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age **Horjin Horer** tomb field. W of the village are **Sp'rikghalaja fortress** remains.

There are also **khachkars** in the village (10th-13th cc).

Camping in the area. **Overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair). **Restaurant** in the village. **Springs** in village and in the area.

➡ From Artsvaberd center, take the H48/P48 (unmarked) S for about 3.2 km as descends in a couple of switchbacks and turn to the valley of the **KHNDZORUT RIVER** 🌊

🌳 **KHNDZORUT RIVER - ԽՆԶՈՐՈՒՄԻ ՔԵՏ**  (Apple Run) is just beyond the intersection, one of the main routes from the Kura River valley and the Caspian into Armenia and Anatolia. The river cuts through the Murghuz Chain of mountains to reach this spot, the mountain opposite is Mt. Manuk (1489 m).

If you turn to your right, the rutted road leads in about 3.8 km to the Khndzorut Reservoir and then beyond to a Military base (off limits, but if the guys are friendly, ask if you can visit). There is a road block at the base, but a dirt road continues through the walnut forest following the river for about 21 km past Mts. Petrositolo (1860.3 m), Yalikhomer (1910 m) and Aldjalu (2544.9 m) before joining the T'tujur road next to Mt. Ghered (2286.4 m).

Turning left and following the river for about 2.5 km there are some dirt tracks that descend to and across the river, then continues uphill following a tributary mountain stream (the Hakhinja). Follow it a picnic area with a 1986 monument to General Andranik and the Fedaiyi (Armenian freedom fighters from the 19th-early 20th cc).

About the Fedaiyi. The story of the Fedaiyi is tied to the events of the 19th c. and the Great Game the European Powers played in securing control over the Middle East and the Caucasus oilfields. It led to persecution of Armenians and the genocide. In truth the seeds of the genocide and the creation of the Caucasian States go back much further than the 19th century, but key events that occurred following the Russian-Turkish War in the 1870's, led to cataclysmic results and tensions that continue to the present day.

After the Balkan War, in which Russian forces defeated Turkey, the 1878 treaty of Berlin promised Armenians and other minorities' autonomy within the Ottoman empire. The Armenian Katolikos Khrimian Hairik, one of Armenia's most venerated leaders, attend the conference to secure Armenia's freedom. Chafing at Russia's victory, Turkey's ally Germany insisted on changing the terms so that Christian minorities were granted the right to exist, but within the Turkish empire, not as autonomous regions. A few regions of Western Armenia (Kars, Ardan) were ceded to Russian Armenia, but nothing else.

Immediately following the treaty, the Turkish Sultan Hamid began a ruthless campaign of oppression, where ethnic Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians were murdered at Adana, Zeitun, Musalehr, Sebastia, Marish, Cilicia, among others, on the pretext of inciting insurrection against the state.

This begins the events of the genocide, with further killing sprees in the 1880's, 1890's and 1900's, culminating the great Genocide of 1915.

As a result an active campaign of guerilla war ensued, led by Armenian fighters, popularly known as Fedaiyi, an Arab word. The Armenian title given was Azgi Zinvor (Soldier of the Nation, or Freedom Fighter). One of the leaders of this movement was Andranik Ozanian, born in 1865 in Shopin Garahisar. Andranik was trained as a carpenter, following 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 the Fedaiyi in successful resistance to the Turkish army for the rest of the 19th c and into the 20th, securing his fame after the 1894-1896 Hamid genocide, where 100,000's Greeks and Armenians were killed throughout the Ottoman

empire. In 1901, with only 30 men, he fought off a Turkish army of 10,000 at Arekelots Vank in Mush Region for a month, succeeding in escaping with the entire population under the noses of the Turks. In 1905 he wrote the book, "The Army Orders", which laid out the principals of guerilla warfare and strategy, still used in Armenian tactical warfare. As WWI began, Andranik led forces against the Turkish army, securing several tactical victories that helped Russia to secure Western Armenia. After the fall of the Tsar in 1917, Russia retreated, leaving Armenia alone to face the Turkish army. Decisive battles in 1917 and 1918 drove the Turks from Armenia and established the first republic.

Believing Russians were still a key to security for Armenia, Andranik pled with Lenin to send troops, but when Lenin struck a secret deal with the new Turkish Leader Ataturk, Andranik realized he had been betrayed. He left Armenia following the 1918 Batumi Agreement, which denied 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.

It was up to Garegin Nzhdeh and D'ro to save the traded territories, which they did in 1919 and the present territory became a member of the Soviet Union in 1920. Nagorno Karabakh became an autonomous region of Azerbaijan, keeping its historic Armenian identity.

Modern freedom fighters from the 1990-1995 conflict with Azerbaijan emulate the Andranik's Fedaiyi, and a cult has grown around several Armenian soldiers killed during the 90's fighting. Tavush seems to glorify these fighters more than most in Armenia, perhaps because they experienced real fighting during the conflict.

At this monument you are only 4.5 km from the Azeri border.

Springs on the river and by the picnic area.

➡ Backtrack to the river road and head E about 6.2 km to (Aigedzor DD 40.8255556 x 45.5408333) note there is a small hamlet of Aigedzor about 1.8 km before the main village, which is across the river. 🏰🗿🌊

SIDE TRIP: (Aigedzor - Այգեձոր - until 1939 Ghulali elev. 906m, pop. 1587) is 3 km from the


Azeri border. Caution should be made when visiting this area, if locals advise of border crossing, you should not visit.

The village has a lovely old 5th-6th cc S. Hripsimeh church, a single nave basilica with rectangular hall and apse jutting from the exterior wall. The church is below the school.

About 2 km NE of the village on top of Mt. Salkari (936.4 m) is a 6th-4th cc BCE fort, and the area has the remains of the Medieval Yerek Vank Berd (Three monasteries fort), noted in the chronicles during several medieval invasions. It was destroyed by the Seljuks, rebuilt, captured by the Mongols and destroyed again by successive Tatar invasions.

Camping in the area (stay away from the border), **overnight** in village home (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair). **Springs** in the village and by the river.

➡ From Aigedzor, continue on the H48/P48 Eastwards for about 3.2 km to **CHINARI** (DD 40.8497222 x 45.5719444) 🏰🗿🌊

🌳 **CHINARI - ԳԻՆԱՐԻ**  (elev. 866m, pop. 1128) is the furthest east village in Tavush and one of the closest to Azerbaijan; from here you are only 1.5 km from the border. The village sits on one of the eastern mounts, looking on to the hills of Azerbaijan to the north, east and south. **WARNING:** Take caution in visiting here, despite the peace treaty, there continue to be border incidents (mostly one side crossing over to the other to assert their authority) and you should not visit if you hear of any during your trip.

If you are able to come, and the border is peaceful, by all means visit the legendary and beautiful Khoranashat Vank, also known as Vanakan Vank, after its most famous scholar, Hovhannes (Yovhannes in old Armenian) Vanakan, one of Mkhitar Gosh's most accomplished students. The 13th century chronicler Kirakos Gandzaketsi was a student here, under Vanakan, both escaping the armies of Jalai-al-din who ravaged the vank in 1225. They spent the next years living and studying in caves near Lorut, south of Tavush (Berd), only to be in 1236 by the Mongols and forced to act as their scribes for a number of years. The master was ransomed by Armenians in Gag, the pupil escaped in the dead of night.



KHORANASHAT MONASTERY

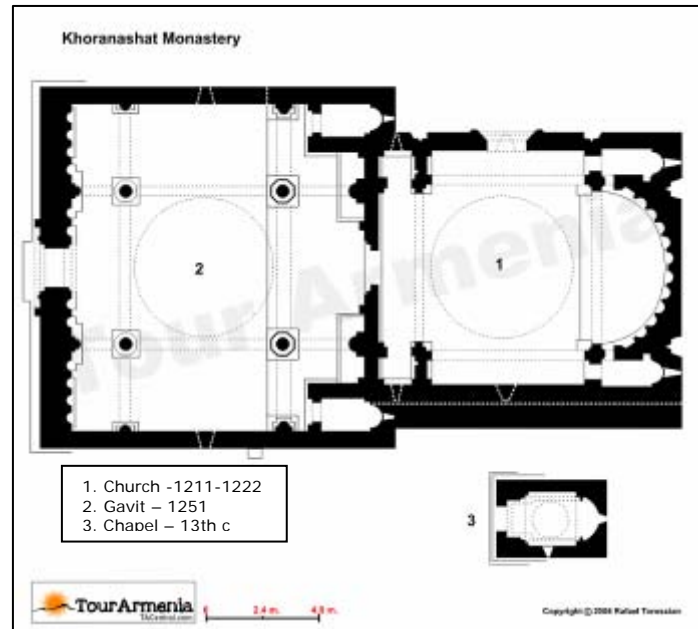
ԽՈՐԱՆԱՇԱՏ ՎԱՆՔ.

The monastery is located NE of the village, only 500 m from the border. On the edge of some woods. To get there, bear right into the village to the NE end, where a dirt road takes off to the left and up the hill. It's about 1.5 km from the edge of the village.

NOTE: The monastery was closed to visitors in 2006 due to snipers on the Azerbaijan side vowing to shoot visitors. DO NOT VISIT unless you are absolutely sure the area is safe. Locals will have the latest information and advise the best. For the time being we do NOT advise visiting this site, but provide information about the vank in the event peace is made along the border after publication.

Background. It's hard to imagine now, but the monastery of Khoranashat, like its companion vank at [Makaravank](#), used to be surrounded by huge settlements of Armenians, drawn to the rich fertile soil and abundant woodlands in the region. Organized settlements are traced to the Copper Age, with the Bronze and Iron Ages receiving the great extent of cultivation. The tribes, known as the Alishtu or Ghamirra, were border tribes on the Urartian empire, warring with or protecting their backs as the tides of fortunes changed. Within 10 km of this spot there are over a dozen Bronze and Iron Age cyclopean walled fortresses, suggesting internal bickering along with struggles with the outside world. It was not until the Arshakunis took possession of the territory that the region was fully incorporated into the Armenian kingdom and it rapidly developed into both a "middle land" and a food basket for the country.

Martyrdom and Sainthood have a long history here, Armenians from these lands. The area was one of the most contested in the religious wars initiated by Tigran the Great and Grigor Lusavorich, with many martyred in defense of their faith on either side. Once converted, the locals became just as tenacious in their faith, building dozens of churches on the ruins of Hellenistic temples. The oldest are easy to detect by their rectangular shape, single nave basilicas from the 5th-6th cc. *Shamshadinetsis* were among the most tenacious of fighters for Vartan Mamikonian in his struggles against the Sassanids in 451. As Arshakuni rule transferred to the kingdom of the Bagratunis, then to the Orbelis and Zakarians, the faithful fought for each in their turn, adding churches and shrines along the way, carving the walls of caves with intricate religious iconography and dotting the landscape with Khachkars and



religious tombs. One thing was constant throughout all these epochs; their cities, their churches and their monasteries were surrounded by thick walls, defiantly jutting into the face of their adversaries rather than hiding themselves among the ravines, mountains and impassable crevices nearby.

By the 13th century, as Zakarian rule established a great period of peace and prosperity due to the countless caravans plying the river valleys from the east to the west, the construction of churches and monasteries accelerated at a rapid pace. The monastery, built over an earlier compound that in turn was built over a pagan shrine or temple, was founded in 1211, built over the next 11 years.

The complex. Khoranashat is one such example. Hardly inaccessible, the monastery relied on thick, even massive **walls** to secure its presence in a land facing the infidels. The huge settlement around the monastery both supported its evangelical and academic work and relied on its walls for protection in times of trouble. The walls were both thick and tall, measuring over 3 meters thick in parts and 7 meters high at the ramparts. The **gates** were columned and the walls were filled with stone crosses embedded in the walls by

penitent and faithful seeking favor with the monks and by extension, the gatekeepers of heaven.

Numerous buildings lay within the confines of the walls, among them refectories, dining areas, storage buildings and a kitchen, shrines and chapels. Unique are architectural buildings housing springs. What remains are the main church (1211-1222), a 13th c. chapel to its S, and a gavit dated to 1251.

The **church** was built of blue-tinted basalt, and is an elongated domed hall type, the dimensions of the dome being quite large, the understructure dominating the interior design. The central dome is supported by pillars which in turn support the arches that support the domes girth. The pillars have pilasters and half-columns, making the space seem much taller than it is. The **apse** is unique in its wall treatment: a series of tall niches, topped with arches and separated with slim half-columns, ring the apse, which is semi-circular in plan. The tops of each niche is a uniquely carved conch each with a distinct pattern based on the number 3 or 7. The walls of the altar dais (lectern) are unique, decorated with diamond shaped and hexagonal ornaments forming a net-like pattern.

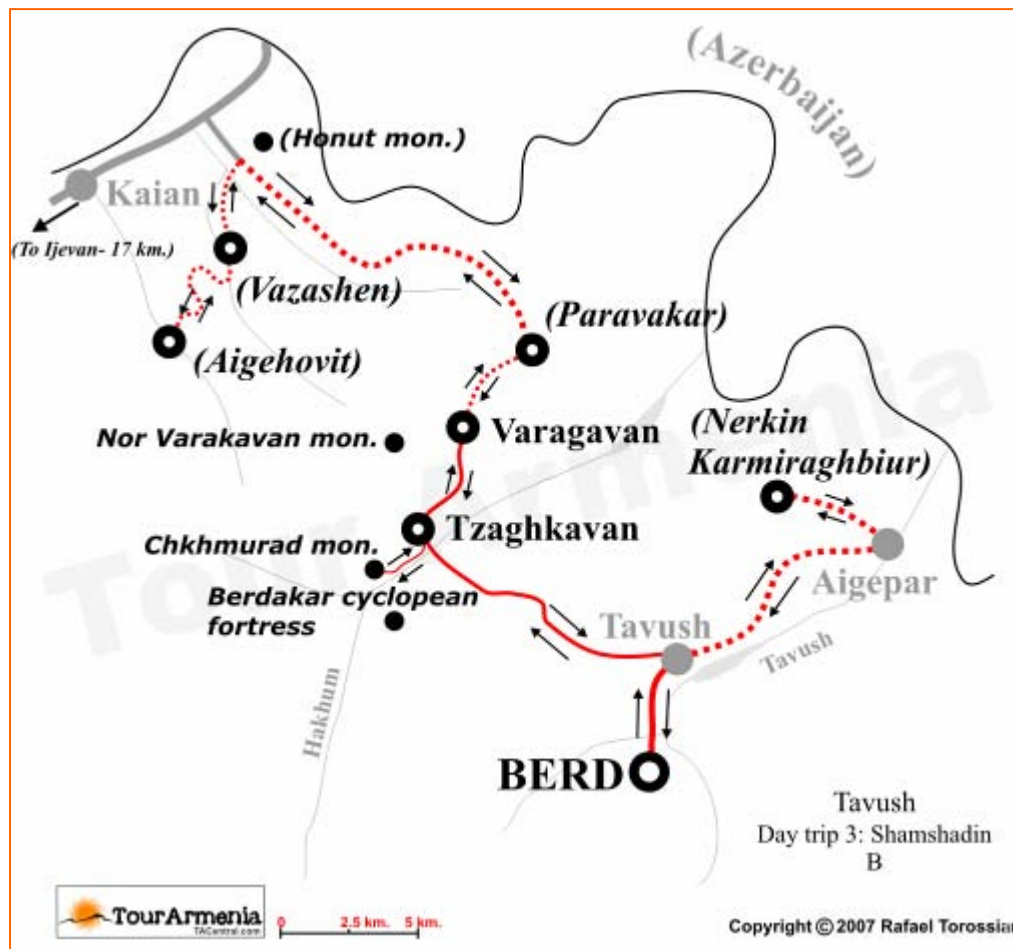
The **exterior** walls are decorated with niches topped with scallop-shell designs connected by framing that form in the center large crosses of various sizes and designs. This technique is characteristic of Haghpat & Hovhanavank, suggesting the same school of stone smiths. Entrances are framed in rectangles, the interior niche of the western door decorated with a band intricately carved with geometric ornamentation (based on the trinity) and the northern portal as well as the spandrel of the inner pointed arch bear the bas relief's of a dove and an oxen head with ring in its mouth—a motif often occurring in Armenian monuments, such as Geghard. The relief served as a cantilever to support the tympanum and part of its framing. The dome drum itself is decorated with rather primitive

arches, unique for its primitive design as for the careful attention to its detail. One wonders if it is a reconstruction, or a statement of poverty for such an otherwise rich building.

The small **chapel**, located on the Southeast side, is made from ashlar with a carved door plat band. The chapel ceiling is domed with a high drum elongated from west to east with a steep conic roof.



The **gavit** (1251) is four columned, and its western wall design is considered unique in Armenian architecture. Like the altar apse of the church, it has twelve arched niches, one of them being the entrance to the church. Above the niche arcature is a high-profile cornice which forms a pointed arch above the entrance, above which, on a cantilever, there are sculptures of lions sitting side by side. The internal abutments closest to the western wall are more elaborately decorated, their fusts made as bunches of six trunks (six = day



before judgment, the day of final atonement, from [sacred geometry](#)).

The **ceiling** for the peripheral parts of the gavit is vaulted, but on the keystones of the S and N vaults there are huge spread-winged eagles (partially broken). The ceiling of the central part of the gavit rests on three pairs of intersecting arches, like those at Makaravank, Arzakan, and inside the dome of Khorakert. The aperture at the top of the central dome was made from three bands of stone, their facing slabs decorated with cinquefoils (the five-lobed curve). Cinquefoils also appear in the arch frame for the western door.

Miniature Art achieved a very real level of expertise at Khoranashat, as surviving manuscripts attest, with copies of bibles and treatises on religion, science and philosophy. One such is the 1224 Khoranashat Gospel, 1224 showing St. John with Prokhoros.

Near Chinari. In the area has 13th-17th cc **shrines** and 1st millennium BCE **graves**.

Camping along the Khndzorut river. **Overnight** in the village, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair. **Springs** at the monastery, in the village and nearby.

➡ Backtrack to Artsvaberd from whence you came, or take an alternate route (avoid during border incursions) from Chinari: take the H48/P48 (unmarked) road out of the village NW entry to the N through vineyards for about 1.8 km to where a bridge is on the left. Do not go forward (1.7 km to Azerbaijan), instead cross the bridge to the left and follow that road W/SW as it winds across the hills and river for about 9 km back to (Artsvaberd DD 40.8336111 x 45.4711111)

➡ From Artsvaberd backtrack to (Norashen) bridge. Immediately after the bridge is the Berd (NW) / Norashen (NE) intersection. Take the right turn into Norashen. About 1.4 km inside the village a road turns right (S/SE). Take the road about – km to (Choratan DD 40.8611111 x 45.48) 🏠 🌳

SIDE TRIP: (Choratan - Չորաթափ) elev. 1035m, pop. 1261) has a S. Hripsimeh church (1683) with a 17th c. shrine. Hills nearby are good **hiking** opportunities, and the village is only 1 km from Artsvaberd, across the river gorge.

Camping in the area, S on the river bed. **Overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair). **Springs** in the village and on the river.

➡ Backtrack to Norashen and at the intersection, turn right (N) and continue on the road for about 4.7 km as it switchbacks dramatically down to a river, crosses it and climbs with switchbacks back up to (Mosesgegh DD 40.90638 x 45.49138) 🏠 🌳

SIDE TRIP: (Mosesgegh - Մոսեսգեղ) elev. 897m, pop. 1667) is prettily set on a river valley, with churches, shrines and caves in the near vicinity.

There is a road heading from the NW of the village that skirts the Azerbaijan border and crosses the Tavush river at Aigepar, on the H45/P45 3.8 km). If there are skirmishes this would be a dangerous road to take; it passes literally less than 100m from the actual border. If peace breaks out, it is a picturesque shortcut to the second part of this day trip.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (3000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village and on river bed.

➡ Backtrack to **BERD**. **Begin Part B.**

Part B travels the Northern stretches of Shamshadin, including two of Armenia's most beautiful monasteries, Nor Varakavan and Ch'khmurad, as well as taking in beautiful stretches of forests and alpine meadows. The main hwy's that trace the northern border with Azerbaijan are now closed, and not expected to reopen before peace breaks out (don't hold your breath), but a newly paved stretch of road connecting Paravakar with Aigehovit bypasses the border route and climbs along Shamshadin's most breathtaking vistas.

➡ From Berd roundabout, take the N road (H45/P45, unmarked) for about 3.8 km along the river and past the SW end of the Tavush reservoir (great camping) to a major bend and a N (left) turn off and another 300 m to (Tovuz DD 40.91444 x 45.40111) 🏠 🌳

SIDE TRIP: (Tovuz - Տօվուզ - renamed again from Tavush, which was renamed Tovuz from Zavanavan, elev. 849m, pop. 1242), is located close to the Tavush Reservoir and some pretty orchards. The village has an Astvatsatsin church (medieval) and a S. Gevorg sacred shrine (medieval-19th c). To the NW on a dirt track is a rock-cut grotto (vimapor karaiyr).

Camping in the area and on the reservoir, **overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village.

➡ From Tovuz backtrack to the reservoir and take the E road (H45/P45, unmarked) for about 2.8 km and 500 m past the reservoir bridge to where a mountain road (poor) starts off to the left (N), follow that road for about 3 km to the entrance to (Nerkin Karmiraghbiur DD 40.9481 x 45.4331) 🏠 🌳

SIDE TRIP: (Nerkin Karmiraghbiur - Ներքին Կարմիրաղբյուր) elev. 857m, pop. 1822) is only 3.1 km from Alibeili, on the Azerbaijan border. It sits on the crest of a hill looking on to Azerbaijan to the E and N, Shamshadin to the S and West. The village has a 16th c. church renovated in the 19th c. and most interestingly the ruins of the medieval Shenategh settlement with S. Sarkis and S. Khach khachkars.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair)

➡ Note that the easy route from Nerkin Karmiraghbiur to Paravakar, the H47/P47 (unmarked) road that skirts the Azerbaijan border is **closed** deemed too dangerous to travel. Until peace breaks out, backtrack to Aigepar and Tovuz, and take the N Hwy for about 7 km over a series of spectacular mountain ridges and valleys to the Hakhum river and across to **TZAGHKAVAN** (DD 40.94194 x 45.33111, turn right and go about 100 m to the village) 🏠 🌳 🗺

🌸 **TZAGHKAVAN - ՇԱԴԿԱՎԱՆ** 🏔 ("Flower site" until 1939 Veligegh elev. 853m, pop. 1522) has a number of archeological sites and the 12th-13th cc Shkhmuradi Vank.



Ch'khmuradi Vank (pronounced "Shukh-muradi,") is 3.8 or 4.8 KM SW of the village, depending on which road you take. The simplest (longer) way is to use a dirt track that runs parallel to the river and begins just before you enter the village proper on its S side. You skirt the S end of the village and meet up with a Western road that goes the same way (shorter way, but you have to navigate village streets). Continue on the track parallel to the Hakhum River (on its North bank) into the forest for about 3.8 km from that point, always choosing the track running closest to the river, though it disappears in the forest. The tracks are very rough, illegal logging trucks have destroyed the route for most vehicles except jeeps and Vilis/UAZ. At about 2.8 km you may have to stop and walk the rest of the way, beginning at a fork with the L path (yours) going down a steep hill. As you get closer you will see two huge rock promontories with trees clinging to them: use these as a marker; the vank is directly below them, in a natural crevice (DD 40.9148 x 45.31133, elev. 950m).



The partial ruins are overtaken with vines and wild flowers, and at first glance it may appear simple a part of the mountain crags. Above it are the towering tree-laden promontories, looking like a Chinese ink painting of huge mountain rocks jutting into the air with trees clinging to their surfaces. The remote area is lush and beautiful, and ideal place to stop, to picnic, to camp and explore.

Background. The vank is supposed to have been named for a nearby settlement, perhaps for a caliph or emir ("Shkh Murad," i.e. "Sheikh Murad"). The monastery was built after the Seljuk attacks, in the 12th-13th cc when all of Armenia celebrated its new-found (and last) flowering of culture.

The complex consists of the Astvatsatsin church, two gavits, the "Khoranik" and ruins of a chapel, refectory and outer buildings in the area.

The main building is **Astvatsatsin**, built in mid-13th c, just before the Mongol census and the mass emigration from the region. Made from finely hewn yellow felsite, the church has a

rectangular interior (8.5x7.0 m) with a cruciform domed hall exterior, an experimental design from for its period. A 17th c restoration, adding structural stonework, increased the volume of the structure by 40 cm. Two 2-story chapels flank the Eastern Apse and there are closed rooms in the opposite corners. Decoration for the apse includes the front apron, which is inlaid with an elaborate geometric pattern and three sacred star signs (svastikas, swastikas). The svastika is part of Copper-Bronze Age (5000-2000) petroglyphs on the Geghama lehr, Ughtasar, and near Dilijan in Tavush. The symbol is believed to symbolize a falling star or comet, and grew to represent the falling of the gods, or their descending to earth. Over time it became associated with early pagan sects worshipping the sun and later, early Christian sects, for the cross of the Christ.

Connecting arches resting on pylons and half-pillars, two of which stand on opposite sides of the apse, supports the vaulted roofing. Like domed halls of its time, the church drum is supported by arcature placed over the main square. What remains of the drum and dome can be best seen from inside, the outside is damaged and covered with wild growth, a beautiful sight in the spring when the wildflowers are in full bloom.

Outside, on the eastern wall there are two finely cut niches, their arches carved with a belt design that also frames the tops of the windows for the apse and the upper windows for the flanking chapels. The church has two portals, west and south, both of which enter onto a *gavit* or gallery. The **western gavit** was built in the second half of the 13th c and is particularly elaborate in its design, at one time holding two highly prized khachkars, which sadly do not remain. The walls were built from lime and rubble, and then clasped with stone slabs. The large gavit (10.30x10.30 m) has vaulting that rests on intersecting arches supported on abutments along the walls and two multi-faceted pillars. A skylight tops the vaulting as with other gavits of the time. The room is large enough for congregational meetings, but is assumed to have been used as a manuscriptorium and academy for the monks. The entry is on the southwestern end of the gavit.

A smaller vestibule lies on the southern side of the church. Built sometime between 1275-1300, it is a finely hewn square building (7.0x7.0 m). Four half-pillars support the spanning arches and vaulted roofing, topped with a skylight.

Additional khachkars are embedded in the walls of the church, left by supplicants and wealthy donors to the monastery.



Khoranik - կորանիկ lies to the east of Astvatsatsin. The church/chapel, a single nave hall church, is now in ruins. Built from rough stone, the church is the oldest in the complex, based on 4th c hall churches. Though attributed by a wall inscription to 1149, the later date may be a reference to a reconstruction, the one you see the latest incarnation of pre-Christian temples on the spot. The building was built of wood and stone, the channels that supported logs can be seen in the ruined foundations. The logs protected the walls from earth tremors, protecting it for a time. The building's name comes from the word "zkhoraniks" in the date inscription.

Shkhmuradi vank was partially restored in the 18th c, when restoration and some of the khachkars were added. Those depicting human figures are especially interesting. One broken khachkar, attributed to the master Kiram is at the vank.

Other Sites. In addition to the monastery, Tzaghkavan is well known for its Bronze and Iron Age forts and settlements. Located at the head of a mountain pass from the Kura River valley, Tzaghkavan was ideally located to stop or at least hinder unwanted entry into Dzorapor and Giulagarak.

About 150 meters NW of the monastery, on top of a huge promontory rock is the **Berdakar (Բերդաքար – Fortress Stone)** cyclopean fortress (6th-4th cc BCE). The fortress was built during the early Arshacid era, but is close in form and type to earlier Urartian and Bronze Age forts, built near

ready sources of water, overlooking a commanding view of the only path through the heavily forested mountain, built with incredible planning and ingenuity; some of these rocks carried up the forbidding mount are over 2 tons.

Several km W on the same road are the remains of settlements **Khachaghbiur**, **Karagegh**, **Spitak Jur** (*խաչաղբիւր, Զարագեղ, Սպիտակ ջուր*) in which are the ruins of a medieval chapel. The road is also a path towards the Karakamurdj and the H45/P45 road to Ijevan/Navur (3.7 km)

About 1 km E/NE of the vank is a third Iron Age fort, **Sevkareri Takht** (*Սեվ քարերի տախտ* - Takht means a *flat wooden ottoman seat*, the field of black stones looking like a field of black ottoman seats. Another possibility is that Takht possibly a corruption of "dasht" or field, so *Sevkareri dasht* may mean *Field of Black Stones*) on the left bank of the Hakhum River. In front of the dairy farm W of the village on the right bank of the river is the **Baghri Khach** (*Բաղրի խաչ* - *Baghr cross*) Iron Age cyclopean fort.

About 2 km N of Berdakar and 1.5 km N of the road to Shkhmuradi Vank is **Sevkareri Blur** (*Սեվ քարերի Բլուր* - *Black Stone Hill*), referencing an older period for its inception, possibly mid 3rd millennium BCE. You can reach the berd by taking the dirt track W at the dairy farm and go about 2 km. Artifacts found at the fort include shards of pottery, tools and shaft graves.

Camping in the area, at the vank, by any of the forts or near the village. Also great camping in the forests or on the riverbed. **Overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village.

➡ From Tzaghkavan continue N on the hwy for about 2.8 km to **VARAGAVAN** (DD 40.96084 x 45.32774) 🏰 🗺 🌊

🌸 **VARAGAVAN - ՎԱՐԱԳԱՎԱՆ** 📍 (till 1978 Azizlu or Hakhum elev. 1083m, pop. 1097) overlooks the Hakhum river, with orchards and farmlands to its SW. The village is known for the 12th-13th cc Vank named after the village, **Nor Varagavank**.

The vank is located on the right (N) bank of the south fork of the Varagavan River, about 3.5 km from the centre of the village. To get there, from the bridge that crosses to the village, take the W dirt road out of the village for about 3.5 km as it

climbs the mountain side and circles around and back to the vank. The vank is in a gorgeous spot in the forest, on a crest of land overlooking the river gorge and mountains. A 1.5 km hike to the NW leads to Mt. Kaznuttumb, which is 5 km from Aigehovit and the Aghstev River valley.



Background. Perched in a forest fairytale land of castles, fortresses and its own beauty, the monastery of Nor Varagavank sits on the SE face of Mt. Kaznuttumb (1491m). The monastery is considered one of the most important "developed medieval" religious complexes in Armenia, which means the architecture, design and elaborate décor is among the most beautiful and complete in the country. More beautifully finished than even Haghpas or Sanahin, which are undoubtedly more important in their functions as centers for learning and manuscript production, Nor Varagavan nonetheless succeeded to churn out historians and ecclesiastics of its own, in a vank richly endowed by the last great nakharar family of the period, the Kiurikians.

The Kiurikian family were related to the great noble families of the early medieval period: the Bagratunis, Pahlavunis and later, the Orbelians. The Kiurikians were the founders of the Lori or Tashir-Dzoraget (996-1118) kingdom, and reigned over much of North and East Armenia including the all of present-day Tavush marz. Professing allegiance to the kings of Ani, they were basically autonomous, controlling a vast and rich fiefdom. They also played an important role in resisting invasions of Shaddadid emirs from Gandzak in the 10th-11th cc.

However, when the Bagratuni kingdom fell to Seljuk Turk attacks, the Kiurikian kingdom fractured and fell to the armies of Emir Kizil in

1105. They moved east, establishing a new fiefdom at Berd ("Nor Berd"). Included was the new monastery at this spot. Originally it was called Anapat, but in 1198 the Kiurikians founded the Nor Varagavank monastery to house the S. N'shan relic, which had been brought from Varagavan Vank in Vaspurakan.



The relic has something of a history of its own. It was believed to hold a fragment of the true cross, carried to Armenia by Guyaneh and Hripsimeh in the late 3rd c. They left it at Van on their way eastward, to Vagharshapat (Echmiadzin) and their martyrdom at the hands of T'rdat III. The relic was lost until the 7th c, when it was miraculously found on Mt. Varag (Varag) by a monk and taken to a hermit enclave. The reigning king Senekerim enlarged the site to house the by now famous reliquary, founding the eastern Armenian "Varagavank" (Varagavank). The reliquary followed Senekerim to Shivas when he ceded his kingdom to Byzantium, and it lived for a while in Shivas at the S. N'shan monastery, returning to Varagavank after Senekerim's death.

The relic was the most famous in Armenia, the monastery built for it was grand, built to receive thousands of pilgrims each year. It is hard now to imagine the kind of veneration this reliquary commanded, but chronicles record the faithful prostrating themselves in front of the church, many repenting of their sins or being miraculously 'cured' in the presence of the sacred relic.

In 1231 the reliquary was spirited east by the Patriarch Luke, who escaped the slaughters of invading Mongols in Vaspurakan in western Armenia, carrying the sacred relic S. N'shan (Holy Sign) with him. The monastery was renamed Nor

Varagavank after the original that had been destroyed, its inhabitants slaughtered.

Later the reliquary was brought back to Van and housed at a different S. N'shan church, only to disappear during the siege of Van and the following massacres of 1915.



The monastery was built on earlier religious structures, which in turn were built over pre-Christian temples or Vishap shrines. Its great period began with the conversion of Anapat Monastery to Nor Varagavan. During the 12th-13th cc, the monastery was the center of religious study for the petty kingdom. Its monks played a vital role in continuing traditions that were being lost in the west, one of the more important being the 13th c. teacher and writer Hovhannes Tuetsi (Tvetsi).

The monastery continued after the Mongol subjugation of the Kiurikian kingdom in the mid 13th c, once the Kiurikians swore allegiance to their new overlords. It suffered during the invasions by Timur and the later Tatar invasions, most greatly during the mass exodus of Armenians in the 14th c from Shamshadin as the Mongols

converted the lands into their private pastures and imported their own population.



Gradually recovering under Persian Safavid rule in the 16th c, the monastery rebounded in the 18th c, and was a key center for rebellion against the Iranian Shah in the 1795 rebellion, led by its abbot Grigor Manucharian. The monastery became an important religious and cultural center again during the Russian Imperial Era. The monastery was abandoned again in the Soviet period and has yet to be reconstituted.

Complex. The vank has several buildings in the old walled cloister: the 1237 Astvatsatsin church, the 1198 Anapat (S. N'shan), the 13th c. sepulchre/chapel of the Armenian Ishkhan (Prince) Davit.

The main church in the complex is Astvatsatsin (Church of the Holy Virgin), which according to the inscription on the church walls was given by Kirakos Gandzaketsi, built by Davit's son Vasak II from 1224-1237, and illuminated (frescoed) in 1240, following the example of Western Armenian churches, which were by now influenced by Byzantine design despite their resistance to being subsumed in the Greek church. The architect was a certain Kazan of Ani.

Outwardly rectangular (10.25x15.40 m), the hall is a cruciform domed type with double-floor chapels in each of its corners. Impressive Cantilever steps decorated with honeycombs of squinche arches (the so-called Islamic stalactite) reach the western wall chapels. The western entry is the grander of the two (the other is south), with its multi-colored felsite and basalt mosaic design (clearly influenced by Arabic and Persian design motifs) in red and cream colored diamonds and

stars with elaborate geometric patterning on the double arches over the doorway.



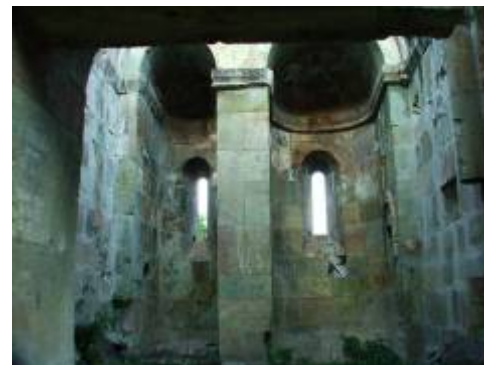
Two arched *niches* flank the south entry, each embedded with an elaborate 13th c *khachkar*. The specific and unique elements of the Armenian khachkar are clearly reproduced here; the ends of each point on the cross ends with three flourishes (for the holy trinity), the cross itself sits over a stylized tree of life, reproducing a pre-Christian symbol going back to the Sumerians (4th m BCE), each cross rests on a highly stylized and refine sun symbol, the earliest of religious symbols in the ancient world. Lastly, the elaborate geometric patterns and rosettes that fill the surrounding border and available space around the cross, are fantastically drawn, more incredible knowing that while over 40,000 khachkars were carved in Armenia, no two of this "unending thread" pattern are alike.

The oldest building is **Anapat** (S. N'shan), built in 1198 for Davit Bagratuni, the son of Vasak I and great grandson of Kiurikeh II. The church is a two-story hall with two apses on its eastern end. There are two windows on the eastern façade, one for each apse. The framing of the windows is carved, and the entire façade was surmounted with a finely hewn cornice, which was itself crowded bas reliefs of animal imagery and stylized flora designs. The original vaulting has not survived.

A two-story **burial chamber** is attached to the northern wall of S. N'shan, built for Davit in 1200 as a patriarchal sepulchre for the Kiurikian family. As was common in the period, the rectangular sepulchre (3.50x2.30 m) was also a chapel, perhaps topped with a khachkar, as at Sanahin. The original vaulted roofing was altered in the early 13th c by adding a modified drum and

cupola, from which the lower rows survive. The lower floor has large arched niches on its southern wall, joining the north wall of S. N'shan.

Another two-story building, a 13th c **chapel**, attaches to S. N'shan from the south, its plan and design similar to the Davit Sepulchre, only larger at (4.50x3.20m).



What is unique about this arrangement is that the second story of both "chapels" were believed to have attached to the church itself, acting as side chapels for the main hall, reached by use of a ladder, as no staircase has been found. Second story chapels or niches in 13th c churches are not unheard of (Saghmosavank, Hovhanavank), but constructing separate buildings that then opened directly into the main church, serving as a part of its main hall, is not usual, and is considered a development of architecture in Armenian sacred design.



Gavits. There is a **small gavit** connected to the S of Astvatsatsin which also joins the Anapat church and two chapels. Built sometime between 1225-1250, its plan was rectangular with vaulted roofing and skylight, supported by two inner columns and abutments on the walls. The western wall survives.

The **large gavit** was built after the small gavit, on the western end of Astvatsatsin. The large square building (14x14 m) is topped by a vaulted roof held up by a mastery of intersecting arches supported by wall abutments; no support columns were required. The gavit has a S and E entry.

Nearby (NW and SW) are two 13th **chapels**, close to the **old cemetery**.

Medieval and later **Khachkars** are throughout the complex. Look for the large khachkar in the big gavit with its depiction of human figures, which was carved by the master Vartan in 1620.

Camping in the area, at the vank, in the forest nearby or on the Hakhum River, **overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village.

➡ From Varagavan, continue on the new hwy for about 1.4 km to the signposted turnoff to Paravakar and continue about 1 km to (Paravakar DD 40.98055 x 45.39916) 📍 🏠 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (Paravakar – Պարավակար elev. 775m, pop. 1069) is just N of the Hakhum reservoir, and has good hiking trails (avoid anything eastwards, you are only 2 km from Azerbaijan), especially to the W in the forested hills on the way to Vazashen. To the South along the river and reservoir the area is covered with fruit orchards. The village has shrines, khachkars and other ruins.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village.

➡ From Paravakar backtrack to the Varagavan/Berd turnoff, turn R (N) nto the H47/P47 hwy for about .8 km as it turns into the new stretch of asphalt that bypasses the Azerbaijan border and skirts around Mt. Kaghnutumn (1407m) to (Aigehovit DD 40.97360 x 45.29265) 📍 🏠 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Aigehovit - Այգեհովիտ**, till 1969 Uzuntala elev. 815m, pop. 1096) has orchards to the NE and lies in a crescent of forest mountains to the west, south and east, Mt. Kaznuttumb (1407 m) separating it and Varagavan.

➡ END OF TRIP 3



1.6 km SW of the village on a dirt road is **the 12th-13th cc S'rveghi Vank**, the walls of which bear the inscription:



"In the year 1252 we Artavazd and Sarkis built this church by the hand (skill) of master Hovhannes." There is also the medieval S. Sarkis shrine, built over the site of a Vishap (Dragon Stone) and the so-called K'trats Yekeghetsi ("Broken church"). About 2.5 km NW of the village, on the right bank of the Aghtsev river is an 18th c. fortress tower, part of the defenses erected by the Shah of Iran to prevent Armenian rebellion and immigration by Karabakh Armenians escaping persecution there.

OVERNIGHT

B&B

"Victor Saribekian Tun" (Ishkhan tel. 093-43-80-53; Vahagn tel. 091-74-52-54) has a large village house with large rooms and a backyard wood craft business. His sons Vahagn and Ishkhan share the house plus one other next door. Comfortable beds, water on schedule and a large healthy breakfast with their own honey. 3000-4000 AMD per person is fair.

Camping in the area, in the S forests and by the vank, overnight in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village.

From Aigehovit, take the E mountain road for about 3.5 km to (**Vazashen** DD 40.99222 x 45.28416)  

SIDE TRIP: (**Vazashen – Վազաշեն**) (till 1978 Aghgegh or Lala elev. 1030m, pop. 1096) is dangerously close to the border, so do not visit if there are any reports of border problems. The village has the ruins of the Iron Age/Medieval Karmir Kar (Red Stone) fort and churches. WNW toward the border is the ruined 10th-13th cc Honut monastery in an abandoned village with the same name.

Overnight in the village (3000-4000 AMD for B&B fair), **springs** in village.

TRIP 4: NOYEMBERIAN ▲

IJEVAN - (Lusadzor) - (Khashtararak) -
LUSAHOVIT - (Aknaghbiur) -
ACHAJUR/MAKARAVANK - (Sevkar) -
 (Sarigiugh) - (Berkaber) - (Tzaghkavan) -
AJARKUT - (Voskepar) - (Voskevan) -
 (Baghanis) - (Koti) - (Jujevan) -
NOYEMBERIAN




UPPER CASE destinations are worth a long visit, (side trips) are worth the stop if you have the time. Trip 1 explores the Aghstev river valley and the eastern route to Noyemberian, near the Georgian Border. The trip explores one of the main caravan routes into Armenia, the source of vast amounts of wealth during the Bagratuni, but especially the Kiurikian and Orbelian dynasties. The area is remote enough to have much of its wilderness relatively untouched, the high mountain areas are seas of grass and wildlife, harboring some of the most beguiling historic sites in their native habitat. The route passes agricultural glens of wheat, rye and grapes, centuries old orchards, and forests barely touched by human hands. The upper route covers both glen and gorge, passing the mythic Kirants Valley, the last bastion of Armenian rule during the Mongol-Persian eras, the great monastery at Makaravank, archeological sites from the earliest eras of human settlement, and some amazing topography; on this trip you pass the lush river valleys and forested mountains to their wind-swept alpine tops.



Stay: Hotel in Noyemberian (the most basic), overnight in Noyemberian and at village home (rustic), camping in the forests above the roads, on the Aghstev River, Lusahovit, Achajur, Sevkar, Tzaghkavan, Archakut, Voskepar, Voskevan, Kotli, Juevan.

Eat: Noyemberian, Roadside stands.

Springs: Aghstev river bed, Lusahovit, Achajur, Sevkar, Tzaghkavan, Archakut, Voskepar, Voskevan, Koti, Jujevan.

➤ From the N (3^d) Ijevan bridge, take the M24 (unmarked) highway N about 6.2 km past Getahovit and the Yenokavan road to the Lusadzor turnoff (W) which is after a major east bend in the road just as it bends back left (N). Take the W turn and go for about 700 m to (**Lusadzor**, DD 40.9333333 x 45.1333333)   


SIDE TRIP: (**Lusadzor** - **Լուսաձոր** - till 1935 Khavaradzor elev. 759m, pop. 5656) is set above the Mtnadzor River, a feeder stream into the Aghstev River, and lies just west of an orchard. The mountain hills to the NW and SW were heavily forested, but have experienced illegal logging and are not as dense as they once were.

*Still there are good **hikes** from here, along the Mtnadzor River and its feeder streams and springs, and into the denser forest to the NW; if you follow the Mtnadzor River W, at about 1.2 km you will find a right (N) fork that continues for about 6.5 km to Mt. Naltonian (1979.1 m). If you continue on the left fork (Mtnadzor) for about 2 km you will pass just north (1.6 km) of Yenokavan, and in another 7 km you will meet up with the Yenokavan summer track, about 48 km from Jujevan, which is just S of Novemberian.*

The village has a new (early 20th c) church and the remains of a medieval (5th-13th cc) settlement and khachkars to the S and W.

On the W end of the village off of a mountain track climbing towards Mt. Naltonian is an Iron Age cemetery with a series of shallow shaft graves. Traces of Bronze Age (3rd m BCE) artifacts have been found in the area as well.

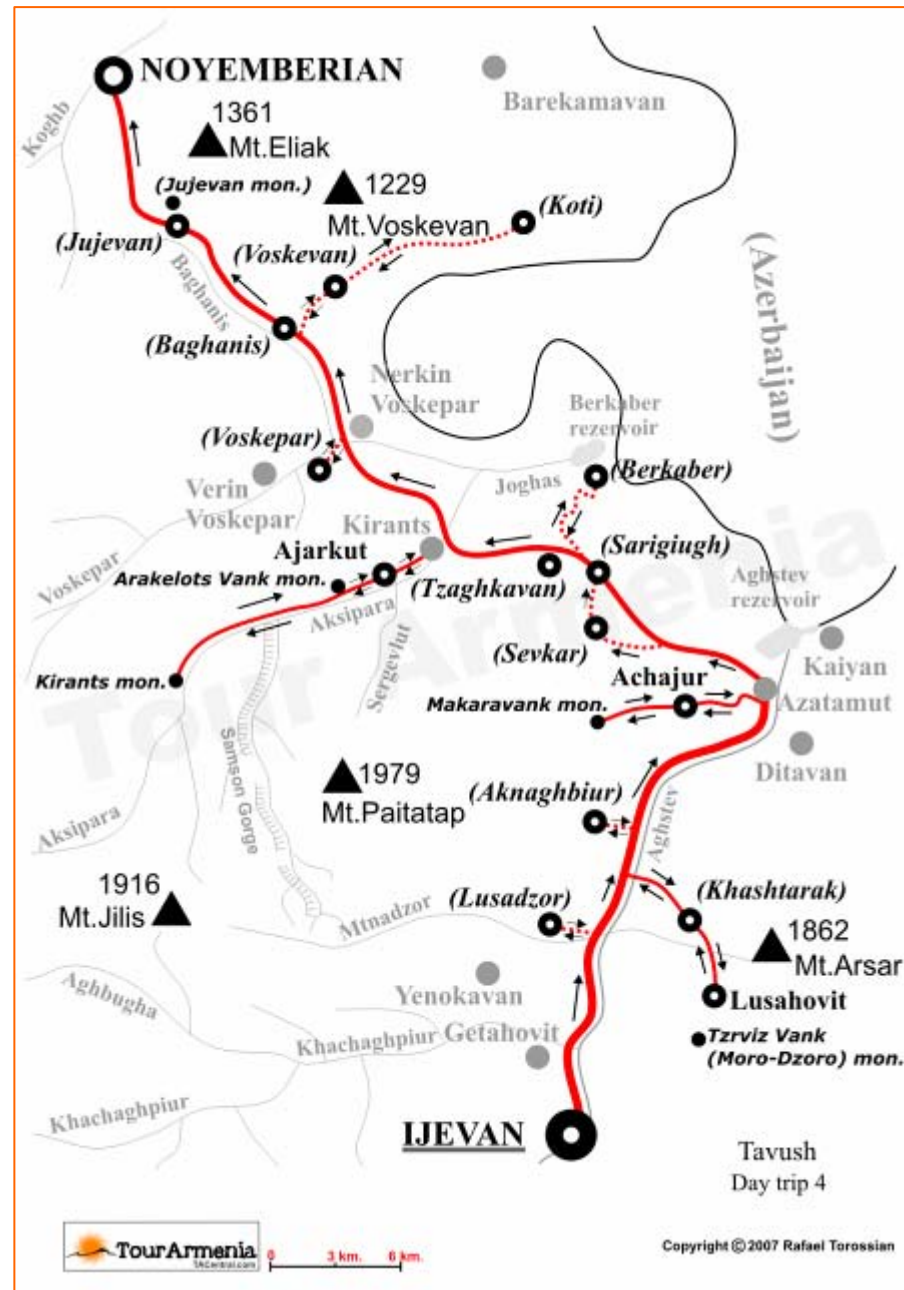
Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village.

➡ **Backtrack to the M24 highway, turn left (N) and go for about 500 m to a bridge, cross the bridge (E) and follow it for about 1.8 km up the hill to (Khashtarak, DD 40.9386111 X 45.1797222)** 



SIDE TRIP: (*Khashtarak* - հաշտարակ - formerly Sahatlu elev. 1065m, pop. 1221), is opposite Lusadzor, on the right (E) bank of the Aghstev River, more able to enjoy the caravan wealth that plied the riverbed. West of the village are fruit orchards and to the east are wooded hills leading the alpine Mt. Ardak range dividing the Aghstev River valley from Shamshadin.

The village has a 19th-20th cc church with a congregation of the faithful that mix Christian and pre-Christian tradition; the inimitable "burning bush" covered with pieces of cloth is



just one example along with totems and offerings at springs and in nearby the village at abandoned medieval (4th-13th cc) settlements to the W and SE.

Hikes. From here you can take several trails into Shamshadin; there is a mountain track that leaves from the NE end of the village and climbs the mountains to a dairy coop in about 800 m and another in about 4 km, climbing the N face of Mt. Ardak and crossing a mountain stream on the way.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village.

➡ From the Khashtarak intersection take the road going S through the village and out for about 3 km as it climbs into a niche in the mountains to central **LUSAHOVIT** (DD 40.95 x 45.1833333) 🏠 🌳

🏠 **LUSAHOVIT - ԼՍԻՍՎՈՎԻՏ** 🌳 (until 1978 Tsoviz elev. 1031m, pop. 1221) is in a fold of Mt. Tanakaya (1423.0 m) and is surrounded on three sides by forested hills, some of which have been heavily logged. The village lies on the right (N) bank of the Tanakaya River and just S of the Lusahovit.

The village sits above the larger Khashtarak but was its superior as the home of the 6th-13th cc "Moro Dzor" (from early inscriptions) or **Tsoviz Vank**. The vank and a medieval settlement of the same name are near the village.

The vank features the remains of the 6th (some say 5th) c. Astvatsatsin church, which was radically rebuilt in 1213 for the Armenian Atabek (Seljuk for "Father of the prince") Ivaneh Zakarian, who sponsored its construction. Ivaneh gave the money for the renovation of the church that towered above the Aghstev valley on the strict condition that the monks would celebrate masses "until the Second Coming" for the prosperity of his sons the Princes Avak and Shah'n'shah. At the time of the request it might have seemed the Second Coming wouldn't have been that far off. Having recovered from the Seljuk attacks a century earlier, the region was flush with wealth from heavily laden caravans plying the routes from Asia, but already the Mongols were making their presence felt, having taken Persia and the Russian Steppes and threatening Anatolia. Strident and powerful, the nakharars were nonetheless keenly

aware the greatest epochs of their history were to the west, and several hundred years before. Now they carefully placed their cultural jewels (which were religious) in the crevices of mountains and deep river gorges.

The vank is recorded several times in chronicles and inscription for the church. According to one in 1197, Ivaneh's sister, "soul mate and helper" Nana (Noni or Nuneh) was among the women in the vank's nunnery. The importance placed on Tsoviz made it equivalent to the memorial shrines in Europe, where churches were built in order to venerate and perpetuate the reign of the ruling house. An earlier decree by King Giorgi of Georgia (1156-1184) absolved the monastery of all taxes and granted nearby land and peasants (remember this is the feudal period) to support it. The nearby Tsoviz settlement was the product of that agreement. Giorgi was the father of the great Georgian-Armenian Queen Tamara.

The church. The first structure on this spot was a Hall type with vaulted ceiling, typical for its time. It was built over an earlier wooden structure from the early Christian period (4th c), which was in turn probably built over a pre-Christian temple or shrine, quite possibly a spring as there are numerous springs in the area. The outline of the early church dictated some of the reconstruction, though it was greatly enlarged in 1213 into a cruciform dome type with annexes in its corners. The design of the church was typical for its day, though highly ornamented on the exterior cornices, the framing of the windows, with their band of geometric lines reinforced in that above, and the use of bas relief figures that once showed the house of Zakarian crest. Rosettes, multi-coloured stonework and "ropes" of vines and vegetation augmented the design. Much is lost, so much needs to be imagined.

The nearby **Tsoviz medieval settlement** has khachkars from the same period, plus a few foundations and pottery shards.

Hiking. The Tanakaya River is a pleasant 3.2 km trek (W) to the Aghstev riverbed, beginning from the village's SE end. Follow the river E from the same point for about 1 km and you reach the base of Mt. Tanakaya. Another follows a track S for about 1.6 to the Kalacha River, which you can follow W for about 2 km to the Aghstev River across from Getahovit or E uphill for about 5.5 km to Mt. Kalacha (1722.6 m) itself which is just 2 km on an E/S track to the Shamshadin highway (H45/P45; unmarked) by Sarum Pass.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village.

➡ Backtrack to Khashtarak and then to the M24 highway, turn right (N) and go for about 1 km to a where a road forks off to the left (NE), take that road for about 2 km to **(Aknaghbiur** DD 40.9583333 x 45.1563889) 🏠 🌳

SIDE TRIP: **(Aknaghbiur - Ակնաղբիւր** - till 1967 Nerkin Aghdan, then 1967-70 Morut elev. 613m, pop. 1656) is left of the road.

Its claim to fame is from the early Christian period, when legend has it the huge oak tree near a spring E of the village was planted by Sparapet ("Commander in Chief") Vardan Mamikonian in 450. Legend is legend, but as archeologists have learned, there is often a kernel of truth inside. Mamikonian could well have visited the area. Tavush was, as a military hinterland engaged in border skirmishes from time immemorial, a reliable source of fighters for the army. In 450, they would have been needed, the Armenian kingdom was under siege by the Sassanid Empire (ancient Persia), who had slaughtered the Parthian House (related by marriage to the Armenian ruling house) and had titular hold over the country.

They were bent on crushing Armenian independence and converting the populace to Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism), the religion founded by Zoroaster in the 6th c BCE. Zoroastrianism was based on the struggle between light (good) and dark (evil), and developed from earlier fire worship based in the Caspian sea area (some say specifically the fire pits near Baku, where the sea seems to erupt with balls of fire from subterranean gas pits in the murky water). Converts to Zoroastrianism, the Sassanids were zealous in their efforts, their king Yazdegerd II summoning Armenian nakharars to his capital Stesiphon and forcing them to convert to his religion. News of their capitulation spread and mass revolt by Armenians broke out, forcing Yazdegerd to send troops to quell the rebellion. On their return, the nakharars, led by Vartan Mamikonian, joined the revolt (perhaps thinking better of their apostasy in Persia) and fought the Persians at Avarayr in Vaspurakan, present day Turkey.

The battle of Avarayr (also known as the battle of Vartanants or martyrdom) was a turning point in the political and religious history of Armenia. 66,000 Armenians fought a Persian force 4 times their strength with a superior cavalry featuring attack elephants from India. It ended in a rout of the Armenian forces, the defection of a number of Armenian nakharars including Vasak Siunik to the Persians, and Vartan's death. Though the battle lasted one day, May 26, 451 (some say June 2, others May 25), and ended in seeming Armenian defeat, it was followed by decades of resistance and guerrilla warfare, culminating in Sassanid capitulation in 485, when King Vaghah was forced to grant Armenians freedom of worship, conscience, and culture in the treaty of Nvarsak. The Armenians had shown they were willing to risk annihilation rather give up their basic rights, and had coalesced into a powerful resistance force, toppling the best efforts of a world super power. Some say they had become as one, finally.

The tree had symbolic meaning greater than a promise of continuity among Armenians. The region had long worshipped a pantheon of gods based on forest spirits and the local fauna (including a particularly strong psychedelic Soma mushroom that can still be found in the forests) were believed to invoke visions and contact with the spirit world. Locals were barely 150 years from the first conversion, which was tentative in outlying areas, so shoring up your base would have been extremely important. If he had come, planting a tree was a way to cement relations with ruling leaders and a way to combine the powers of the old and new religions.

The tree is still used as a pilgrimage site, locals visiting the site, praying and leaving candles, religious pictures and pieces of personal belongings as offerings to the great saint, asking for strength and power to surmount personal crisis'.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village.

➡ From Aknaghbiur, take a side road that goes E from the N end of the village for about 1.8 km to the M4, turn left (N) and go about 1.8 km to the **Azatamut/H46-P46 intersection**

SIDE TRIP: The **Azatamut Intersection** is a triangle of roads. To the Left is the highway to

Noyemberian (via Achajur and Sev Kar); to the Right the road to Berd (via Aigehovit).

OVERNIGHT

The **Motel** at the center of the intersection is a recently built venue with restaurant, favored by locals. Rooms are clean enough, running water. SGL/DBL at 5000/10,000 AMD.

➡ At the Intersection take the left (NW) road (H46/P46) for about 150 m to a road on your left (W) that crosses the river, take that road and go for about 3 km to central **ACHAJUR** (DD 40.99027 x 45.14527) 🏠 🍷 🌿

✳️ **ACHAJUR - ԱՉԱԶՈՐ** ▲ (formerly Achasu elev. 1169m, pop. 1631) is on the left (W) bank of the Aghstev reached by driving through large orchard fields. The village is sandwiched between two small rivers that feed into the Aghstev, and is below the wooded hills of Mt. Paitatap (Naltonian, 1979.1 m) to the SW while the Azerbaijan border is barely 2 km to the NE.

The village is the latest incarnation of a series of settlements in the area. At the NW edge of the village are the remains of the **Tmbadիր (Թմբադիր)** early Armenian (BCE-CE) fortress, while in the SW of the village there is an old **settlement** originating in the Bronze Age with khachkars from the Christian era.

✳️ **MAKARAVANK - ՄԱԿԱՐԱՎԱՆԿ** ▲ (DD 40.97358 x 45.12656) The beautiful complex at Makaravank is SW of the village on a slope of Mt. Paitatap. To get there, drive W through the village on the main road where a potted asphalt road leads SW for about 8 km up the mountain in a series of winding turns and switchbacks to the monastery, surrounded by picnic areas and forests.

Background. Makaravank, like its sister vank [Khoranashat](#) was once part of a huge settlement that existed solely to support the monastery, with peasant farmers, craftsmen, carpenters, stone

masons, ceramicists, jewelers, blacksmiths, cooks, embroiderers, painters and trades people engaged in the business of replenishing a monastery that was more than a community of religious people, but rather the focus of being for the community at large.



The monastery is dated from the 10th c, though earlier, wooden structures stood on the territory, from the 4th c, and evidence of pre-Christian worship are found at area springs and in the shape and size of the original standing church.

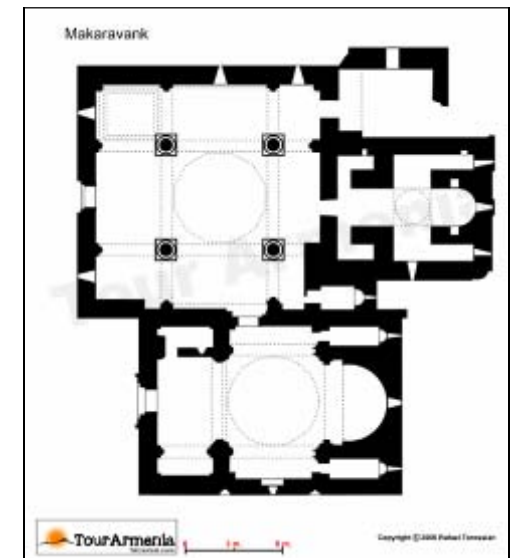
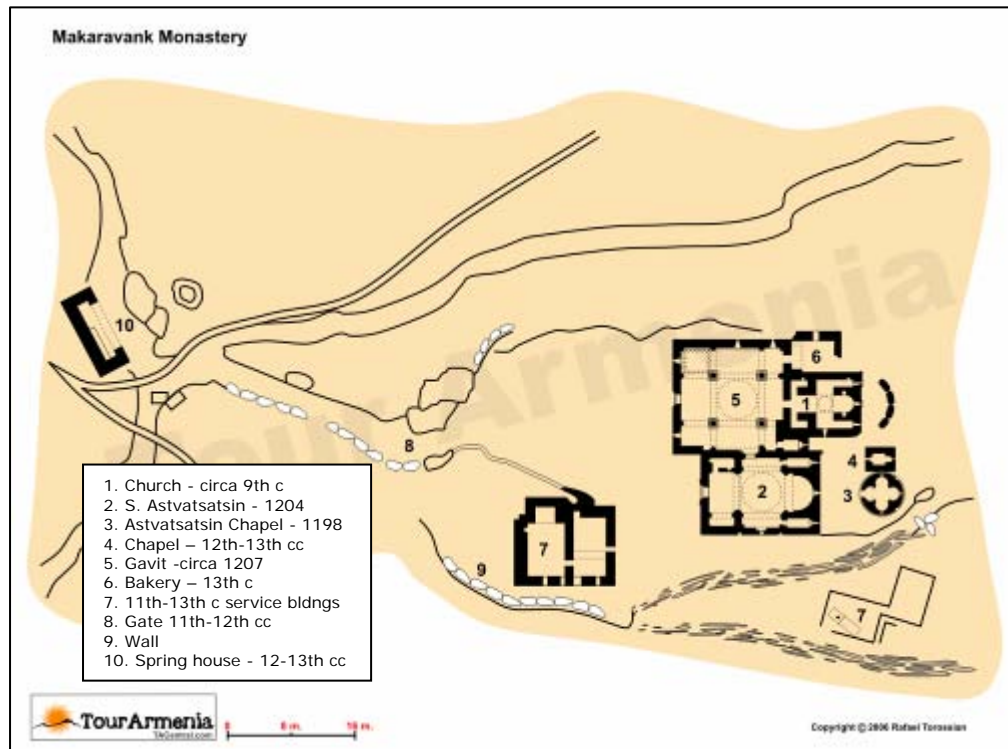
Makaravank has enough evidence of its golden era to imagine the life that was led here; worship, study and a politics; it was after all patronized and courted by the ruling families of the 12th-13th cc. The walled monastery was one of the richest and most powerful in Tavush, housing religious staff, pilgrims and students from throughout the country. Numerous **residential quarters** were built inside a separately walled compound to house these individuals, as well as elaborately built pavilions housing mineral springs.

Makaravank's buildings are of pink andesite and red tufa, offset with turquoise green felsite. And, as richly carved as it is with floral and animal imagery, some of which were crests or icons of the ruling Zakarian, Kiurikian and Vachutian families, it is also a reflection of the times, when Arabic, Seljuk and Persian influences were felt throughout Armenia, as well as the oriental designs from afar. Designed in the late Medieval period. In a time when builders were flushed with cash and ideas, of all the monasteries in Tavush, Makaravank may best be described as Armenian Rococo, its florid details complementing and at times overwhelming the austere architectural dictates of Armenian church building.

Complex. There is one particularly venerated **spring** near the entrance, possible site of a Vishap stone in the Bronze Age. As you enter the compound through the gate, the main church is on the right and the gavit is on the left.

The **main church, Astvatsatsin**, built in 1205 for Vartan son of Prince Bazaz, is a domed hall type, with a large central apse and two annexes with apse on either side. The date for the church is found on a khachkar to the S of the building, to commemorate its (or rather its donor's substantial) dedication. The exterior is rectangular (13.5 x 9.5 m) with a cruciform interior space and two 2-story chambers on either end of the apse, used as depositories for church treasures and manuscripts. A third was added to the NW end of the building at a later date.

The interior is wide and full of light, the diameters of the high domes are large, and the under-dome space predominates in the structures' interior. The church is divided into three spaces, the first, or narthex is followed by the main, domed hall and the large altar. The diameter of the central dome is quite large, its towering effect reinforced by the support columns and interconnecting pointed arches that support the drum. This is echoed by high niches and arcature on twin half-columns on the apse facing.



The *walls of the apse* are extremely interesting, the whole façade literally covered with bas-reliefs of geometric patterns and unusual floral imagery, including two bands of a pattern of eight-pointed stars and octagons, floral motifs, fish and birds, as well as sphinxes and sirens. This is considered the height of Medieval Armenian carving, its chef d'oeuvre. The way the eight-pointed stars are polished is truly remarkable, as are the cascade of bas-relief figures, biblical imagery (Jonas and the Whale) and amazing detail given to the dozens of figures. The fish imagery is unparalleled in Armenian medieval art, for its life-like appearance and plasticity of motion. Note the boatman figure looking forward and another human figure, thought to be the artist, inside an octagon on the left edge of the altar dais wall with the word "Veridasart" or "student" (literally 'young').



The *exterior* is even more elaborate. The S façade features a pair of niches (the N wall niches were altered when the gavit was built) and a sundial over the main window and a dove carving on the cantilever column under and circular windows in various shapes and ornament. The most stunning feature is below the window of south wall of the church, where there is a bas-relief of an eagle holding a calf in its talons, a mastery of carving. Doorways are rectangular with their own niches, the west and North doors especially rich with details and polished andesite and basalt stone mosaics forming a chess-style pattern. The tympanum and spandrel are made from multi-coloured stones and the mass of the drum is lightened by twenty recessed archways built into its wall.

The **gavit** (13m x 12.9m) is to the N of the main church, and was built in front of the smaller, older

church, though it served both. It was built circa 1207 with money supplied by Prince Vacheh Vachutian. The building has a centralized, four-column plan and had an inner door that led to the communion bread oven, a small vaulted room. The building was built from pink, polished andesite stones. The gavit's façade décor complements that of the main church, with its ornamental carvings and corniced door and window framing, like that at Geghard monastery. The four columns, the wall piers, the surfaces between the arches, the octagonal roof (the dome rotunda with support columns has not survived) and the corner shed ceilings are all decorated with rich ornamentation of plant and geometrical designs. Arch bases and column capitals have bas-reliefs of birds of paradise and the foundation plates for the dome carry the initials of the church portal builders. Topping the main entry are two bas relief carvings, the left of a fighting lion and ox, the other of a lion's body with a human head. Said by some to be a sphinx, its head is more like the six-winged angels common in Armenian iconography which can be found decorating the inner dome of the bell tower at Echmiadzin. The body is not reposed like a sphinx, but poised and active. The face has an almost sly look about it, its eyes reinforced with vertically carved features.



Between the gavit and the NE end of the old church you can see the remains of the 13th c relic room, a rectangular (3.5m x 5m) constructed from Whitestone.

On the NE of the complex is the oldest standing structure, the **10th-11th cc church** that can be accessed only through the gavit. The church has a rectangular exterior with a cruciform domed type interior (with very wide wings) with annexes in the corners and a single apse. The building was built

from half-finished ref tufa stone, but the renovated dome of the same (but polished) material. The altar dais is ornamented with detailed carvings of floral and geometric patterns within oblique circular patterns, unlike that found in other churches of the same period, and may be the result of later 13th c flourishes added to the main church. The patterning continues on the main window frames.



Another unique building is the small **round Astvatsatsin chapel** built in 1198 for Abbot Yovhannes in memory of his parents and brothers. The church was built from large pink and red andesite and is of the centric dome type typical of the 10th-13th cc (like S. Grigor at Sanahin) but is unique in that it is only round at its base; the upper part is octahedral with four niches in the corner angles topped with differing conchs. The practice of carving conch designs is not unique; it is a hallmark of the design. Like insuring no two khachkars are made alike, the individualism of each conch may come from their purpose as unknown (to us) religious symbols or simply a love of experimentation. We may never know. The church has three apses with a rectangular west wing. The dome is set upon a small barrel with narrow windows piercing the plain surface. Below it is another matter; the façade is more richly detailed with carved bands and cornices that frame the W entry, wall, round window and continue along the niches and other walls with bas-reliefs of birds, lions, rosettes, and duel of an eagle and a dragon. Note the north wall with its bas relief carvings of a stork and snake and on the south the two fighting beasts.

Next to Astvatsatsin is a 12th-13th cc arched **memorial chapel** topped with a fantastically pieced together khachkar of an earlier period

(10th, 11th c?). The cross was toppled during the vank's demise in the 13th c, saved in the Soviet era. It sits on top of a small platform ("dais") faced with arcature carving, and shows a narrow cross surrounded by ornament on the edges of the rectangle but otherwise free of carving around the cross. The chapel was built of ashlar (squared off blocks) with carved doorframe and vaulted roofing.



Nearby. The old settlement of Achajur spread to the SE, though a smaller one with the remains of a medieval fort is at the end of a difficult 3 km hike up Mt. Paitatap (1979 m). On the S face of the mountain is an old shrine, more easily reached by hiking up the river from Lusadzor (1.2 km from Lusadzor on the Mtnadzor River take the right fork for about 5 km).

Hikes. The hike up **Mt. Paitatap** is a moderately difficult 3-hour trek. Starting about 600 m south of the vank on the asphalt road, a dairy coop has a dirt track that winds S and then N for 3 km to the E slope of Paitatap, and then continues in a circle S and back in another 2 km to a fork; take the left fork for about 3.2 km to the vank, or the right to descend the mountain to reach Lusadzor in about 3.5 km.

You can also hike to **Sevkar** in about 1.9 km by following a track out of the N end of the village over a seasonal river bed.

Jeep Track. A mountain track departing from the NW end of the village or from Makaravank asphalt road about 1.8 km S of the village climbs across the N and W slopes of Paitatap in about 25 km to intersect with another from Yenokavan, near which is the Early Iron Age fort of Bardzraberd.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** at the site (to left of complex and downhill), in the area, forests, **Springs** in the village.

➡ Backtrack to the H46/P46 road, turn left (N) and go for about 4 km to the Sevkar turnoff (left – W), take it for another 2 km to (**Sevkar** DD 41.0197222 x 45.1425) 🏠 🌲 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Sevkar** – **Սեվքար** – formerly Gharatash elev. 830m, pop. 1376) is set on a rugged hill slope east of Mts. Karmenzal and Gevavakhan, both good mountain treks. The village has a 14th c church and a sports school, though most of the population has immigrated elsewhere in search of work. SW of the village off of a dirt is the ruined 17th c Nahatak (martyr) church, with an 8th-7th cc BCE berd.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ From central Sevkar take the N route out of the village for about 2.2 km to central (**Sarigiugh** DD 41.03820 x 45.13816) 🏠 🌲 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Sarigiugh** – **Սարիգյուղ** – till 1951 Ghichkend elev. 813m, pop. 1344) is an immaculately kept village with green felsite retaining walls and covered benches in the central square. It has an 8th c BCE cyclopean fort built over an older Bronze Age fortress on a hill at the W edge of the village and about 900 m beyond on the road to Tzaghkavan, monumental stone-cists graves dated to the period from the Late Bronze Age to the early Pre-Roman Iron Age. On the road N just outside the village, the right fork to Berkaber has a small renovated S. Mariam chapel/shrine, a likely candidate for the village's Tukh Manukh. Above on the hill are the ruins of an old basilica.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ From central Sarigiugh go N on the H46/P46 for about 600 m to a fork in the road, the highway going left (NW), take the right side road for about 2.6 km to central (**Berkaber**) 🏠 🌲 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Berkaber** – **Բերքաբեր** – formerly Joghaz, pop. 454) is extremely close to the Azerbaijan border, E and should be avoided if there are any reports of border skirmishes. The village is on the S bank of the Joghaz River, just after its confluence with the Voskepar River and has beautiful spring wildflower displays on its grassy slopes. The village has a wooden-roof church from the 18th c and medieval khachkars from the middle and late periods but is famous for its Middle Bronze Age shaft tombs excavated by the Armenian archaeologist H. Simonian near the S bank of the Joghaz reservoir. The tombs revealed a rich culture already at trade with the cultures to the east and south: jewelry pieces, totems, weapons, pottery and utensils were found on site. The villagers, under intermittent threat of Azerbaijani snipers, manages to produce abundant crops of cherries, grapes, figs, nuts and vegetables in the folds of hills protected from the border.

About 1 km W on the Joghaz River is the medieval Gavarzin and Gaga berds, both at the border and subject to attack by Azeris.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Springs** in the village.

➡ Backtrack to the H46/P46, turn right (N) and continue on the road for about 1.9 km as it winds S, crosses a river and then winds N to the Tzaghkavan turnoff left (S), on which you go for about 600 m to (**Tzaghkavan** DD 41.034167 x 45.118055) 🏠 🌲 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Tzaghkavan** – **Ծաղկավան** – “Place of Flowers” – till 1940 Melikgyugh elev. 879m, pop. 337) sits between orchards running N to the Voskepar River and woody hills to the S and W. The western forested mountains are good hiking areas; you are just 5 km of moderate hiking from Ajarkut to the W. The village has a S. Hakob church and some interesting 12-13th c. khachkars. On the top of a hill 1.3 km W of the village are the ruins of the

Tsakageghtsi (Flower village) church near a small Bronze/Iron Age fort.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ Backtrack to the H46/P46 highway and turn left (W) and continue for about 1.8 km as you cross another river and see a large sign/gate over a left fork that follows the south bank of the Aksi Para (Joghaz) River for about 2.4 km into **AJARKUT** (DD41.05027 x 45.101388) 🏠 🌲 🌿

🏠 **AJARKUT** – **ԱՋԱՐԿՈՒՏ** 🌲 (once Kunen elev. 729m, pop. 510) lies at the confluence of the Aksi Para and Sergevlut rivers. The village stretches along the N bank of the Aksi Para, guarding the forested valley to the west, home to a series of excavations and medieval settlements, vanks and churches. The forests continue to Lori, with several easy-to moderately difficult hikes and mountain treks.



Background. The village is merely the last (1930's) incarnation of a number of settlements on the site, the most famous being its designation as the castle stronghold for the Artsruni branch of the Zakarian Family, who ruled the area in varying degrees of autonomy from the 11th to the 13th cc. After they lost their power base in Vaspurakan (the area around Van in present day Turkey) when the Seljuks captured their kingdom. The Artsrunis were a remarkable and remarkably powerful family in their heyday, competing with the Bagratunis for control of the Armenian kingdom. The Bagratunis controlled the vast amount of the country at the time, but the Artsrunis, as old a house as the Arshakunis and the Mamikonians held Vaspurakan,

and through marriage parts of Siunik, Gegharkunik and Tavush.

The last of the Artsruni Vaspurakan rulers, Senekerim-Hovhannes (990-1021), was forced to cede his kingdom to the Byzantine Empire, receiving the province of Sebastia in return. His son lost that province in 1080 when the Seljuks attacked, and the family, by marriage and wile, moved their base of operations to Tavush, a part of the kingdom better able to resist Seljuk domination, for a while. Their household, merged with the ruling Georgian Orbeli House and the Zakarian House, settled on this river valley, and their capital was built to the SW, on a remote point along the Khndzorkut River. The exact location is hotly debated still, but it seems the probable location is nearby, below the Deghdznuti monastery.

SITES

Beginning in the village and continuing for 10-15 km along the Joghaz River westwards (upstream) you pass some of the most evocative and beautiful forests and monasteries in Tavush. Give yourself plenty of time to take it all in. If it isn't getting too dark, keep climbing the riverbed and hills!

Local Guide. The sites in this area are not readily apparent and directions often confusing. But a surprisingly resourceful brigade of local guides await you in almost every village. The teenagers in the village are your best guides. Not only do they know where everything is (having explored the area 100 times over), they also know the best (or most interesting) routes, as well as sites we couldn't begin to find. At Ajarkut, our guide was 16 year old **Andranik**, who took us to the valley sites below and spent the afternoon filling us in on local gossip. It is not customary to give money for this service; villagers considering it an honor to show off their village, but you should give them something. Stock up on T-shirts, baseball caps or simple electronic devices (cheap portable FM radios are a real hit). I gave Andranik a new T-Shirt I had brought over, which seemed to please him to no end.

Village Sites

Just before crossing the bridge into the village center, take the L uphill road at the roundabout and climb it (continue taking L, about 200 m) to the old cemetery and the 5th c. **S. Astvatsatsin** (DD 41.03398 x 45.08444, elev. 761m) Church, mistakenly taken for a 17th c edifice due to a religious offering inscription from the 17th c:

"In the year 1675 I Melikshah'nazar son of Melikslamaz of the Herumeh clan, and my wife Khanzateh built S. Astvatsatsin by the hand of Master Hakop."

The inscription is a "modern" version of the small khachkars found in the walls of churches throughout the country, commemoration stones from the pious in return for a donation. The word "built" is often confused for 'newly built' when in fact it equally means rebuilt or renovated.

The foundations, ancient stones and layout are specifically Hellenistic, and a remarkable piece of pre-Christian memorabilia seems to confirm its Pagan origins. The altar has stone protruding from the apron floor, a piece of a Vishap stone that still stands sentinel over the faithful, if now baptized as a Christian relic. And the signs of a now dried spring can be seen in the indentations of the surrounding grounds.



Go back to the bridge and cross over into the village, taking the main W road towards Arakelots Vank. Follow that out of the village for about 500 m to the signposted fork to Arakelots. Just beyond that point and about 50 m to the L, at the river is the **Siranots Medieval Bridge, picnic area and swimming hole** (DD 41.03172 x 45.06871, elev. 791m), both teeming with local folks when we visited. The picnic area is beautifully located at the river's edge with flagstone flooring and nice awnings over the tables.

From here, S along the river there is **good hiking**: follow it from the Joghas for about 5.6 km to the crest of Mt. Abo. The top of Mt. Abo is a moderate-difficult 1 km climb from the church and cemetery.

Go back to the signposted fork and turn R onto the dirt path and about 100 m uphill, to the R in the undergrowth are the ruins of an early **(5th c) church**. The walls of the church building are now permanently entwined with trees protruding from the ruins, the gnarled roots appearing like gargoyles guarding the ancient temple grounds.

At the end of a dirt track on the E side of the village in about 2 km and on the top of a flat clearing on a ridge is the little **Khndzorut church and khachkar**.

Valley Sites.

Allow half a day or more and a good jeep or Vilis/UAZ to see everything below, the drive is on rough roads and dirt tracks and there is some walking to the vank sites.

Valley monasteries. The modern village sits on part of a massive medieval town that supported a string of monasteries along the Joghas River: the 12th-14th cc **Arekelots, Deghdznuti and Kirants**. These vanks remain behind, lonely sentinels in the thick forests that cover this region. Despite incessant and illegal logging, there are still enough trees and vines to give a jingle feel to the region, adding a fairytale aspect to the far flung sites.

✦ **ARAKELOTS (APOSTLES) MONASTERY - ԱՐԱՔԵԼՈՏԻ ՎԱՆԿ** ▲ (DD 41.03398 x 45.06588, elev. 846m) is just west of Ajarkut. Starting from the signposted fork, follow the signs and road to the vank for about 1-2 km to the substantial remains of the 13th c. **Arekelots Monastery** complex with its 10th-13th cc **fortress walls, refectory** and a **pilgrim ijevan (inn)**.



Complex. Arekelots Monastery consists of two churches, a gavit ("zhamatun"), and refectory buildings, enclosed with substantial portions of monolithic stone walls. The walls, built from stone found nearby, have the classic "castle feel", with turrets and thick dimensions.



The **main church** is made from finely hewn stone in a modified cruciform dome type with four annexes at the corners. The cross form is clearly seen from both its outside and interior. The small central space is topped by a central dome with a round drum, unlike others of its period (13th c) which tended to have octahedral faceted drums. The deeply curved dome crowning the church has a shallower cupola on the inside. Sparsely decorated on its outside, the church with carved pediments, there are nonetheless several interesting khachkars decorating the walls and surrounding grounds.



The **gavit** is more interesting, its vaulted ceiling held up by intersecting arches supported by

abutments along the outer walls. The roof itself is done in the "Hazarashen" style, common in domestic buildings of the period, whereby slabs of stone are piled progressively inwards at cross angles creating an octagonal skylight at the top. The difference is that Armenian homes used wood to create their dome, while Arekelots is made from stone.

Over the South doorway there is a faded inscription (1293) mentioning a certain **Khutlu Bugha Artsruni**, the son of **Atabek Sadun**, Lord of Mahkanaberd in the 13th c. Mahkanaberd was the family castle, capitol of the Artsruni petty kingdom, and the inscription is both a "certificate" of donation and alliance, and a prayer for eternal life in the hereafter.

It didn't work for very long. In Bugha's case: within 4 years this princeling, achieving status as **atabek (governor)** and **amirspasalar (commander in chief)** of all Georgia in exchange for helping to prop up the Georgian King Vakhtang, was dead at the hands of the Mongols, for plotting insurrection. No doubt the charge was true, even under the yoke of the mighty Mongols Armenians chaffed at the bit and constantly made alliances and treaties to establish a new kingdom.



Inside the monastery is the 13th c. masterpiece **Karapet Khachkar - Կարապետ խաչքար** with an elaborate design and ornamentation typical of the period. There is a **ruined chapel** on the next hill over.

The **ijevan** lies about 50 m from the main church, past a gorge of trees with moss laden rocks scattered on the ground. The substantial building housed pilgrims and traders passing by en route from Asia Minor and the East to the Byzantine

Empire, and had room enough for 100 travelers at a time. The building's farthest end is a part of the fortress ramparts, the round watch tower still standing watch over the river gorge. An entry through the walls of the ijevan and the next building shows how fortresses of the time maintained security: the narrow alley way was barely wide enough for one horse at a time, climbing a steep hill that then turned sharply to the L as it entered the compound, the foundations of surrounding walls remaining to show its course. It would have been had indeed to storm this entry, with guards bearing down on single file horsemen and their laden caravan.

✂ **DEGHZDZUTI MONASTERY - ԴԵԴՅՆՈՒՏԻ ՎԱՆԵ** is reached by continuing on the river road upstream (W) for about 2 km to a monument on the R in front of a "Bisetka" (picnic spot) with a **cave museum** in the cliff side (DD 41.02148 x 45.04015, elev. 925m) and another 2 km to a left (S) road that crosses the **Zaighoshani bridge**

(Չայղոշանի կամուրջ) which bears a Safavid Persian inscription, "In the year of the Hijra 1207 (1792)". Take that road for about 900 m as it rises towards the 13th c. **Deghdznuti Vank**.



The monastery is in a tumbled state, which seems only to add to its charm, surrounded and covered as it is by nature. Grass, flowers and bushes have taken root on the exposed arches of the gavit and church roof, framing the mountains towering above and around you, and the river below.

The small **main church** (1258-1274) is faced with finely hewn basalt clapped over an internal cruciform domed hall with four annexes in the corners. The apse is semi-circular with arcature and arches supporting the drum above the central square. The carving on the exterior is especially elaborate, as fitting the period: the W doorway is decorated with both a rectangular frame and an archway and half columns, both elaborately carved with intersecting plat bands and bas relief stars of David in a lacework

pattern. Stylized sun orbs flank the upper corners of the framing and an elaborate cross over a distinct tree of life tops the door proper.

The large **gavit** is supposed to have been built immediately after the church, its roof covered with moss and in the spring, wildflowers. An *inscription* on the S arch of the building is in commemorates the visit in 1292 of a certain Asil (Az'l) from Mesopotamia, who may have been an Armenian trader. There are khachkars on the walls flanking the gavit entry and several in the area, some toppled on the ground.

On a slope opposite Deghdznuti Vank are the remains of another fort, **Melik-Abovi Berd – Մելիք Աբովի Բերդ**.

✂ **SAMSON CANYON - ՍԱՄՍՈՆԻ ՋՈՐ**. If you don't have the time (half a day or more) or a suitable vehicle, skip this part and Kirants Vank. However, if you have the time and *do* like long mountain treks and deep gorges, take your Vilis/UAZ or Jeep and continue S on the same mountain track, following the river (the Khndzorkut) an in about 2 km you reach the L turn to the spectacular Samson Gorge (*Samsoni Dzor* DD 41.02032 x 45.03972, elev. 874m). Watch for falling rocks and mudslides in rainy weather. This is also a great **day hike** connecting Yenokavan and Ajarkut.

As you continue south, above you on the right (W) bank of the river, on top of a mountain, are the reputed ruins of the **Berdakar medieval fort (ԲԵՐԴԱԿԱՐ ԱՄՐՈՅ)**, with cisterns and a wealth of artifacts ready for excavation. This would have been **Makanaberd (ՍԱԿԱՆԱԲԵՐԴ)**, the fortress-capital of the Artsruni family, who ruled the area during the 11-13th cc.



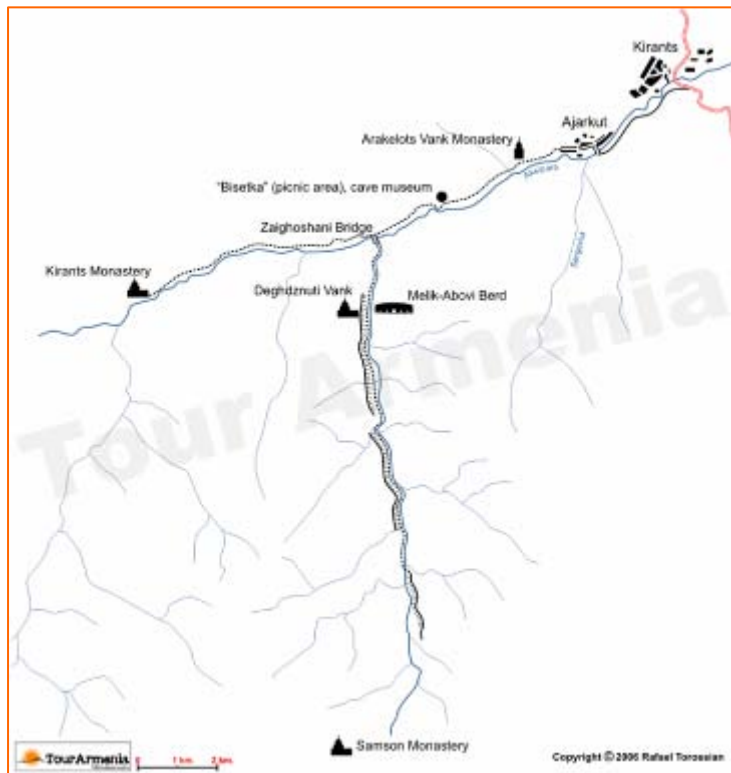
✂ **Samson Vank - ՍԱՄՍՈՆԻ ՎԱՆԵ** is about 6 km S of Deghdznuti Vank (about 3 km N of Yenokavan), and consists of a domed church, shrine and another tiny church. The **main church** of the once walled complex is stripped of much of its facing stone and gabled roofing slabs but enough remains to show the character of this remote medieval hermitage. A shallow cupola tops the tall drum, resting on the square of the cruciform hall; both it and the denuded roofing seem thatched, covered with thick moss and grass as they are. The nearby smaller church lies to the NW of the main church, and may be more properly called a chapel, it is large enough for just a few mass celebrants. It lies mostly in ruins. The area has evidence of khachkars and graves, and a spring is the vicinity. Mostly it is a lone citadel on the side of hill, a reminder of much better days gone by.

Backtrack N to the Joghas River road, and continue upstream (W) for about 3.5 km to an interesting contemporary **monument** and picnic site with a built in display of 19th c. tools and household implements.

✂ **Kirants Monastery – ԿԻՐԱՆՏ ՎԱՆԵ** ▲ is about 10 km W of the bizetka, in the bend of the road that now goes N as it climbs the difficult terrain above. The 13-14th c. monastery is well preserved for its remote location and neglected status, and is one of the more unusual constructions in Armenia churches, being made entirely of brick and colored tiles (another is Servekh, also in Tavush). The vank is on the left (N) bank of the Joghas or Kirants River, overlooking the ravine.

The **complex** consists of three churches, two barrel shaped vestibules/arcades, a refectory the remains of support buildings, all enclosed by large stone walls with large roofed gates.

The **main church** has an incredible perspective, the octahedral drum towering above the cross form basilica, rising almost like a gothic or Teutonic spire. The entire building is made from baked red tufa brick, carefully laid with thick mortar forming a strong pattern of white and red, making the surface seem etched. The walls of the drum have recessed arch-niches with tall narrow windows centered in each, the window space itself narrowed further with additional stone fretwork. The magnificently laid brick is interlaced with green and cream colored polished octagonal tiles, a distinctly eastern pattern then popular in



the Near East. The top of the drum is pierced with inlay white tiles.

The *interior* of the church is rectangular (11.04x10.5 m) a classic domed basilica type from a much earlier period (see 7th c. Odzun, Guyaneh,) which had become popular again in the 13th c (Akhtala, D'segh). The dome surmounts the square by the use of four large arches resting on the corner walls, which taper up to the dome in a triangular fashion. Two side chapels flank the central hall apse and main altar, each with a circular apse.

Two smaller **single-nave churches** abut the S and W walls of the main church, each with a single slope roof.

The **refectory** is about 10 m W of the main church, and is missing its western wall. The building, made from rubble and once faced with smooth stone slabs had a very large hall for its time (17.1x9.5 m) and barrel vaulting. The roofing was supported by arches resting on wall abutments. There were several auxiliary rooms, including a kitchen.

The interior walls of the refectory and church were both coated with lime plaster and **frescoes**. Sadly defaced by earlier visitors (note Modern Armenian scribble, the 20th c version of "Roscoe was here"), the frescoes of the same period have a distinctly non-Apostolic Church character. Georgian characters in the frescoes points to this monastery (like Akhtala) being a part of the Chalcedonian Church (See Akhtala in Lori).

Other fragments of buildings are on the S end of the complex.

The area is beautiful, and a good jumping off point for day **hikes**. From the vank you can follow the N road uphill through a couple of steep ravines for about 3.5 km to a winter/summer camp for shepherds. The W mountain terrain is rough, you need a good guide, but there are several day mountain hikes for the avid trekker.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ Backtrack past Ajarkut and Kirants to the H46/P4 highway, turn left (N) and cross over the Joghas (Aksi Para) River, skirting Kirants and passing into what was once an enclave of Azerbaijan (the de facto boundary runs along a

line of hills about 3 km E) and continue for about 4.8 km and past Nerkin Voskepar (Ashagi Askipara) to a bridge crossing the Joghas River and in about 1.5 km to (**Voskepar** DD 41.07379 x 45.07561) 🏠 🏕️ 🌿



SIDE TRIP: (**Voskepar – Ոսկեպար** elev. 741m, pop. 1748) The name means "Golden Dance," perhaps a reference to the brilliant display of yellow leaves on the forest trees in the autumn. The area was a wealthy farming community before the Karabakh conflict, now bereft of the farmers who once made this valley fertile. The village lies on the south bank of the Voskepar River, between the old borders of Azerbaijan to the E (Nerkin Aksipara) and W (Verin Aksipara). The western area was an Azerbaijani enclave encircled by Armenia, and is now de facto Armenian territory, the eastern border pushed back about 3 km. During the 1990-95 conflict, the village was under constant attack by Azeris, and the **7th c Astvatsatsin** church you see on the R as you cross over the river and begin to climb to the other side was used as a machine gun nest, miraculously surviving its ordeal and renewed as a place of worship. The repaired church is still exposed to the elements, its only worshippers a colony of fruit bats that use the dome for their nursery. Signs of a healthy habitat, the harmless bats do show some hope the area can be reclaimed for agricultural and natural use. Next to the church are the signs of burned out houses, once Azerbaijani homes.

Nearby are the remains of a 10-11th c. castle.

At the W end of the village is an 18th (?) c. tower with slit windows to prevent arrows from

getting inside. One km beyond is a medieval stone bridge. Follow the road W of the village and in about 2 km you will find the deserted shells of houses of Verin Aksipara among grazing cattle and the Joghas River. Continuing W on the path for about 1.6 km a path to the right leads to a ruined medieval church past the old collective farm.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village



➡ Backtrack to the H46/P4 highway, turn left (N) across the bridge and continue for about 4.7 km skirting Ashagi Askipara and driving through Baghanis Airum to a fork in the road, the right side road going N. Take the side road for about 1 km (**Voskevan** DD 41.1191667 x 45.0652778) 🏠 🏕️ 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Voskevan – Ոսկեվան** - formerly Ghoshghotan elev. 960m, pop. 1224) is set in the lower hills of Tavush, an area with abundant water and rich soil. The area immediately adjacent to the next several villages is good farmland, growing tobacco, wheat and fruits that are famous for their succulent taste. The village has a 20th c. church and friendly villagers who, in season, will argue over the honors of sharing their produce. The village is the birthplace of a hero of the Great Patriotic War (WW II), one Ishkhan (Prince) Saribekian. Ask for details and prepare for a mouthful.

To the N are some wooded hills, good **hiking**. One trek departs the Koti road at about 1.4 km onto a mountain track that after 1.3 km forks

right to Mt. Voskevan (0.5 km) and the E slope of Mt. Karidash (4 km), or left to Jujevan (5 km).

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ From Voskevan continue NE across the bridge and continue for about 6.5 km as it winds and switchbacks past Mts. Voskevan (1229.7 m) and Beiyuin Gedik (1155.6 m) to (**Koti** DD 41.1355556 x 45.125) 🏠 🏕️ 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Koti - Կոթի** - until 1964 Kotigegh, then Shavarshavan elev. 774m, pop. 1591) was once named in honor of Shavarsh Amirkhanian (1894-1959) an early communist born in the village who rose to become head of the "Special Commission" (cheka) for the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, later known as the Armenian KGB (1921-1924). The Special Commission was charged with rooting out "class enemies" of the Socialist revolution and was subordinated to the central Soviet police authorities. Between 1920 and 1940, the police agency was reorganized and renamed several times, serving as the tool of the Stalinist policy of oppression and mass executions. Ten out of thirteen heads of the Armenian police who served between 1920 and 1940 were executed by the same agency. One of which was dear comrade Amirkhanian.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ Backtrack to the H46/P4 highway, turn right (W) and continue for about 700 m to (**Baghanis** DD 41.1166667 x 45.0666667) 🏠 🏕️ 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Baghanis - Բաղանիս** elev. 960m, pop. 1224) is on the north bank of the Baghanis River and E of woody hills leading to the old Azerbaijan enclave of Askipara. The hills are good hiking with several streams feeding into the Baghanis river to the NW. The well kept village (with sidewalks!) has the ruins of a 10th c church E of the road, and a 12th-13th cc funerary monument.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village

➡ Continue NW on the H46/P4 highway for about 3.9 km to (Jujevan) 🏰 🏰 🏰



known throughout the known world, establishing Armenia's links to ancient cultures from the Copper Age. In the seventies, a second similar boat was found in a tomb during excavations in Jujevan by archaeologist Dr. S. Chilingarian. The vessel was partially preserved, but enough survived to show its details. The bow had a figurehead. The profile of the boat is more modern, more navigable than that found at Sevan. The tomb boat was dated to the 9th c BCE, in a later layer of development at the site. It might be a tomb for a fisherman: fish bones in the next tomb were found, which indicate the presence of fishery in this village or nearby. The boat even had the shadowy impression of the paddle used to power the vessel, which had evaporated over time. The boat and much of the artifacts found at the site are at the Yerevan State History Museum.

SIDE TRIP: (Jujevan – Ջուջեվան pop. 559) founded in 1874, lies at the end of the Voskevan agricultural valley, on the left (N) bank of the Baghanis River. On three sides are wooded hills and mountains, partially deforested of their former glory. As you approach the village from the SE, on the left side of the road, you will pass the early Bronze Age Jaghatsategh settlement, which excavation uncovered a number of shaft graves, domestic utensils and tools, weapons, pottery, jewelry and totems, and one of Armenia's archeological jewels.

As you go N through the village take the first R street that angles back then L and L again to the 19th c. "vank" (church) of the same name and a 12-13th c. chapel.

Nearby, on the same road, due S of the village on top of a hill: Poploz-Gash, an Early Iron Age cyclopean fort.

Overnight at village homes (3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **Camping** in the area, **Springs** in the village


➡ Continue W/NW on the H46/P4 highway for about 6.6 km (pass the Mishkhana mountain road at 2 km, which leads to Gomshavar in about 7.4 km and 2 km E of that the Dondar Bronze Age settlement) to **NOYEMBERIAN** 🏰 🏰 🏰

➡ END OF TRIP 4



Log Boat. One of the great finds of Armenian archeology were two intact log boats from the Bronze-Iron Ages. The log boats, carved from trees, were a primary mode of transportation in the era, and established early trade routes. In the 40's a log boat was raised from the bottom of Lake Sevan, and proved to be of a type well

NOYEMBERIAN (DD 41.1725 x 44.9936111)

 **NOYEMBERIAN - ՆՈՅԵՄԲԵՐԻԱՆ** (till 1938 Baran elev. 857m, pop. 1626) is the Northernmost town in Armenia, about 30 km S of the Georgian border at Sadakhlo and 59 km S of Tbilisi. The town is set in one of the prettiest landscapes in the country, at the foot of the rolling mountains of Batsrel and Bertagh and the Gogveli orchards, the produce from which is legendary in Armenia. Most of the produce is shipped to Georgia where it commands a greater premium, but locals in Yerevan especially those from the Soviet era remember the arrival of Noyemberian peaches, apples and pears as momentous occasions, the hailing of true summer bounty. Stock up on some while you are here!

Background. A settlement from the Copper-Bronze Age, the town itself has a more recent history. Established to house miners and loggers working in the area, the town has been the administrative center for the immediate region from the Soviet period, and before that, during the Russian Imperial period, it was an important administrative, trade center, based on logging and the stone quarries in the area. During the Soviet era the town was heavily industrialized, even including an automobile manufacturing center, all of which closed with the collapse of the Soviet Unions and the beginning of the Azerbaijan war. In 1990-1991 the first shells exploded in Noyemberian, lobbed over from Azerbaijan, which had vowed to take Tavush as the first part of a concerted effort to smash through Armenia to the Turkish hinterlands. In one day over 120 shells dropped on the city. Damage from the war can be seen some, but the greatest damage came in the 1997 earthquake, which damaged numerous houses, schools and public buildings.

Ecology. Noyemberian's nature is devoted to agricultural output, its fruits and vegetables (especially dried) are among Armenia's best tasting, grown on fertile land at the Azerbaijan frontier. During the war the farmland was mined and under fire and some of it is still off limits. There are still rare border incidents that make the frontier territory dangerous, but both sides have worked to end the violence and negotiate a settlement. The forestland is to the W, in the increasingly logged mountains leading to Lori.

The dominating species in Noyemberian forests are the oriental beech (comprising 58% of the wood reserves) and the oak (comprising 33% of the wood reserves). Logging has been carried out on 12,500 hectares [30, 875 acres] extracting 400,700 cubic meters of wood. Much logging has been done under the guise of forest maintenance with the promise of forest restoration and planting to be done as the next step. However, it has become obvious that the tree-cutting activity has not ceased and the tree-planting activity has not begun. During the energy crisis, all tree species were indiscriminately cut for fuel, while in recent years it is the rare species that are being cut illegally for export and for profit by a group of bandits who have "taken over" the forest.

SIGHTS

S. Sarkis Church (tel. 23243) was built in 1848 and during Soviet times, it was used to house a power generator, which may have structurally weakened the building. The Soviet authorities later turned the church into a storage warehouse for a collective farm. In the early 1990's the church was restored and renovated, and it housed soldiers during the war with Azerbaijan, reverting to its religious role in 1995. An earthquake in 1997 so damaged the church it cannot now be used, though it is constantly visited by parishioners. The parish priest works from the old *kolkhoz* office, where the church relics are kept. The earthquake also damaged the villages of Koghb and Berdavan. The only working church for the Noyemberian region, S. Sarkis is part of the Gugarkats diocese, which stretches across all of North Armenia. If you are lucky, or visit on a Saturday you may catch one of the weddings that are still held at the damaged church, as is Sunday Mass. Included in the ensemble is a beautiful **khachkar** propped against the church wall.

There are a number of small **monuments, schools,** administrative offices, shops and a **House of Culture.** All based in the town center.

A **Bronze Age burial site** was discovered in the Papichal area of the town by local resident Gamlet (Hamlet) Gulkanian while working in his garden. Remnants of people and animals, as well as ceramic items characteristic of the Bronze Age, were found at a depth of 1.5 meters. In the past relics uncovered in the area included clay mugs, bronze arrowheads and various adornments.

Greek Community. Noyemberian is well known for its large Greek population, descendants of miners invited in the late 18th c to the area, as well as migrants escaping the 1820 massacres in Turkey. A few trace their ancestry to the first waves of Greeks to migrate into the Transcaucasus, beginning in the 2nd-1st cc BCE and continuing through the 13th c, i.e. the Seljuk and Mongol invasions. Much of the population has left in recent times, but enough remain to add their characteristic culture to the area. The Greeks of Noyemberian speak the Pontic dialect, an extension of the Ionic dialect of the Old Greek language. All Armenia's Greeks are fluent in both Armenian and Russian.

"OLYMPUS" – THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF NOYEMBERIAN, 3, Kamo p, Noyemberian, Armenia. Tel.: 2 20 98

Near the city are **three Iron Age cyclopean forts**, with traces of early metalworking: **Berdagh - Բերդաղ** is 2 km NE off of the Dovegh road, on a dirt track that branches to the left (N) and upwards to the crest of Mt. Berdagh (981.3 m), the fort is evident on the ridge; **Mraghants Areguni – Մրաղանձ Արեգունի**; and **Depi-Ghash - Դեպի-Ղաշ**, just N of town.

Carvings, Souvenirs

The Noyemberian Cooperative is an informal cooperative of carvers and woodworkers founded by a product designer and ex-Peace Corps volunteer who felt a need to continue his mission in Armenia after his Peace Corps responsibilities had ended. Ask for their whereabouts, they have some excellent woodwork and reasonable prices.

Agencies

NGO Yerevak, 14 Andranik, 2-26-05, 2-27-05 does not cater to tourists (they promote community development, the integration of refugees, development of farm economics and social equality) but they are still a good spot to meet people and to learn about the local community, and they can help with some basic support (they will know someone who can drive a car and act as a local guide, and may have line on alternate overnights).

Bridge of Hope non-governmental organization opened today a community-based child development center for children with disabilities and children from vulnerable families.

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 266
Long Distance: 0266 + local number
From abroad: +(374) 266+ 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 (0266) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 266 prefix if calling from abroad.

IN AND OUT

By Bus, Minivan

Buses stop at Noyemberian on routes from Georgia (Tbilisi – 1500 AMD) and Yerevan (1500 AMD) Main Bus Station (6 Admiral Isahaakov Ave, 010-565370). The bus stop (aftokaiyeran) is located at the town center square.

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) connect Noyemberian with Yerevan (2000 AMD), Ijevan (500 AMD), Dilijan (600 AMD), Alaverdi (500 AMD) and Bagratashen (500 AMD) and Tbilisi (2000 AMD). Marshrutni taxis are at the bus stop. Minivans wait until they are full before leaving and can pack em in on a busy day.

By Taxi

Yerevan-Noyemberian (bus station) or as you catch them in town \$20-30, in Yerevan catch at the Kino Rossiya side lot.

Ijevan-Dilijan-Noyemberian taxis run on order, around \$10-20.

Georgia-Giumri taxis run on order, around \$50 each way to Tbilisi.

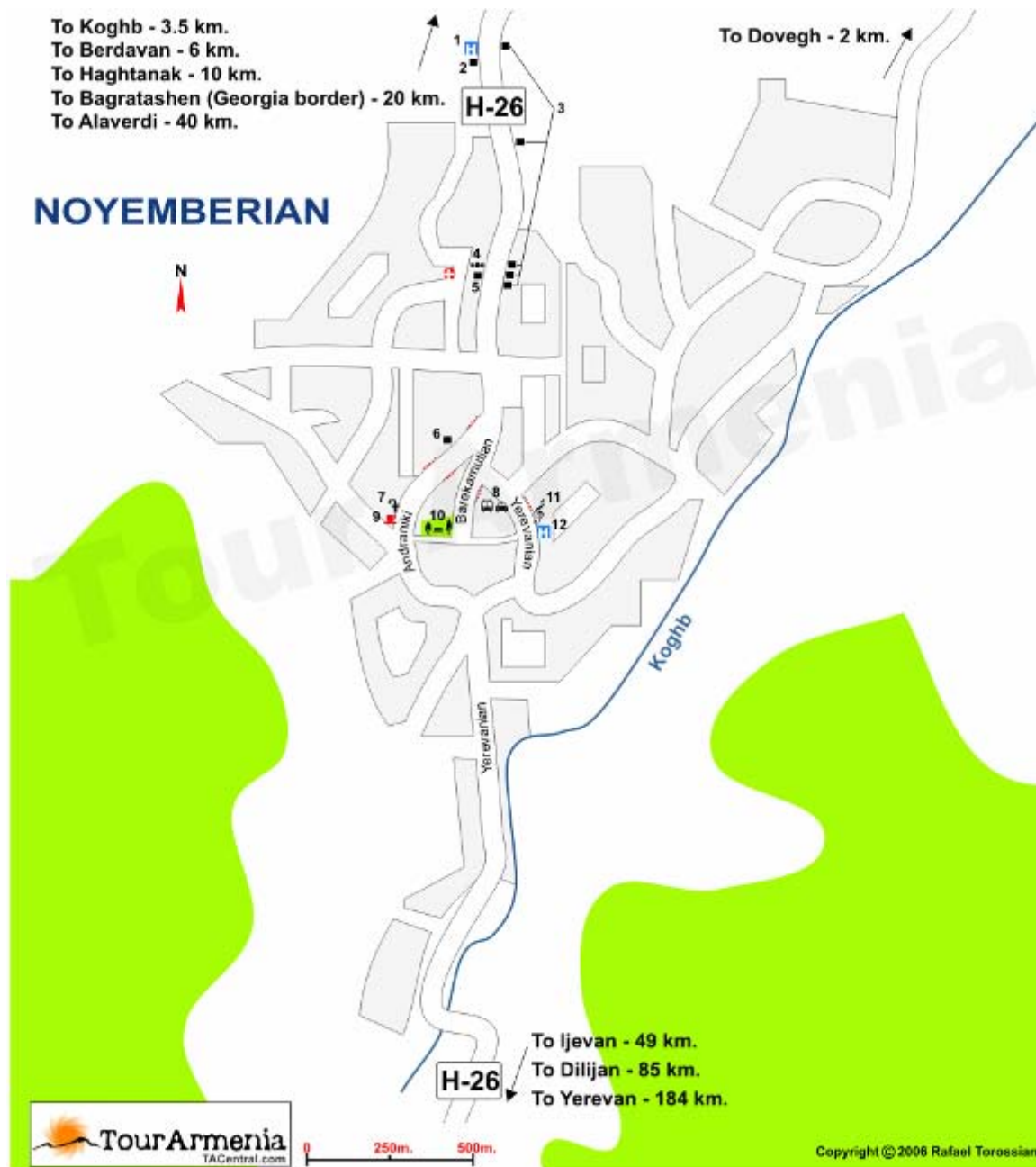
By Car

Noyemberian is located on the A46/P46 highway, 184 km north of Yerevan, 49 kilometers north of Ijevan, 85 km north of Dilijan, 40 km W of Alaverdi and 93 km S of Tbilisi.

AROUND

On foot is easy, the town can be crossed in 15 minutes. **Taxis** are in town, hail them on the street or at the bus stop. Rate is 100 AMD per km. You can also use these to tour the region, figure 5000-10,000 AMD for a day trip in the area or to explore the mountain road to Gomshavar.

Nature Tours. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#).



H OVERNIGHT

1. Levon 2 Hotel / Restaurant
12. Hotel

▲ FOOD & DRINK

1. Levon 2 Hotel / Restaurant

☐ CAFÉ

9. Cafe

🚌 BUSES -MARSHRUTNI TAXIS

8. Aftokaiyan

🏛 MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY

🏛 MONUMENTS - SITES

🏛 CHURCHES

🎭 THEATRES, MUSIC

11. Culture Palace

🛍 SHOPS, SHUKA

3. Kiosks
- Shuka (Market)
- Yarmaka (Market)

📧 INTERNET, PHONE, POST

6. "Navi" Yerevak Computers

🏛 GOVT. OFFICES

🏛 BANK, ATM

7. ACBA Bank, 6/4 Valans

🏛 APOTEKAS

H CLINICS - HOSPITALS

▲ OTHER

2. Sauna, Bar, Swimming
4. Kodak
5. Air Tickets
10. Park

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

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

Post, phone, telegraphs

The *Central Post Office* is at 5 Yerevanian 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.

Additional phone services are around town.

Armentel is at 5 Yerevanian p. (tel. 21922)

Internet

There are a couple of internet clubs, but ask at your overnight and at *Yerevak*, 14 Andranik, 2-26-05, 2-27-05, which is developing connectivity in the region, and can point you to a commercial point, or let you use theirs if you are nice.

Bank, Exchange

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

ARMSAVINGS BANK, 8 Kamo, tel. 22372

Film, etc.

Shops and kiosks sell film and batteries, the batteries in the regions are useless for anything more than a travel alarm clock. Bring plenty from home, use rechargeable batteries (220v charger) or buy carefully in Yerevan. There are few shops in town for basics, Mterks in the center.

Hospital, Clinic, Dental

The *hospital* phone is (tel. 23471, 22233)
The *polyclinic* phone is (tel. 22988)

Apotekas are in the center of town, ask at your overnight for a recommendation.

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL

Hotel Noyemberian, west side of square, is a small, Soviet Hotel long past its glory days. Staff is friendly though, and will do their best to supply amenities (buckets of water, tea, advice). Cheap at 1000/2000/4000 for Single/Double/Lux.

B&B

Arkady Amiraghian, 4 Khanjian p. (tel. 22211, 22201) 3 Rooms. Car, tennis. 5000 AMD.

Boarding is a distinct possibility in Noyemberian, in family homes or apartments. Ask around and you will have your pick of several to choose from. 5000 AMD a night and breakfast is fair.

FOOD AND DRINK

Noyemberian has several cafes and bistros, on the town square and on both approaches into town, North and South. Kiosks and mterks abound in the small town, also in the center.

Nearby. About 2 km S of Noyemberian on the A46/P46 is a restaurant set in the woods. Good khorovatz, weekends are busy.



TRIP 5: AROUND NOYEMBERIAN ▲

NOYEMBERIAN - (Dovegh) - **KOGHB** - **MSHKAVANK** - (Berdavan) - (Haghtanak) - (Bagratashen) - (Airum) - (Archis)

The area around Noyemberian is a complex mixture of orchards, tobacco and wheat fields and forested mountain ranges, bound by the Koghb and Kokha Rivers running to Azerbaijan, not 5 km away. The area is rich in monuments as well, home to the Koghb Historic area and Mshkavank monastery, Bronze and Iron Age fortresses, medieval castles and a surprising variety of wildlife inhabiting 5 topographic regions in this tiny area. Roads are rough, and everywhere there are reminders of the struggles of the 1990s; bombed out homes, earthquake-ravaged schools and offices, and persistent poverty. Home stays,

while rustic, are a rewarding experience, with the income reaching those most in need. The fruits and produce are among the best in Armenia, especially the Noyemberian Peach, taste itself.



Stay: Overnight in Noyemberian, village home if you don't mind the outside toilet and possibly sharing a room, down the road at Alaverdi (40 km) or Tbilisi (93 km)

Eat: Noyemberian, Koghb in season, roadside stands on highway, village home.

Springs: Koghb, Dovegh, Berdavan, Archis, Airum, Bagratashen.

☞ From Noyemberian, take the small road/dirt track from the NE end of town for about 1.9 km to (Dovegh DD 41.183333 x 45.033333) 🏠 🌳 🌿



SIDE TRIP: (Dovegh - Ղովղէ - formerly Balakend elev. 839m, pop. 1616). Is barely 3 km from the Azerbaijan border and was heavily bombed during the 1991-1995 war. Just to the south are orchards and sparsely wooded hills, which are good hiking territory, just avoid the East border. About 3 km S of Dovegh is a S. Sarkis shrine, built over a pre-Christian spring monument (Vishap or Dragon Stone) from the Copper-Chalcolithic eras. The shrine is a popular spot for believers, replete with burning bush (bush covered with strips of clothing tied on its branches, a 'sacrifice' made to an unknown god who is still summoned in a Christian world), candles and hexagrams. You may spot a supplicant or two circling the shrine in prayer as they beg for forgiveness or for a favor.

Camping in the area, overnight in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in village and area.

☞ From Noyemberian, take the A46/P46 road from the N end of town for about 3.5 km as it winds its way to **KOGHB center** (DD 41.18668 x 44.99042) 🏠 🌳 🌿

🏠 **KOGHB ԿՈՂԲ** ▲ (till 1949 Hamamlu elev. 750m, pop. 1626) was the original administrative center for the region during much of Armenia's history, Noyemberian but a mere babe in the time of history.

Background. Koghb is first mentioned by the historians Movses Khorenatsi, Pavstos Biuzand and Agatangeghos (5th c). Uniquely positioned on the Koghb River entry to the region, Koghb became the provincial capital for Koghbapour province in the Gugarats kingdom of Mets Haik. Koghb was also mentioned in 9th-10th cc "Road Guides" detailing the long caravan routes.

In the 9th-11th centuries the Bagratuni Kingdom played an important role in international trade. Due to its neutrality in the Arabian-Byzantine conflict after reaching accord with the Arabs at the end of the 9th century, it capitalized on its position and restored its routes on the caravan trails. These originated from Byzantium and the Arabian Caliphate and, crossing Armenia, traveled to the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, Georgia, Iran and further on to India.

One particular guide written in 971-981 mentions Koghb and nearby Koti by name. The 7th point on this route, originating in the Armenian capital Dvin, details the road from Dvin to Parthav: "Dvin-Kulp 50 leagues, then to Kotakeivkh (Kotagiugh) 150, from there to Tiflis 140, then to Hunarakert 70 and to Parthav 100." Kulp is contemporary Koghb (Koghbapour province of Gugark), Kotagiugh is Koti, on the same line following the river Koghb to the Kura River. From Koti the trail diverts to Tiflis (Tbilisi) and from there to Hunarakert. The latter was the border point of Armenia, Georgia and Caucasian Albania.

The village is also the home of the 5th c scholar **Yeznik Of Koghb** born in the last quarter of the 5th c. Yeznik was a pupil of Mesrop Mashtots and the Katolikos Sahak and contributed actively to the translation of the Bible into Armenian. Taught at the schools of Edessa and Constantinople, he was one of the most brilliant scholars of his time. Bishop of the influential Bagravand Diocese, Yeznik was an expert of ancient Greek philosophy, he is known for his theological works the most famous of which was "On the Refutation of the Sects." Yeznik was also a key player in the events leading the Battle of Avarayr and the war with Persia in the latter half of 5th century. Yeznik was a part of the Artashat Council in 449, one of the writers charged with answering the demands of the Persian King Yazkert II to renounce Christianity and adopt Zoroastrianism. He died in 450, a year before the decisive battle of Avarayr, but his words formed the basis of the Armenian identity in its Christian faith, and his contribution to the advancement the Armenian language was decisive in the survival of the Armenian identity.

Later, the village and region is mentioned in the chronicles of the 14th c. Tamurlane invasion by Tovma Metsobetsi:

[The Timurids] came against the Chakututs' country of Surmari and Koghb, against Barnakut and the Archesh district. They tore apart these three districts, universally robbing everyone, but by the mercy of God the captives were freed from their clutches. There was a great famine throughout the entire country. But in the same day the town (giughak'aghak') of Koghb was robbed. Twenty-five buffaloes from upper Koghb were sent down the rock in the Archesh district. Putting their swords to work, the Christians sacrificed them, divided up the provisions, and reached the K'ajberuni country, with vardapets, bishops, priests, and the people. (R. Bedrossian,

T'ovma Metsobets'i's 'History of Tamerlane and His Successors')

The village was decimated and abandoned by Armenians until late 18th c resettlement by Karabakh and Tavush Armenians. Modern Koghb is quite a large village, with a couple of schools, and art academy, music school and a hospital. This may make a more interesting jumping off point than Noyemberian for exploring the area.



Koghb Museum of History, Culture Palace, town square. Open Monday-Friday 10-5, if closed ask cultural palace office to call director. Founded in 1970 as a community museum, the collection contains more than 12,000 artifacts discovered in the course of archaeological excavations in the region, as well as materials related to its modern history. The commentary is not great, and not in English, but the wealth of discoveries is impressive and gives some perspective on just how important a trade point this area was for millennia of time.

NW of Koghb are the ruins of **S. Arakel shrine** in the ruins of Arekelots village.

Near Koghb. About 1 km S of the village is the Bronze-Iron Age **Berdategh** cyclopean fort with pottery shards and fragments just below the surface. A little beyond (use a local guide) are the ruins of the medieval **Gharanots Gol fort – Դարանոց Գոլ Բերդ**. Both are on the slopes of Mt. Batsrel.

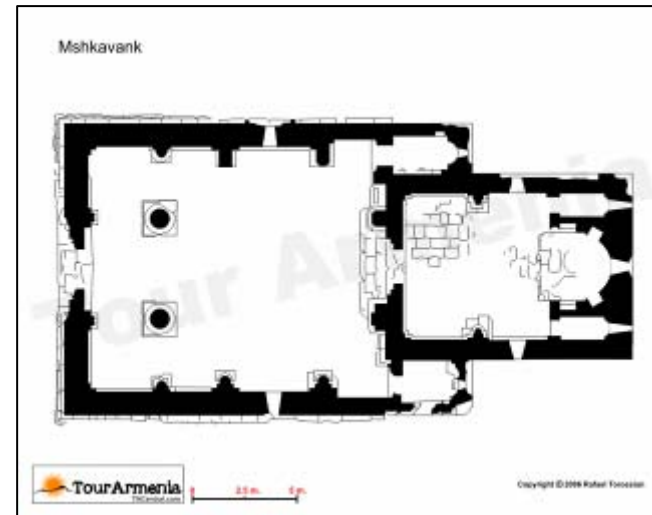
➔ **Mshkavank** is SW of Koghb, in the Koghb River canyon. To get there, go about 2 km from the center (take the left at the roundabout) on the main road SW along the Koghb River to a L path crossing a bridge (if you reach a simple pole gate and gatehouse, you have gone too far. Backtrack

about 20 m). The road is passable for Jeeps and Vilis/UAZ from this point on, the monastery on the ridge to your R (N) overlooking the river gorge about 1 km past the bridge/gatehouse. There is an alternate dirt track from western edge of Noyemberian that is passable by Jeep in good weather, about 3.4 km due W.

✠ **MSHKAVANK - Մշկավանք** (also Mshakavank), was built in the 13th c, and has a number of interesting buildings, not the least of which is the 12th c gavit, an early example of the unique Armenian system of supporting the roof with interconnecting arch spans. Thick walls once encircled the complex but bare traces remain, the stone taken by locals to construct homes, barns and other buildings in Noyemberian, Koghb and surrounding villages.

The gavit almost overwhelms the small 5th-6th cc triple-nave Basilica **Astvatatsin church**, almost certainly built over a pagan temple from the earliest times of settlement in the area. The shape, step platform and orientation of the church on an east-west axis shows a recreation (renovation) of an earlier structure, the size of the single-nave church almost identical to Hellenistic temples of the latter half of the 1st c BCE. The here aisles are separated by large T-shaped pylons, the middle aisle considerably wider than the other two. The central apse is semi-circular with flanking apsidioles. The interior width to length ratio is the same as others of its type; 1:2. The current building is a recent renovation, which explains the finely hewn pink and cream coloured tufa slabs clasped onto the walls and the excellently carved gable roofing, a style of covering halls thought to have been imported from the East Asia. The western façade of the church is covered by the 13th c gavit, but the eastern end has a uniquely carved khachkar above the apse window, the ends of the cross do not filigree into three points as is customary for crosses of the time, but rather end in sharp, almost arrow-like points, the trinity suggested by slight mutations in the outer line rather than as individual end points. The cross hovers over a small globe with a sharply delineated geometric pattern. The effect is both severe and strong, like the crest on a shield or battlefield flag.

The **gavit** (narthex) is an early example of a distinctly Armenian form of architecture, borrowed from its vernacular (domestic) roots in community homes (the "gikhatun"), which were square in plan with gradually rising cupolas of interlaced logs crowned by a central opening to ventilate and allow light into the central space. The key



difference between the domestic homes and the gavit were both their function (the gavit was used for overflow congregation, public meetings, academic instruction and the preparation of manuscripts and miniatures), and their roofing system. The necessity to create wide open spaces for meetings as well as the search for the most unitary and definite internal volume led to the adoption of an ingenious system of roofs, made up of four large arches that cross, a structural device often repeated on two overlapping levels. The most famous gavits are at Mshkavank, Haghpats (Lori) and Gandzasar (Karabakh). Built in the same time period, these three gavits are identical in layout and size, separated by their individual internal décor. All three share the same stalactite ornament on the cupola opening.

Inside the gavit there is a beautifully carved intricate **khachkar** of the 12th-13th c, with depictions of human figures (saints) above the cross in distinctly oriental costume and two kneeling figures (donors) under the cross.

The monastery also has the ruins of the 5-6th c. single-nave **Tsghakhach church**, the 6th c. single-nave **Tvarageghtsi church** and a 12th-13th cc **cemetery** with fragments of tombs and khachkars in the lush yard.

Other

Alternate route to Archis (Zikurati/Kozmani Fortresses): The Bronze/Iron Age fortresses are just S of Archis, but there is an alternate, more

picturesque route that continues past the village in the Koghb river canyon about 5.4 km to Deskhos Kozman village (Mshkavank turn off at 2.9 km), then after another 800 m or so take the right (N) fork road up the mountain hills, over Mt. Khamgham-Sar (1134.0 m) then down the other side to central Archis in about 5.3 km. About 1.5 km after the fork in the road are the ruins of the fortresses.

Taking the left fork and continuing W then S for about 12 km, the dirt track passes between Mts. Samerkh and Zigatar then turns sharply W and slowly descends to Teghut.

Alternate route to Airum: A beautiful, if rugged (Jeep only) mountain road climbs the mountains west of Koghb before descending into the Deb River valley at Airum. The 7.5 road begins on the NW edge of town and has a series of switchbacks as it climbs and descends the upper hills. It deposits into the M7 highway just N of Airum.

Hiking. There is a good day hike connecting Koghb village and Archis some 12 km W. From Koghb, take the SW road following the Koghb river, after about 1.1 km SW (upstream) from the edge of the village a dirt track branches to the right (N) and up the hills. Follow that track for about 7.2 km as it passes a dairy coop (1.5 km); keep going SW (at 3.2 km take the left route) and tops the ridge of mountain dividing the Koghb and Debed Rivers and then meets up with a better track. Turn R (N) and follow the canyon road about 4 km as it climbs, wind, switch backs and then descends to central Archis. About 900 m after the turn are the Zikurati and Kozmani forts.

Camping in the area, overnight in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair, **springs** in village and area.

➔ **Alternate Nature Trek:** Take a mountain road/dirt track from the SW end of Koghb to (Kozman DD 41.15 x 44.9 elev. 1127m, pop. 1435 &/ Mts. Dzighatar/Salerk) 🏰 🌿

SIDE TRIP: Canyons, Camping, Nature, mountain trekking.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in the area.

➡ Main route: From Koghb take the NE road leaving the village on the left (N) bank of the Koghb River for about 1.8 km to a fork in the road at the SW end of Berdavan, the left branching off N and the main continuing forward. Go forward for about 500 m to one of the left (N) roads to central (Berdavan DD 41.2027778 x 45.033333) 🏰 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (Berdavan - **Քեղապահ** ▲ "tower place" - once Kalacha elev. 640m, pop. 1616) is 1200 meters from the Azerbaijan border, with sloping hills and orchards on the left bank of the Berdavan stream and hilly forests on the right (S) bank. Too close to the border to warrant safe trekking, the village nonetheless has some beautiful 10th-12th cc large khachkars, and not far away, **Ghalinjakar Castle - Ղալինջարքաղ** **Քերդ**. From the SW corner of the village, take the main road into town, then bear left at a fork in the road crossing the stream, and, bearing left again, jeeps and Vilis/UAZ can navigate the dirt path to the 10th-11c castle, on a hill overlooking Azerbaijan. The castle was rebuilt in the 17th c, under Persian dominion and became a key defense of the region against Ganzakar Emirs and later the Persians themselves as Russian Imperial soldiers took the area.

Note: this can be an extremely dangerous visit. Be very sure the border is safe before coming this close.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in village and area.

➡ From the Berdavan south fork, continue N/W on the A46/P46 for about 8.7 km through Verin Kerpli (at 6.4 km) to (Haghtanak DD 41.2238889 x 44.9377778) 🏰 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (Haghtanak - **Հաղթանակ** - "Victory" elev. 782m, pop. 1268) sits above the right bank of the Debed River, on a hill overlooking much of the Western bend of the river. The area is mostly agricultural; orchards and farm fields cover the rolling hills with some spots at the upper elevations windswept

meadows and mountains steppes. Directly across the river from the western point of the village is the Georgian/Armenian border, and all along the right bank of the river to the North are orchard fields producing the area's hallmark fruits; peaches, apricots, plums and some amazing white cherries. The village had at one time the ignoble name "The Village Linked to Tumanian Sovkhoz," the Soviet era farming cooperative that ran the orchards and farmlands. The village is worth a stop in season to bargain from fruits, to take in the beautiful farming valley and the Debed River.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in village and area.

➡ From Haghtanak center continue on the H26 for about 700 m to a T-intersection, turn right (W) and go about 500 meters to the M7 intersection, turn right (N) and follow the M7 for about 9.7 km to (Bagratashen DD 41.2458333 x 44.8211111) 🏰 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (Bagratashen - **Բագրատաշեն** ▲ formerly Lambalu, from 1960-72 Debedashen elev. 474m, pop. 1798) is the main road entry point into Georgia. The village was named after a Hero of Socialist Labor and founder of the Zeitun plant, Bagrat Vardanian (1894-1971).

The village exists as a customs point, shuffling trucks, cars and buses into and out of the country, and is a major stop on the North-South Caucasus Trade Route, encompassing Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Russia. Customs for tourists is pretty straightforward on both sides for tourists, though the wait can be long as the line of trucks snake across the border, figure about an hour to clear both points. 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. From here it is 34 km to Marneuli (Azeri populated Georgian village) and 63 km to Tbilisi. Figure about 2 hours over rough roads.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in village and area.

TO TBILISI: cross the border into Sadakhlo (customs and immigration) and continue N on

the M7 to Marneuli (34 km) and then the M6 to Tbilisi (29 km)

➡ Backtrack to the bridge at the Noyemberian turn off (9.7 km), and continue S on the M7 following the Debed River for about 2.3 km to a left (2) turn to (Airum DD 41.1716667 x 44.8191667) 🏰 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (Airum - **Այրում** elev. 662m, pop. 1762) sits on the right bank of the Debed River overlooking left bank orchards rambling to the Georgian border. It backs up against some steep and rugged hills, sparsely forested with moderately difficult climbs.

Airum sits at a crossroads of historic trade routes, protected on its SE flank by the Gugarats mountain ridge and overlooking a major bend in the Debed River, one of the primary caravan routes into Armenia. There are three fortified sites near Airum attesting to its importance; first is the **Early Bronze Age Shahlama Berd** that sits on the same hill as the candy factory just W/SW of the village. Shards of pottery and fragments of tools, weapons and other items were excavated at the site, most housed at the State History Museum in Yerevan. A second is the mid **Bronze Age site** of the same name, which sits on the right bank of the Debed River at the intersection of the Tbilisi-Vanadzor highway (the M7). A third is the early **Iron Age Site** about 3 km SW of the train station on the left (N) bank of the Debed River. A 1962 excavation of this latter site uncovered bronze figurines then dated to the 10th-8th c BCE, but possibly much older, situating the site a few hundred years earlier in time.

Mountain Trek. There is a mountain track that connects Airum with Koghb, 7.2 km of climbing switchbacks over the Gugarats ridge before descending to the Koghb River valley.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in village and area.

➡ From Airum continue SW on the M7 for about 1.7 km to a left (S) branch road that switchbacks and climbs the hills for about 2.6 km to (Archis DD 41.1641667 x 44.8725) 🏰 🏰

SIDE TRIP: (Archis - **Արժիս** elev. 789m, pop. 1281) sits atop a hill overlooking the Debed River and guards the mountain pass between the Debed and Koghb river valleys. The village is rich in orchards on its northern edge and steep woody mountains to the south, ideal for hiking and mountain treks. Mt. Khamgham-Sar (1134.0 m) is due S. The village has a S. Hakop church, a mountain shrine, and an Iron Age metallurgical center.

About 3.2 km S of the village on a rough mountain road are two Bronze Age/Iron Age forts, **Zikurati** (Zigurat, or tower in Assyrian-Urartian, later corrupted Turkish) and **Kozmani**, with an adjoining Bronze Age grave field.

North of the village is the Bronze Age **Patashar** cyclopean fort, overlooking a bend in the Debed River.

Camping in the area, **overnight** in village home (rustic – 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair), **springs** in village and area.

➡ END DAY TRIP 5



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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 [TWRU](#), 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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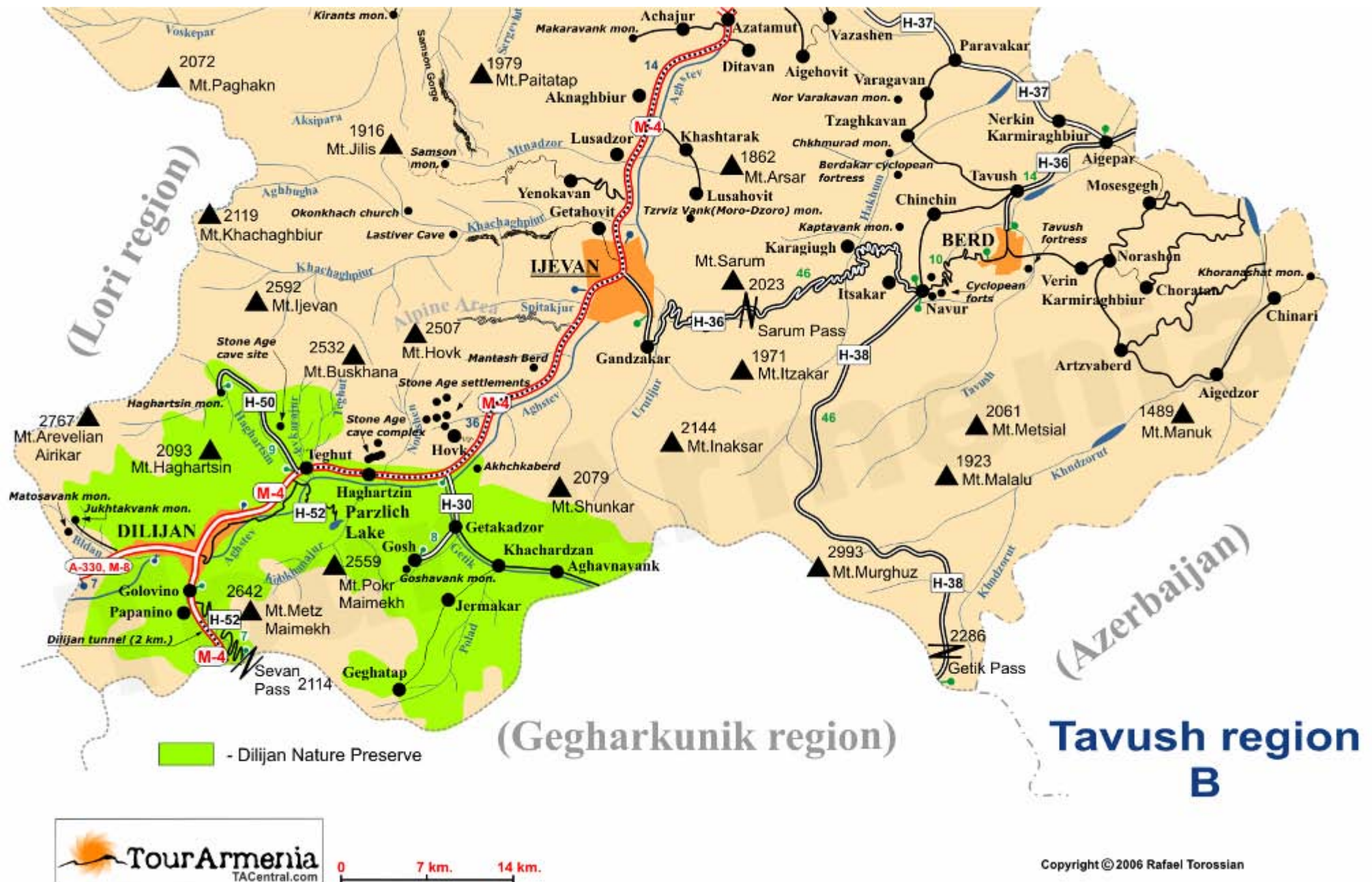
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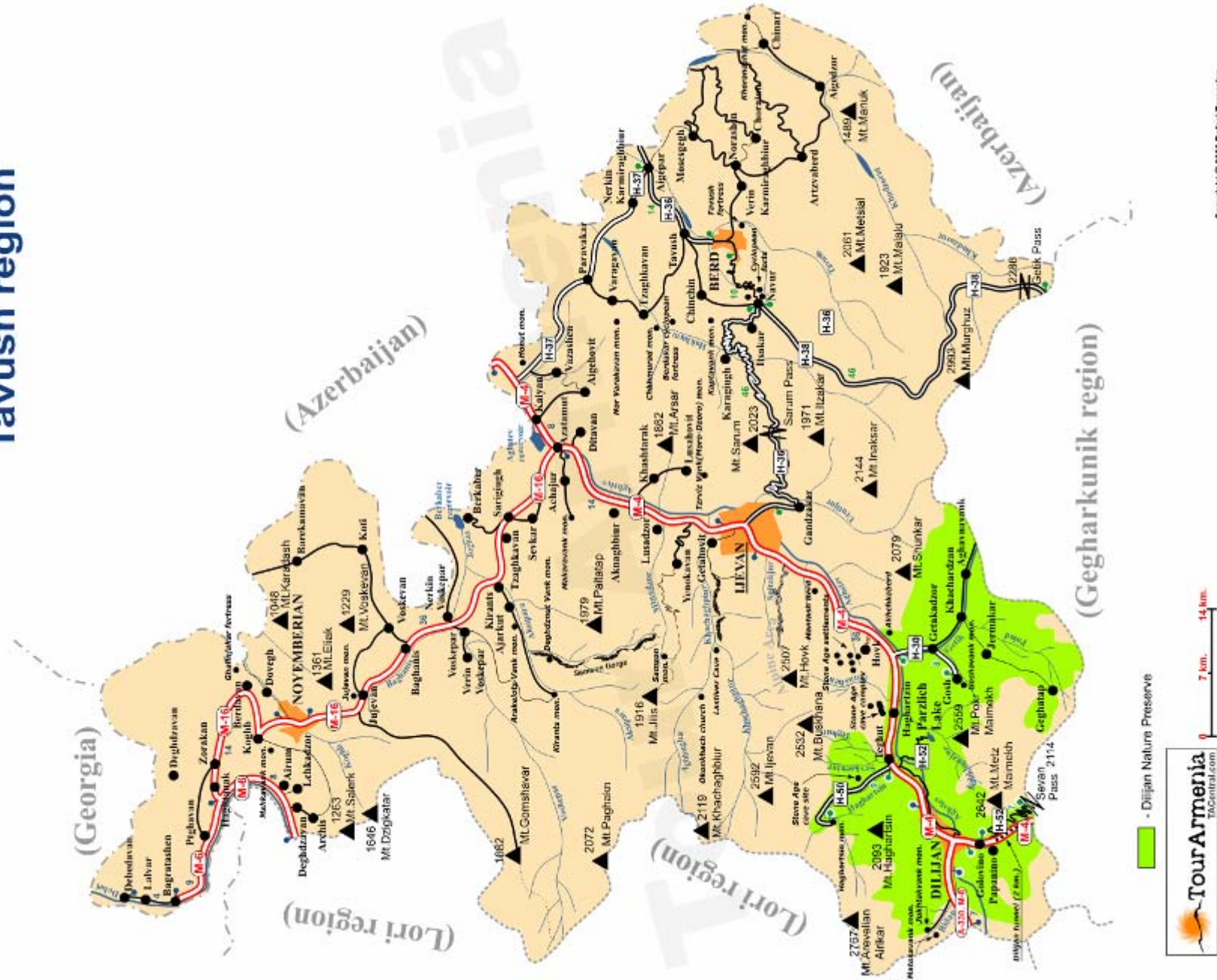
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