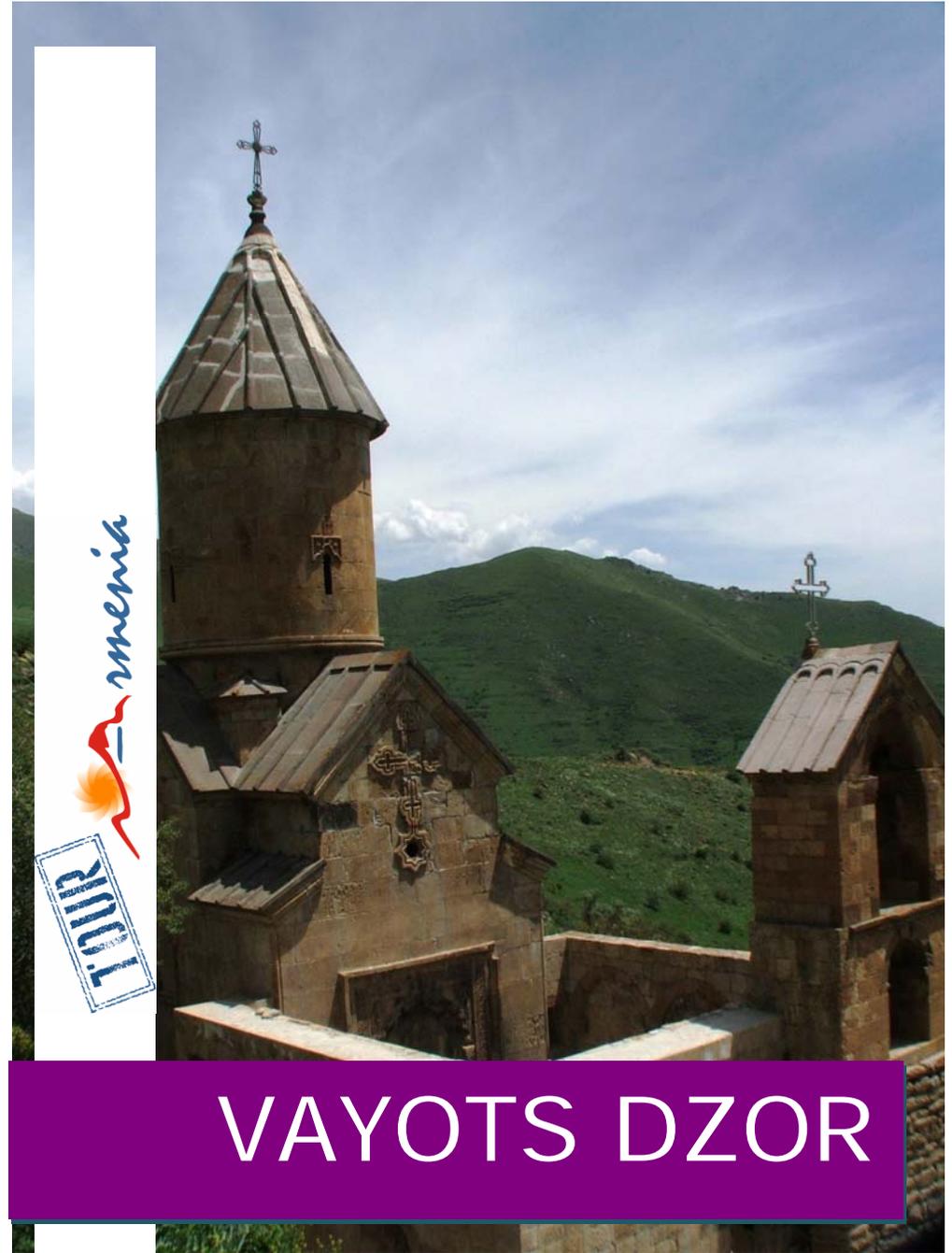


NOTES:



TOUR

Armenia

VAYOTS DZOR

[Areni](#)
[Noravank](#)
[Noravank Canyon](#)
[T'rchuneri Cave](#)
[Magili Cave](#)
[Noravank Monastery](#)
[Mozrov Cave](#)

[YEGHEGNADZOR](#)
[Vernashen - Gladzor](#)
[Vernashen](#)
[Tanahat \(Gladzor\)](#)
[Proshaberd](#)
[Spitakavor](#)
[Shatin](#)
[Selim Pass](#)
[Yeghegis Artabuink](#)
[Yeghegis Alayaz](#)
[Archeri Cave](#)
[Malishka - Moz](#)

[VAIK](#)
[Her-Her](#)
[Arpi Canyon](#)
[Gndevank](#)

[JERMUK](#)

Largest City: Yeghegnadzor

BACKGROUND

ADVENTURE TOUR GUIDES

Guides: A guide might be locally found (check in Yeghegnadzor and Arpi), but you may have the best luck in planning by contacting the Armenian Speleological Center web site for guide and details (6 Rostomi p, Yerevan, tel. 010-550986, email: speleo@armenius.com, URL: www.armenius.com/speleo/).

Another is INKAR LLC, tel. 010-744226, 093-744226, email: info@amtour.am, URL: www.amtour.am, a geological company that has begun offering speleological tours with its mountain trekking tours.

INTRODUCTION

Area: 2308 sq. km

Population: 40400

Marz Capital: Yeghegnadzor

Distance from Yerevan: 190 km

Marzpetaran: Tel: (281) 22 522

EXPLORING THE REGION

TRIP 1: ARENI & NORAVANK ▲

➡ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Yelpin** (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Chiva** (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Rind** (pop.)

➡ *From Artashat City. Take the R fork for about 1.5 km to the car park for **ARENI** (DD 39.72396 x 44.18983, elev. 1054m)  *
 

🌿 **ARENI - ԱՐԵՆԻ (Արենի)** ▲ (pop. 1500) is at the bottom of the long mountain road that descend into Vayots Dzor from the Yelpin Pass. The village is situated in the heart of one of Armenia's most fertile vineyard regions, and Areni is famous for its wines.

Background Excavations have found a number of Bronze, Iron and Hellenistic artifacts, including a pagan altar with an inscription in Greek dated to the year 163. The inscription dedicates the temple that once stood there to the "Olympian Goddess" on behalf of a Roman officer, a certain Aemilius Ovalis, a member of the 15th Legion, also known as "Apollinaris" after the god Apollo.

Areni was part of Roman protectorates beginning in 114 when the kingdom was briefly occupied by the Roman emperor Trajan, thereafter ruled by tribute from Armenian kings. The area passed back and forth between Persian, Roman and Armenian control, briefly under Persian rule in 161 before a Roman counter-attack in 163 by Statius Priscus installed a Roman candidate on the Armenian throne. Roman influence remained until the Roman defeat at the Battle of Barbalissos in 253.

The altar is from the period of the Roman counter-attack, and would have been a portable altar carried by soldiers of rank from camp to camp. It is unsure how long Aemilius Ovalis was stationed at Areni, or indeed, how long the Roman army stayed, and whether or not the altar was lost, given away or abandoned during retreat (the battles were not easily won and Persian partisans would have not given up so easily).

During construction of the modern Areni Winery, a number of ancient artifacts were found, including several huge clay pots used for the production of wine.

Areni Viticulture

The village is on the Arpa River, where it widens and begins its descent into the Nakhichevan Plains. There is some local suggestion that Areni was founded in the time of Genesis by Noah and his sons; Nakhichevan is believed to be the exact spot where they came down from the arc after the flood. Since the Arpa River valley connects Vayots Dzor with central Nakhichevan, it is argued that here is where they came, and here tilled the village's first vineyards.

Interestingly, Armenia has the widest variety of native grape sorts in the world, and local grape varieties are traced back 4500 years; to about the time Bibliophiles believe the Biblical Flood occurred.

Uartian cuneiforms note the advanced state of viticulture in Armenia as early as the 8th c BCE, noting the potency of its wine. A 2500 year old wine cellar was found at Karmir Blur, and Rome chronicles described Armenian exports of wine throughout the known world.

The 5th c BCE Greek historian Xenophon in his "Anabasis" or "The March Upcountry", notes Armenian wine and its varieties, writing,

"There were stores within of wheat and barley and vegetables, and wine made from barley in great big bowls; the grains of barley malt lay floating in the beverage up to the lip of the vessel, and reeds lay in them, some longer, some shorter, without joints; when you were thirsty you must take one of these into your mouth, and suck. The beverage without admixture of water was very strong, and of a delicious flavor to certain palates, but the taste must be acquired."

Medieval exports of Armenian wine found its way to Europe; one document shows agents of the Lithuanian king purchasing Armenian wine for the Vilnius court.

The vineyards were deserted after the forced migration of the area's populace to Isfahan in 1604, though the strongest vines survived to the 19th century, when cultivation resumed. In the Soviet times Areni wines became popular in the 60s and 70s, while modern wineries are traced to the late 1990s. The vintages are still in their infancy, but already some varieties are gaining international notice, especially Areni Maran and Areni Gedeon, which compare favorably with French table varieties.

SIGHTS

[PLAN]

S. ASTVATSATSIN CHURCH

Astvatsatsin is located on top of a tall cliff on the S side of the Arpa River. The church is easy to see even from a distance, though its honey-colored stone sometimes blends in with its surroundings.



The oldest cross stones in the church yard are carved from vishap and standing stones, pointing to pre-Christian origins, while the current church dates to 1321, during the tenure of a Bishop Hovhannes, who also commissioned Noravank, where he centered his diocese.

The church was designed by the architect, sculptor and artist Momik (1250?-1339), an master of miniatures in Kilikia who was brought to Vayots

Dzor/Siunik and reached fame in Gladzor University with his exquisite 1302 miniatures, "Entombment" and "Angel Appearing to Holy Women". In the 14th c Momik turned to sculptural pieces, creating several masterpiece khachkars and bas relief sculptures at Noravank, Tatev, Gladzor and other sites. Some of his work is on display at Echmiadzin and the State History Museum in Yerevan. In his later career, Momik turned to architecture, creating spaces to house his sculptural and (presumably) miniatures works, a unique feat for any time.

Built when the artist was at the height of his powers, Astvatsatsin is one of the most beautifully proportioned churches in Armenia; seemingly small on the outside but with a surprisingly spacious interior and a soaring dome decorated with some of Momik's finest sculpture work.

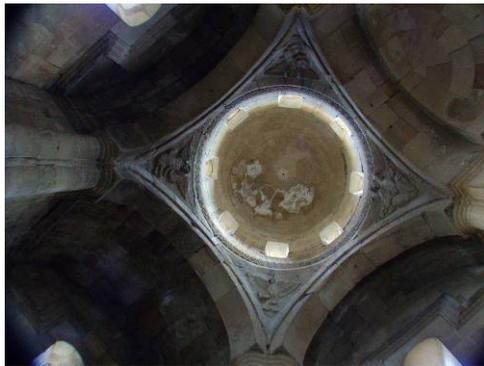


Badly preserved but still considered one his masterpieces, is the bas relief of the *Madonna and Child*, on the tympanum over the entryway. The depiction of the Virgin Mary and Christ child, while maintaining their iconic poses, are infused with life through the drapery of their clothing and the florid background design, which includes highly detailed grape vines. The imagery shows both high Gothic and Asian influences.

The Gothic is not surprising, considering Momik's Kilikian period and contact with European Crusades. "Masonic" crosses (emblem of crusading Knights Templar) proliferate in Armenian carvings from this period. What marks Momik's mastery is the way he blends the high Gothic curiosity in capturing lifelike poses with the iconic stoicism of Armenian carvings, infusing both with a

celebration of the natural world through floral and grape motifs. The combination is purely individual, the mark of a true master. Were Momik born 100 years later, in southern Europe, he might have been hailed as the father of the renaissance.

The church is a domed cruciform type with a rectangular exterior. There are two entries; west and south. The west is the main entrance. The south has a tympanum that was not carved with a bas relief, but instead has four crosses added sometime after the original construction.



The interior is marked by the soaring dome, hoisted aloft by four pillars, two of which are free standing, a unique feature of the church. The drum rests on pendentives that are faced with four exquisite carvings representing the evangelists.



The carving style is absolutely unique, though to anyone who has visited the gothic churches of

Europe, they will seem pretty much in character for the times. The experimentation with the free standing columns (like those in European cathedrals) and the life-like carvings point to European influences in Momik's work.

Graveyard The churchyard has tomb stones from different periods, same dating to the Hellenistic period, if not earlier. The smaller, more elaborately carved khachkars are contemporary to the church, but the larger, cruder stones are older. They are the remains of standing stones that may have stood in a worship site here, carved with the cross to "convert" them to the new religion, possibly in the 4th century. Note the double and triple cross styles that are found on other 4th century cross carvings.



OTHER SITES

Fortress Archeological finds include a **Bronze Age cyclopean fortress** SE of the village overlooking the gorge. The walls are scant remains of the original structure, stones taken long ago as construction material.

Hrashkaber is a medieval fortress that sits on a mountain side overlooking the SE road to Amaghu village. The fortress is mostly in ruins, but is lower walls show traces of Iron or Bronze Age cyclopean stonework.

The fortress is noted in Stepanos Orbelian's *History of the State of Sisakan (ca. 1299)*, in which he wrote of the Mongol invasion and its effects on the Orbelian holdings in Siunik. Stepanos was the son of Lord Tarsaiyich, whose castle ruins are in Areni Village. His history is considered valuable for its insights into local politics by a member of the ruling family, who had acquaintances at the highest levels, including the Orbeli kings of Georgia and Mongol Aghas. Stepanos became bishop of Siunik, forging a powerful religious counterweight to the political powers of the day, and had first hand knowledge of the ways of the aristocratic world, lending his writing an authenticity seldom seen in Armenian histories. In one section, he describes the fortunes of his brother, Prince Elikum, in flight from the Mongol leader Aslan in 1238:

"When the Tatars first came to this land, our districts fell the lot (bazhin) of Aslan noyin. Elikum [Orbelian] was holed up with his people in the impregnable fortress of Hrashkaber. That Aslan came and circumlocuted the fortress and realized that it was humanly impossible to take it. So he encamped opposite the fortress and sent messages to Elikum, saying: 'Make friends with us; come to us, and you will find many benefits from us. Otherwise, no matter how long you sit on your rock, we shall not quit this land. For God has given us this [land] as patrimony, and when you come forth, it will be the ruin of you and your tun (House)'.

"When Elikum heard this, he did not reject the advice, but instead, replying sweetly, he requested an oath. And he went before [Aslan] with numerous gifts. When Aslan saw this, he liked Elikum greatly and received him and made peace" (trans. Robert Bedrosian)

Medieval ruins Medieval Areni was a large estate for the Orbelian family, in the 14th century

boasting a large **medieval village and castle** for the Orbelian patrician Tarsaiyich Orbelian. The ruins are near the modern village, in the east valley.

The remains of a **13th c Bridge** attributed to Bishop Sarkis (1265-1287) span the river under the church. As you return to the highway from the church, take the first right intersection and look for the bridge—it is near the metal bridge.

Shrines Traces of Areni's medieval period include several shrines and khachkars, scattered about the modern village. Some are in yards, others in open areas. These include a S. Sarkis cave-shrine in the cliffs and a S. Grigor Nahatak shrine, which resembles a Tukh Manuk. These and khachkars are most easily found by asking locals to show you the way.

Vineyards

Areni Wines, Areni Village, tel. 22133, URL: http://www.virtualarmenia.am/vayots_dzor/areni/wineries/areni/sxema/site.htm, was formed by two brothers in the late 1990s, and has grown ever since, exporting its varietals worldwide. The wines are made from locally grown grapes, themselves from a specific type that has been naturally selected for over 3000 years. The wines are aged in large oak barrels at the winery to produce semi-dry and dry red wines. The winery offers tours of the facilities, and sells to the public, including vintage and new releases.

Cave Complex Just to the left of Hrashkaber on the same road, in a small gorge, there is a **complex of caves** in the rocky walls, with traces of pre-Christian and medieval settlement, including some pottery fragments.

Food at roadside stands and grills: **Overnight** in village (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Camping** is possible near the village and in the mountains—better camping is in Noravank canyon about 5 km beyond (see Noravank entry).

➡ From --- to (DD) 🏠 🍷 📶 🌐

SIDE TRIP: (Amaghu, pop.)

➡ From --- to (DD) 🏠 🍷 📶 🌐

SIDE TRIP: (Khachik, pop.)

↻ From --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Aghavnadzor** (pop.)

➡ From --- to (DD) 🏠 📶 📶 📶

NORAVANK ▲

Noravank is located at the head of a spectacular canyon which is home to two of Armenia's best known cave systems, a nesting eagle sanctuary and cave restaurant, and some of the most spectacular scenery in the country.

The monastery is one of the most famous in Armenia; a realization of the grandiose dreams of the 13th century Orbelian family, and the repository of some of Armenia's finest sculptures, including one that is often pointed out as Armenia's first Renaissance sculpture.

A candidate for World Heritage Status, Noravank, the canyon it inhabits and its nature are reasons enough to make this a must-see sight on any itinerary.

➡ From --- to **NORAVANK CANYON** (DD 39.73214 x 45.20589, elev. 1059m) 🏠 📶 📶

✂️ **NORAVANK CANYON - ՆՈՐԱՎԱՆԻ ԶՈՐ (Նորավանքի ձոր)** ▲ is located 1.7 km east of Areni Village, off the (M2) highway. The signposted entrance is about 5 km from Arpi village and 13 km from Yeghegnadzor. The canyon road starts a roadside restaurant and the T'rchuneri Cave, and continues for about 8.3 km through some of the region's most stunning landscape through a wildlife preserve and cave restaurant to the 13th c monastery and World heritage Site nominee. This is the must-see sight in Vayots Dzor, impressing even the most jaded tourist with its splendid nature

The canyon is impressive, with towering rock formations and gigantic land fissures that seem to part way just for your car. At its most narrow points, the canyon walls barely make way for the road and a now-channeled Darachai River, but after a few kilometers the rock crevices open into a yawning chasm of rushing water and tall grass, punctuated by flower fields and towering rock formations. The widening canyon protects important endemic wildlife, including rare spring-blooming flora and the breeding zone for some of Armenia's most endangered birds.

And all of this can be taken in through the comfort of your car, stopping half way at a café made out of a folk-decorated cave, in the heart of the breeding area.

➡ Stop by the side of the road next to the café or just across the bridge heading into the canyon, then walk about 100 m behind the restaurant following the cliffs, where a small path leads uphill to the entrance to **T'ARCHUNERI CAVES** (DD 39.73135 x 45.20421, elev. 1084m) 🏠 📶 📶

✂️ **T'ARCHUNERI CAVES - ԹՐՉՈՒՆԵՐԻ ԲԱՐԱՆՁԱՎԱՆԵՐ (Թրչունների քարանձավներ)** ▲ are located just at the entrance to the gorge, in the cliff behind the restaurant (to the right as you turn to enter the gorge). It is reached by taking a footpath behind the restaurant up the steep hill to the triangular entry points into the caves.

The cave is actually a collection of small caverns inter-connected with narrow tunnels, with a few smaller caves in the higher cliff walls. Excavations showed a Bronze Age burial site for children, suggesting to some archeologists that this was a unique example of human sacrifice in the region. Found were skeletons, totems, among other items.

Food The roadside restaurant is laid out in a patio overlooking the Arpi River, with indoor dining space for inclement weather. The restaurant serves khorovats (grilled fish a specialty) and salads. A pleasant place with decent food. \$\$-\$\$\$

Camping on the river near the site or inside the canyon: **Springs** on the river.

➡ Continue --- to **MAGILI CAVE** (DD 39.72234 x 45.20683, elev. 1239m) 🏠 📶 📶

✂️ **MAGILI CAVE - ՄԱԳԻԼԻ ԲԱՐԱՆՁԱՎ (Մագիլի քարանձավ)** ▲ is located about 1 km south of the (M2) in Noravank Canyon. The cave is high above the road, on the left after the canyon widens to form a valley, and not far from a huge bolder that diverts the road path.

The mapped portion of the cavern is 1.7 km deep, with myriad small offshoots that have not been entirely explored. The cavern was inhabited as far back as the Neolithic period; stone tools and

implements have been found, along with more "recent" finds from the 9th c. Its remote location and difficult entry made it a perfect hide out in times of trouble.

Because of its depth, Magili cavern holds a constant temperature of 14 degrees centigrade (58 degrees Fahrenheit). The passageway varies from just enough for a person to crawl through to a spacious chamber 10-15 meters in width. There are a few stalactites and stalagmites, but most have been broken by vandals and local boys playing in the caves. Many chambers are small, accessed by narrow tunnels.

Magili is also a unique underground eco-system; home to thousands of *Microchiroptera Desmodus, Diphylla, Diaemus*—otherwise known as fruit bats. The only mammal capable of true flight, bats are an important part of Armenia's ecology, a keystone species that is vital to the crop production in the country. Were it not for those little furry fliers, Areni wine would not exist, something locals are only just beginning to understand. One of Armenia's spectacles appears each summer evening, as the cave's nesting bats emerge in a fluttering cloud that twists and turns in the evening air.

Armenian Bats

The largest bat populations are in the south, though millions nest in the countless number of caves and crevices throughout the country. More than 800 caves and grottoes inhabited by bats have been discovered and mapped in Armenia, including more comprehensive research of cave-dwelling bats.

But none seems to be as prolific or diverse as the bat population at Magili Cave.

Prior to the 1990s, scientists knew of 16 species of bats from two families, *Rhinolophidae* and *Vespertilionidae*. Since then, 12 new species have been discovered in Armenia, including a representative of a family of *Molossidae* new to Armenia — *Tadarida teniotis*, *Rhinolophus blasii*, *Myotis bechsteinii*, *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, etc.

The discoveries show a remarkable diversity in the bats, and in Magili Cavern alone, more than 65% of Europe's bat fauna is represented.

At present 28 species of bats are known in Armenia, including:

- Family Rhinolophidae (5 species): *Rhinolophus euryale*, *Rh. mehelyi*, *Rh. hipposideros*, *Rh. ferrumequinum*, *Rh. blasii*;
 - Family Vespertilionidae (22 species): *Myotis blythi*, *M. bechsteinii*, *M. nattereri*, *M. schaubi*, *M. emarginatus*, *M. mystacinus*, *M. hajastanicus*, *Barbastella barbastella*, *B. leucomelas*, *Plecotus auritus*, *Pl. austriacus*, *Nyctalus noctula*, *N. leisleri*, *Pipistrellus kuhlii*, *P. pipistrellus*, *P. pygmaeus*, *P. nathusi*, *Hypsugo savii*, *Vespertilio murinus*, *Eptesicus serotinus*, *E. bottae*, *Miniopterus schreibersii*;
 - Family Molossidae (1 species): *Tadarida teniotis*.
- For more information, contact the Armenian delegation for Eurobats (www.eurobats.org):
- Dr. Mark Kalashyan, email: mkalashian@yahoo.com
- Prof. Eduard Yavruyan, email: anpuorg@freenet.am

Practicals While the large black entrance is easy to spot as you scan the canyons walls, entry is for the more fit; a rope is needed to scale the cliff walls and enter. You will also want to wear appropriate caving clothing; solid boots, a spelunking hat, flashlight, sturdy clothes, etc. Beyond the few near chambers the cave continues into uncharted territory and it is easy to lose your way.

Guides are necessary to visit this cave. See [Adventure Tour guides](#) (p. 2) for a list, or contact the Speleological Center (tel. 010-550986, URL: www.armenius.com/speleo/).

Free style **camping** can be made in the river canyon near an ancient apricot forest by a **hankaiyin aghbiur (հանքային աղբյուր - a mineral spring)**.

➡ Continue --- to **NORAVANK** (DD 39.68438 x 45.23297, elev. 1514m) 🏠 📶 📶

✂️ **NORAVANK - ՆՈՐԱՎԱՆԻ (Նորավանք)** ▲ (literally "New Monastery") is located at the end of the canyon asphalt road, on a promontory overlooking the Darachai River. From a distance the basalt monastery blends in with the towering landscape behind it, its honey-colored rocks

seeming to be a part of the rugged yellow and amber cliff towers behind. It comes into focus as you approach the complex and stand so the tall S. Astvatsatsin sticks out in from the brilliant blue morning sky.

Background

Though its nomination for World Heritage Site status lays in its spectacular medieval monuments, the site shows signs of having been a place of worship at a very early age; gravestones scattered about the church yard have finely carved eye-holes used in the Bronze Age to scan the night sky and worship the ancient gods.

A cloistered monastery was built at the site sometime in the 5th c, the basis of its transition into one of the preeminent communities of prayer, learning and politics in the 13th-14th cc, where one of the world's finest medieval artists lived, worked and is buried.

The "new monastery" (Noravank), was founded by a certain Bishop Hovhannes, Abbot of Vahanavank, who moved his bishopric there in 1205. In the following two centuries the monastery grew with the fortunes of the ruling Orbelian clan of kings, who bequeathed riches on the church, establishing it as the center of the church in Siunik and commissioning patrimonial sepulchres at the monastery.

According to legend Noravank housed a piece of the True Cross, believed to have been stained with the blood of Christ. A mysterious stranger is said to have found the relic after performing a miracle by raising a child from the dead.

Mongols looted the monastery in 1238, but a quick truce between the forces of the Agha Khan and Prince Elikum Orbelian brought a certain amount of peace to the region and the chance to rebuild the monastery, establishing a new golden age that lasted until the Timurid invasions in the late 14th c.

In its heyday, Noravank was a major cultural center, closely connected to the many seats of religion and learning in the kingdom, especially the university and library at Gladzor, some 20 km distant. Owing to its Orbelian benefactors, the monastery was also steeped in the politics of the day, its bishops influencing Mongol Georgian Orbelian kings alike during the 14th c. One of its most famous bishops was Stepanos Orbelian, author of

History of the State of Sisakan (ca. 1299), and largely responsible for forging the Siunik bishopric into a powerful political, cultural and religious center.

Noravank and Momik The monastery is also connected to the sculptural work of one of the most prolific and astonishing artists of the Middle Ages, the artist, architect and sculptor, Momik (1250?–1339).

Momik began his career as an artist of manuscript miniatures in Kilikia, where he was exposed to the art of late gothic Europe, introduced by legions of crusading knights and princes. In 1299 Bishop Stepanos Orbelian brought Momik to Vayots Dzor, where he soon turned his hand to carving; creating khachkars that are among the greatest in the art form, and unique bas relief sculptures that introduced the high Gothic style into the eastern church.

Momik was the architect and sculptural artists for S. Astvatsatsin in Areni (1321), the same year he created the exquisite bas relief sculptures over the gavit entry at Noravank and added khachkars to the ensemble. His last work was also at Noravank, where he created the Orbelian sepulchre church of Astvatsatsin/Burtelashen, two striking bas relief sculptures on the church's west and south walls, and a small, simple khachkar for his tomb, which is at the side of the church. Both church and khachkar are dated 1339.

A year later, the earthquake of 1340 destroyed the dome of S. Karapet, which was repaired in 1361 by the architect Siranes.

The monastery was plundered during Timurid invasions and deserted during the 1604 migration of the country to Persia. Damaged by earthquakes, the monastery was reoccupied in the 18th century, when a new wall was constructed around the churches.

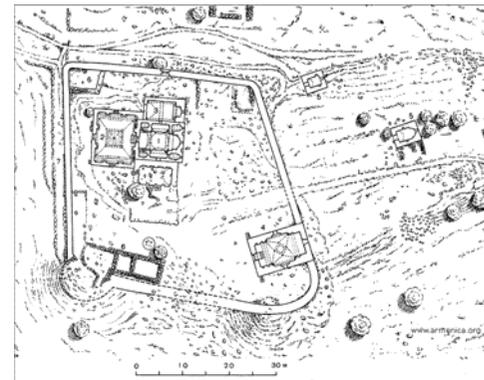
The 1931 Siunik earthquake destroyed much of the site, including the dome of S. Karapet. Repairs to the roof of the church were made in 1948-1949, with a final overhaul of the entire complex, begun in the 1980s finally complete in time for 2001 church celebrations.

Complex

Vastly renovated in for 2001 celebrations of Christianity in Armenia, the modern compound

more closely resembles the outline of the original, with new walls built to ring the complex of churches, shrines, monk quarters and graves.

The complex includes the three-story 14th c S. Astvatsatsin/Burtelashen sepulchre, the main church of S. Karapet and its gavit, the S. Grigor Patrimonial Sepulchre for 13th c Orbelian kings of Siunik, the remains of 13th-14th cc shrines and monk quarters, and the modern office, hall and a restaurant.



LEGEND

1. The Church of St. Karapet (1221-1227)
2. A "gavit" of 1261, rebuilt in 1321
3. The Church of St. Gregory, a patrimonial sepulchre of the Orbelians
4. The Church of St. Astvatsatsin (1339)
5. Chapels of the XIV & XVII centuries
6. Residential & service premises of the XVIII century fence

S. Astvatsatsin/Burtelashen

The impressive three story building is the first church you reach entering the complex, though it is not the main church. Burtelashen (also Burteghashen; "built for Burtel") was built to house the remains of the family of the donor, Burtel (Burtegh) Orbelian, who reigned in Siunik in the early-mid 14th c.

The building is considered a masterpiece, and was the last significant work by the 14th century artist, sculptor and architect Momik, whose simple grave khachkar lies next to the church.

Astvatsatsin follows the same layout as that of its contemporary in Areni, with a rectangular base

inscribed on the inside into a cross form. It differs in scale; Noravank has a larger building, each of its three stories is taller than the previous, creating a spire.

Momik's design, like the Astvatsatsin monument church in Yeghvard (See Kotaik chapter), is similar to the Shepherd Church in Ani (10th-11th? c), which hails back to tomb monuments from the pagan and early Christian period.

Interestingly, Yeghvard's church (Kotaik marz) also dates to this period (1321-1328), just before Momik started his masterpiece. The influence of one on the other (or whether Momik had hand in the Yeghvard design) is not known but fun for history buffs to knock about.

The **design** was in three parts; a rectangular ground floor for the sepulchre, and a domed cross form for the next two floors.

The enclosed **first floor** was reserved for the Orbelian family tombs, marked by elaborately carved khachkars and votive plate. The restrained interior was designed to act as a backdrop to the elaborate tombs, so walls are plain with four small carvings of the evangelists in the corners of the support system pendentives. Leaning against the western wall are two large khachkars; the one on the left is attributed to Momik, early 13th c.

Narrow cantilever stairs on either side of the western entry lead to the **second floor**, where church services were held. The second story hall has clean lines using architectural features to frame the space. There is a semicircular altar apse on the east wall, which is topped by an effigy of Christ flanked by two angels, and a symbol of the Holy Spirit just above the east window.

The central domed hall is crowned by pendentives that lead to an open air **rotunda** in place of an enclosed drum, as was customary for Armenian churches. Other memorial churches with the same feature are at Yeghvard and Kaputan in Kotaik, Khorakert (Lori) and the bell tower over the library in Goshavank. Almost all of the columns for the rotunda are reconstructions based on fragments found from church ruins. One capital survives to show the original design. The dome is cleanly designed to reflect light that pours in through the rotunda.

The **façade** of the church is extremely refined, with excellent **bas relief sculptures** worked within the walls. Bas relief sculptures predominate on each wall, breaking up the mass of stonework with rounded moldings, arches and large crosses. The east wall has stepped framing over the top heraldic emblem of the Orbelian family (an eagle holding a lamb in its claws), with three cross designs underneath, the central surrounding a sun disc ornament.

The north and south walls frame windows with rounded moldings that form an arch over large crosses. There are also narrow bas relief columns that lighten the effect of the monolithic lower walls. Some of the detailing is extraordinary; look at the incredibly intricate geometric pattern carved in the diamond piece over the top window of the south wall.

The **dome** is supported by an open air rotunda, which both lightens the entire structure and allows the builders to top the church with an extremely tall feature. Rotunda details include pairs of birds above each of the exterior capitals of the 12 support columns, and carvings of the donors on three columns on the western side. The carvings show bas relief figures of an enthroned Madonna and Child with two standing men in rich attire, one holding a model of the church.



The **western façade** is magnificent, its lower doorway framed by the cantilever stairs that form a stepped pyramid frame for the lower door frame, which is a series of rounded moldings and platbands, intricate "lace" geometric squares that form an inner frame and the archway and a recessed framing of the door created by

columnettes supporting a stalactite arch with a tympanum bas relief sculpture.

In the corners of the inner framing above the archway there are four **sirens**, birds with crowned human heads. Such heraldic symbols were widely used in medieval Armenian art, in carvings, miniatures, embroidery, jewelry, pottery and ceramic ware. The exact origin of the siren symbol is unknown, but examples have been uncovered in Urartian, Phrygian and Greek excavations.

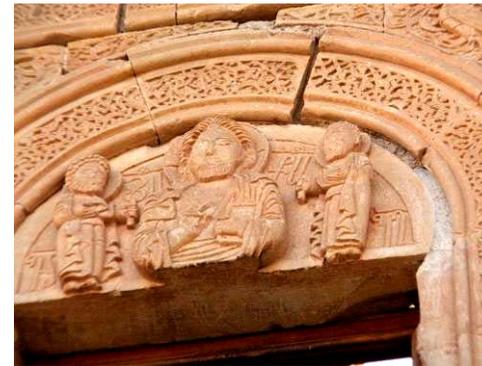
Sirens are mythic figures that appear throughout ancient mythology, in the tale Jason and the Golden Fleece and Odysseus among others. In Greek mythologies, sirens were water creatures whose song drove men mad. In others, they are birds with women's heads, and were thought to be real spirits capable of bringing doom to those who crossed them. Later Jesuit writers asserted they were mentioned in the Bible, and even had a compartment on Noah's ark.

Sirens were originally thought to be Greek in origin, but the same figure appears in Indian mythology, suggesting they may have originated there, entering the Near East on their journey west. Others point to the Jason myth, which occurs in the Northern Caucasus, suggesting the origin may be there, filtering through the southern Caucasus en route east and west.

The early church tried to stamp out belief in sirens, and by the middle ages they were used as symbols of temptation, though they are also widely used in heraldic emblems and on church carvings throughout medieval Europe and the Near East.



The **tympanum bas relief sculptures** were both done by Momik, at the same time as the church (1339). The **lower** depicts an enthroned Holy Virgin with the Christ child in her lap, flanked by the archangels Gabriel and Michael. The Armenian letters on either side of Mary's head are meant to read "Mair Astvatsatsin" or "Mother of God". Akin to high gothic sculptures of the period, the scene combines iconic poses with lifelike folds in the garments and a beginning sense of perspective. The child's figure is especially expressive in the way his legs cross and the movement of his arms.



The **upper** carving depicts Christ holding a tablet with his right index and middle finger extended in a sign of blessing. He is flanked by Ss. Petros and Poghos (Peter and Paul). The Armenian letters on either side of the Christ head stand for "Isus Kristos" (Jesus Christ). Like the lower carving, the figures in the lower scene stand out from their background in an almost three-dimensional way. Momik had so mastered his craft he was able to project his figures out from their stone, and may have been experimenting with a complete separation of statuary in these, his last carvings.



Above the doorway arch, in the top frame, an inscription reads "ԹՎ ՉԸԹ", which means "In the year (ԹՎ) 789 (ՉԸԹ)"; the date of the church's consecration using Armenia's old method of counting, where each letter in the alphabet also stood for a numeral. The dating is in the old style calendar, which changed to the one we use now in 550. To find the date in our calendar, add 551 (the first year of the new calendar) to medieval dates. Thus, S. Astvatsatsin was consecrated in the year 1339 of the new calendar.

Old S. Karapet

The small basilica church (9th-10th cc) is still in ruins, its walls adjoining the main church. Remains include traces of three arches that supported the vaulted roof, and a southern antechamber.



The size and layout suggest the church may have been descended from pre-Christian times, not impossible considering a number of gravestones in

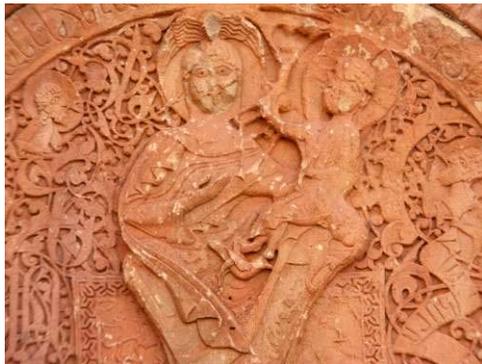
the church yard that seem have been Bronze Age standing stones. The stones, with carefully carved eye-holes at their ends, suggesting the site may have been a cromlech at one time, the stones used to scan the night sky. The predominance of cromlechs and Bronze Age “observatory stones” found in Siunik and on the western and southern shores of Lake Sevan make this entirely possible.

There are some exquisitely carved **khachkars** and khachkar fragments lined up in front of the old church. The cracked one on the left is dated 1266.



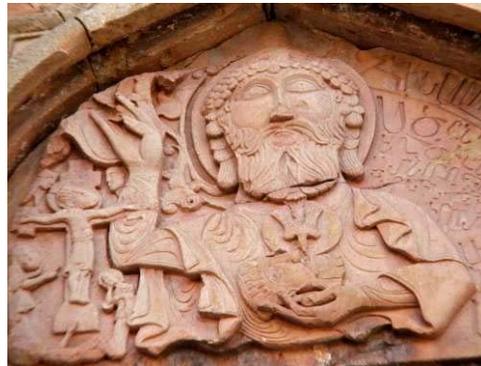
S. Karapet Gavit

The gavit lies to the west of New S. Karapet, and is its formal entrance, an academy, manuscriptorium, and community center. The first gavit was built in 1261 and rebuilt in 1321 adding a vaulted roof and two of Momik’s most outstanding carvings on the tympanum for the door and the upper window arch.



The **lower sculpture** is of a seated Madonna and Child, set against a richly carved backdrop of large letters interwoven with floral designs of leaves, vines and flowers, with the heads of two saints gazing on the central figures.

The iconic pose of the figures is typical for early Christian statuary, though the attention to background details and in the clothing of the figures is close to gothic bas relief figures of the same period. The two are seated on a stool or throne that is covered with cloth, adding an Armenian effect with its tassels in the shape of pomegranates.



The **upper window sculpture** is unique for having the only known depiction in medieval Armenia of God the Father. The large carving is deeply engraved, lifting the figures off of the background of inscriptions and smooth stone. The scene shows God with his right hand lifted above the miniature crucifixion of his son, his left hand cradling the head of Adam, with a dove (the Holy Spirit) breathing life into Adam’s mouth. The meaning is explicit (God gave us life with Adam, and then he gave us life everlasting with the sacrifice of his son) and beautifully depicted. Mourning figures flank the crucifix and one lies prone under the cross. Two small heads peer onto Christ’s head; one peeking out from God’s arm. These are often called saints or angels, but they may be connected with the construction of the church, the one on the left wearing a royal headdress. The space between the God figure and one of the seraphim is filled with an inscription.

This carving shows Momik at the height of his artistic powers; as opposed to his earlier work at Areni and Gladzor, these friezes fill their respective tympanums with iconic figures and backgrounds, and their interplay creates a dramatic story with a rhythm and pulse that is echoed throughout their building’s design.

Outside the entryway to the gavit there are a number of **tombstones paving the ground**. Note those with large carefully carved holes; these are the remains of standing stones that were used to scan the night sky in the Bronze Age. A number of these stones are also inside the gavit and the churches. Standing stones were often converted to graves in later centuries, their use in cromlechs and ancient observatories granting them a special status by later generations that had already forgotten their original use. Hundreds of these stones can be found on the shores of Lake Sevan and in Siunik, many carved into khachkars or early Christian cross stones.

Interior Its first roof was destroyed by the 1340 earthquake, and the gavit was rebuilt in 1361, covered with a new roof in the shape of an enormous stone tent with a central aperture, mimicking the wooden roof styles of peasant homes; the “hazarashen”. The inner roof rises in rows of stone that lead to the top, which is made from four rows of quatrefoils topped by circular bands of the same to the top hole.

Unique among gavits, there are no central columns to support the roof; wall piers and semi columns bear the weight of the support arches. The structure relies on the thickness of the walls and the pier system to keep the roof from collapsing, which explains how the roof collapsed again in later earthquakes. The interior walls are lined with magnificent khachkars and carvings on the walls and on the columns for the windows. In an upper corner there is an interesting carving of a figure on a horse attacking a wild lion with his sword. The figure is allegorical, depicting an unknown Orbelian prince attacking his enemy.

New S. Karapet

The main church of St. Karapet was built in 1221-1227 for Prince Liparit Orbelian (1216-1223). In 1340, an earthquake destroyed the dome and was replaced in 1361 under the direction of the architect Siranes.

The church is a domed cruciform type with two story annexes in the corners, their walls carving out the cross form of the interior. The second story chambers were used by monks for prayer, study and to create manuscripts, while lower chambers were used as shrines, changing rooms and to keep the church treasury and manuscripts during the 13th c.

As a type, the church is like most of its day, with simple lines and a round drum tipped by a tent roof, though the altar apron is carved with Greek crosses, and the column capitals have trefoils. The use of the Greek cross indicates the church was influenced by the Chalcedonian leanings of Armenian-Georgian armies that liberated the area from Seljuks, under the command of Ivaneh and Zakareh Zakarian. Ivaneh was Chalcedonian, and his domains following the eviction of the Seljuks included Siunik, and Noravank. Thereafter, influence by the Georgian (Chalcedonian) court continued during the rule of the Siunik Orbelians, whose cousins were Georgian kings.

S. Grigor/Smbat Sepulchre

Adjoining S. Karapet on its northern wall is a small basilica mausoleum for the Orbelians. Called the Smbat mausoleum the church is S. Grigor, and is more famous for housing the tomb of Elikum (Elikom), the son of Lord Tarsaiyich Orbelian and the last free prince of the Siunik kingdom.

Elikum ruled over a fantastically rich kingdom, and as a relative of the Georgian kings, held sway in international politics. His brother, Stepanos, was appointed bishop of Siunik and forged a powerful religious counterweight to church leadership in other regions. It all came crashing down with the Mongol invasions of 1238.

Surrounded by the forces of the Mongol leader Ashlan, Elikum and his forces holed up in the nearby fortress of Hrashkaber, where Ashlan, seeing the fortress was impregnable, set up a siege and told Elikum he was prepared to wait until the Armenians starved to death. Seeing his predicament, Elikum made peace with Ashlan and joined the Mongol armies in their conquest of the Near East.



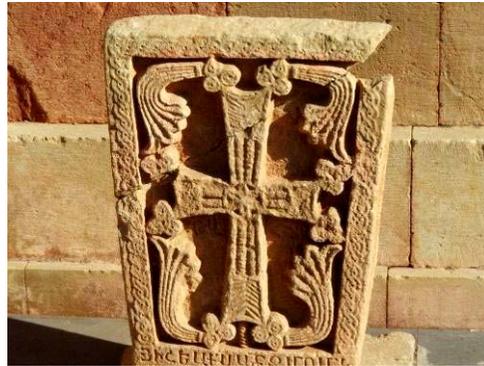
The mausoleum-church was built by the architect Siranes in 1275. The church floor is paved with ten large stones marking the **graves** of members of Elikum's family. The largest and most elaborate is that of the king himself, showed as a sleeping lion. The hall is simply designed, which was the custom, with a small altar in the semicircular eastern apse. Carvings are sparse, represented by wall doves and a few cross forms. The altar apron is carved with geometric patterns of squares, four pointed stars and swirling leaf forms. The vaulted ceiling is supported by arches held up by wall piers and semi-columns.

The simple design was once livened with wall paintings, traces of which can still be seen. It was obviously elaborate; red and white checkered designs are compliments by swirling sun disks, elaborate red patters and diagonal red stripes on the ceiling.

Khachkars

There are dozens of impressive khachkars and fragments at the site, though most are not signed, their authorship unknown.

The few that are known include the simple **tomb khachkar for Momik**, which stands next to his masterpiece 1339 Astvatsatsin church.



Another early 14th c Momik khachkar is in the ground floor mausoleum-church of Astvatsatsin. The khachkar is highly detailed, showing a frieze of three figures in the top panel, and a rosette sun disk under the cross. The side panels are unusually carved with a texture pattern.

Another, now housed in the new residence of Echmiadzin is the masterpiece 1308 khachkar, also by Momik. Compared to the great 14th c masterpiece khachkar at Goshavank, by the master Pavgos, Momik's is covered with fine lacework detailing, which frames the central cross standing over a rosette shaped like a shield, with columns of eight-pointed stars on either side. The top is a series of three vignettes, topped by quatrefoil arches.

Other

There are the foundations of two **13th-14th century chapels**, to the east of the main churches, made from rough stone. Just south of S. Karapet is a well and the foundations of 18th century monastery offices and residence.

Modern buildings are to the right of the main gate as you enter, and include the monastery office, a mataghatun, and rest rooms.

Outside the Complex

Taking a gravel road that goes up the canyon from the asphalt road (take a L after you descend from the monastery and reach the river road), the road peters out after a bit, where a dirt path leads to a secluded **picnic area** with campfire stones.

Another path leads up the left slop and passes below the small **S. Pokras Matur** (chapel), with a sacred spring said to have curative powers. Accordingly the chapel walls seep underground waters into a basin, and for the faithful, miraculous healing oil oozing from the saints buried relics.

Camping is possible in the river gorge, or in the hills nearby, but ask first; camping also available at the bird sanctuary cave café; **overnight** in Arpi village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **food** at the bird sanctuary cave café and the highway restaurant next to T'rchuneri Cave; **springs** in monastery, and in the gorge.

➡ From Areni, the (M2) highway continues E for about 6.3 km or 100 m from the Arpi sign, to a row of **outdoor stands and hotels** (DD)



SIDE TRIP: The row of stands and hotels is on the river side of the highway. The stands sell fresh produce and homemade Areni wine. They offer free tastings—do taste before you buy, and be sure they pour your bottle from the same stock. Prices are not any cheaper than in shops, but when you find a vintage you like, it is worth it.

Overnight includes one of several motels/restaurants to choose from; decently priced at around 5000-8000 AMD a night (or five hours) for basic amenities (hot water and clean sheets):

IJEVANATUN MOTEL, basic amenities, 5000-8000 AMD

HOTEL NOY/CAFÉ SEN, has Armenian grill in the kitchen and basic amenities in the rooms, 5000-8000 AMD.

HANGESTIAN GOTI, is off the highway by the river; offers camping sits and picnic tables, grill. Camping spot at 3000 AMD.

Food includes the stalls and a couple of cafes:

ARENI CAFÉ, basic grill \$-\$\$

HAIKAKAN KHOHANOTS, grill and Armenian recipes, \$-\$\$

➡ From the highway headed E, just before the Arpi sign a R turn will cross river and then a L road that follows the river will start to climb

the southern mountains. Take this road for about 7.6 km, following it into a long valley, where a small guardhouse stands opposite the tin covered entrance to **MOZROV CAVE** (approx. DD 45.31236 x 39.7061) 🏠 🍷 🗺️

✳️ **MOZROV CAVE - ՄՈՅՐՈՎԻ ԶԱՐԵՆՁԱԿ (Մոզրովի քարանձակ)** ▲ was discovered in 197- during road construction and has not been completely mapped.

Note: This is not a casual "tourist cave". To gain entry, you will need to be able to rappel down a cliff some 30 meters to the entry, and then you need a key; the cave is locked due to vandalism of its priceless stalactites and stalagmites. Professional guides (see below) can obtain the key and all necessary equipment.

The cave is considered one of the best in Europe, said to have the largest collection of stalactites and stalagmites on the continent. The rock formations are full of variegated colors and natural designs, some of them quite striking.

Mozrov is a Karst Cave, formed by a complicated process that can take tens of thousands of years to complete. The process occurs when limestone comes into contact with carbon dioxide CO₂, naturally produced throughout Armenia, the stuff that makes sodas fizzy. Another common substance in Armenia, and especially in Vayots Dzor, is limestone, which cannot be dissolved by water, but can when the water contains CO₂.

Karst caves are formed when limestone, originally water proof, contains cracks produced by tectonic forces - which is very common - the water oozes into the rock and starts to widen the cracks and solute caves inside the layers.



If you are a serious spelunker, this is one of the main destinations for you in Armenia, along with the bat colony at Magili and Armenia's largest known cave, Archeri. Both are nearby.

Guides are necessary to visit this cave. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#) (p. 2) for a list, or contact the Speleological Center (tel. 010-550986, URL: www.armenius.com/speleo/).

Camping is possible in the area: **overnight** in nearby village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **springs** in the gorge and village.

➡ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Arpi - Unqhh** (founded 1965, pop. 750) is on the (M2) highway, near the food stalls and some motels/restaurants. The village population is mostly from the village now largely abandoned village of Gnishik, relocated in Soviet times to better farming land. Many still maintain plots in the old village, which is about 13 km S of Arpi in a rugged part of the marz.

Arpi is at the turnoff for Mozrov Cave (Gnishik), and has a couple of sites on the other side of the village, indicating its settlement at least hails from the medieval age.

The 13th c **Ertich Fortress** is on a hill on the southern rim of the Arpi River, about 1.5 km from the bridge that crosses the river on the W side of the village (the road to Mozrov Cave and Gnishik).

The small cave-shrine **J'ravank** is a little south of the fortress, reached via the same road. Its name means "Water Monastery", though the "monastery" is actually a cave with a pool of spring fed water outside the entrance. Inside there are a series of stalactites that were used as part of 4th millennium BCE worship ceremonies.

Directly in front of the cave entrance is a sacrificial stone, and the stalactites inside were used as phalluses for fertility rituals. Researchers found human skeletal remains inside the cave, suggesting that early rites included human sacrifice.

Hiking The canyon outside the cave is a hiker's paradise; continuing south on the road, you will reach **Mozrov Cave** in about 6.5 km, and can continue from there another 1 km to **Mozrov village**, where locals still keep some of the oldest traditions; the semi-abandoned village of **Gnishik** (5 km); and an alternate route N, to the 11th c. **Agaragadzor Kamurj** (6 km) and a large spring fed pool, a perfect place to swim in and cool of after a lengthy hike.

Camping near the village, ask; **Overnight** in village (rustic; 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Food** at "Jam Simon Café" or at "Kari Tak" grill on the (M2) in the village; **Springs** in the village and on the riverbed.

➡ From Arpi, continue E on the (M2) for about 1.5 km to **YEGHEGNADZOR** (DD 39.756013 x 45.330702, elev. 1184m) 🏰 🏠 🗺️ 🌄

🏰 **YEGHEGNADZOR** - ԵՂԵԳՆԱԶՈՐ (Եղեգնաձոր) ▲ (till 1935, Keshishkend, between 1925-57 Mikoyan, pop. 7000) is the capital of Vayots Dzor marz, located off the Arpa River.

The small town is conveniently located in the center of the district and is a good stopping point for explorations. There is a hotel and two guest houses in the town, plus a couple of cafes and restaurants. Nearby on the road to Vaik, there are several motel/restaurants.

Yeghegnadzor is within a half hour's drive from all major destinations in Vayots, Dzor, including The Selim Caravanserai and mountain pass to Lake Sevan; the medieval complexes at Yeghegis; the monasteries and churches of Noravank, Tanahat (Gladzor University), Areni and Gndevank.

Yeghegnadzor adjoins a number of vineyards and wineries, some of which host tours of their facilities, and wine tastings. It is close to Areni; perhaps the most famous wine district in Armenia.

The town is also close to a number of natural sites, such as the nearby caves and hiking trails into the wilder parts of the district.

HISTORY

Yeghegnadzor is located at the confluence of two rivers, the Arpa and the Yeghegis. Situated on tall hills overlooking the rivers, the town has been a prized defensive site for thousands of years. It also benefited from being located on one of the main trading routes of the Silk Road, connecting the Kura Valley with Siunik, Persia and the Anatolian plains.

The site has seen a number of Paleolithic and Bronze Age settlements, which evolved into a major trading city in the Iron Age. Urartians captured the spot in the 8th-17th cc BCE, converting the walled keep into a stronghold to watch for invading Cimmerians and Scythians from the north.

It also benefited from trading caravans that had already been plying the mountains passes for hundreds of years. The rich natural resources in the area (forests for smelting iron and building

houses; rich ores of copper and iron) were mined and sent to the Urartian capitals at Erebuni and Tushpa (Van).

Regional sites include one famous fortress; an Iron Age cyclopean stronghold inside the town that was rebuilt and enlarged into a medieval stronghold. This fortress became famous as a stronghold for escaping warriors from the battle of Avarair (451). According to the 5th c historian Yeghishe, a detachment of nobles tried to escape to Artsakh through Vayots Dzor, and held up in the fortress of Kioshk. Sassanid soldiers followed and "they conducted bloodshed at the hill, which was between the Yeghegis and Mozan Rivers where the refugees were, because it was a strongly protected place".

The town was historically known as Yeghegik, and in medieval times it was an ancient seat of the Orbelian family (r. 10th-17th cc). The Orbelians ruled over a thriving and then declining area that enlarged and decorated some of the most magnificent monasteries in the kingdom (Noravank, Gndevank), and then watched as they were destroyed and deserted during successive Mongol, Timurid, Koyunlu and Persian invasions.

Yeghegnadzor was deserted during the 1604 forced migration of Armenia to Persia. It remained deserted until the late 18th c, when settlers from Artsakh, Persia and Ottoman Turkey began to resettle the town. During the population exchanges of 1828 and 1878, the town received an influx of immigrants from Iran and Turkey.

The town was renamed Keshishkend until 1935, when it was named Mikoyan after Anastas Mikoyan, a Bolshevik and Soviet Statesman who become one of Stalin's favorites.

It was renamed Yeghegnadzor in 1957, which name it has kept.

NAVIGATING THE TOWN

Yeghegnadzor may be small but it still is a bit of a hike from the highway to the top of the town where the road to Gladzor, Proshaberd and Spitakavor begin. The center is about 500 m from the highway.

Two streets frame a central park that runs uphill to the small traffic circle. The street on the right passes the new Gladzor University and an outdoor

café in summertime before a cross street merges to the left, main street above the park. The left street, Yerevanian, is the main entry to town.

The bus stop is just off the highway, in front of the statue at the entrance to the town (L or W street as you face the statue). The police station is a little north of the bus stop on the same street, as are a number of small shops and a café.

Yerevanian dead ends at a T-intersection with Orjonokidze p. Left (W) takes you past a university, shops and the next T-intersection. This is Momik p. Opposite is the Cinema Aragil (closed) and minivans serving the region. Turning L (S), you immediately pass Hotel Gladzor, a little worn but cheap at 5000 AMD for a DBL. Opposite is a beautiful park. On the same side as the hotel is a Unibank, and Billiards hall. More shops line the street as you continue S and the E again to return to Yerevanian.

Back to the first T-intersection: Orjonokidze continues E past more shops, mterks, a bookshop and another park. It ends at an intersection, where a N turn takes you past an Apoteka and Shahumian p, where a R (E) leads out of town after passing the polyclinic and the regional museum.

This same road goes to Gladzor village and Vernashen (Gladzor museum), where a right road that leads eventually to Tanahat Monastery (medieval Gladzor University), Proshaberd and Spitakavor.

SIGHTS

Astvatatsin, is located off of Mikoyan p. The small church was built using stones from Kioshk Fortress, which is in the west of town, behind S., Sarkis. The church lies on an older structure that may be pre-Christian in origin.

The 17th c **S. Sarkis** lies in the west of town. The church was partially built using stones from Kioshk Fortress. It sits on top of an older 5th c structure. The outline and foundations stones may be original to the pagan period.

Kioshk Fortress is located just south of the church. The 7th c BCE-5th c fortress was built over older structures that served the same purpose. The walls are clearly seen on the hill;

semi-processed blocks of cyclopean stones. The walls were built in three rings wrapping around the citadel. There are medieval tombs at the top of the hill, along with the remains of a small castle and patriarchal burial vault.

The fortress is connected with the 5th c battle of Avarair. After their defeat at the hands of the Sassanid Persian Immortals, Armenian nakharars escaped to the fortress, where they holed up while waiting for a chance to escape to Artsakh.

The Persians followed and "conducted bloodshed on the hill" to quote a local history. The nakharars were decimated, and, by order of the Catholicos Giut, a large martyria-church was built. Pieces of the columns from the structure have been found, while much of the rest was used to construct the 17th c Astvatatsin Church in the town center.

Fragments from this church are on display in the front portico of the Matenadaran in Yerevan, along with fragments and khachkars from 13th c Yeghegis.

Medieval Bridge The 13th century bridge was built in the Middle Ages, this bridge over the river Arpa consists of a single arch 16 meters in span. Unlike other medieval bridges of Armenia, its arch is pointed, a development of the Gothic Era which increases the height of the bridge in the middle.

Getnatun Winery, 11 Yerevan p, tel. 091-421796, 25565, Fax: 23792, URL: http://www.virtualarmenia.am/vayots_dzor/yeghegnadzor/factories/wineries/getnatun/sxema/site.htm, started as a cooperative and received assistance aid to convert itself into a viable business that sells premium wines and hosts wine tours and tastings.

The winery takes advantage of the unique soil in the area, its abundant sunshine, clean air and water to produce a specific type of wine that has begun winning international recognition and awards. It still has a long way to go to become as famous as France, but it has achieved so much in only 10 years, and has shown how small production services can benefit the local economy. The story of the winery and how it benefits local farmers can be found at http://www.eclof.org/index_UK.php?p=nh&idj=12&idArt=34#

MUSEUMS

Yeghegnadzor Regional Museum, 4 Shahumian p., tel. 23392, email: museum68@rambler.ru, URL: www.genesis.am/church/eng.htm, open 10-4, 500 AMD, has been recently renovated and has an easy to peruse series of displays on the history and folklore of the marz. The staff is very friendly. Displays include pottery, tools and weapons from the Bronze, Iron and medieval periods.

Yeghegnadzor Art Gallery, 1 Momiki p, tel. 22638, open 10-4, 500 AMD, has a small but well presented collection of art work from local and regional artists. The museum hosts the occasional exhibition. You may have to ask someone to search for the staff to open.

PARKS

Town Parks are pleasant to stroll through. The central park that runs from the highway is ill kept but the other, off of Ordzonikidze, has a grove of evergreens and is quieter.

AGARAKADZOR SPRINGS

Some 150 meters E from the main entry to town a R (S) road leads to Agarakadzor (sign-posted). Follow it across the Arpa and for another 2.5 km (through Agarakadzor village and beyond to just before a second bridge) to a large pool and the springs. The waters vary between hot and cold, though are mostly cold now. The springs are refreshing (bracing on a hot summer day) and good for bottling and taking with you on the road.

PRACTICALITIES

IN AND OUT AND AROUND

Minivan, Bus Daily buses/minivans connect Yeghegnadzor (Bus Stop at Highway) with Yerevan (Gordsaranaiyin Bus Stop, next to the Gordsaranaiyin Metro Stop: come up the escalator stairs and exit the metro using the right-hand doors. Walk down the street so the metro bridge is behind you. Cross the next street and continue to the large intersection, turning L. There should be minibuses and taxis by the street. Bus leaves 7-8 am, 1000 AMD). The bus from Vaik to Yerevan leaves Yeghegnadzor at 9 am. All north-south buses drive by the Yeghegnadzor bus stop and can be used to reach the town.

Regional Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) are caught in front of the Cinema Aragil, and connect Yeghegnadzor with Vernashen (100 AMD), Shatin (150 AMD), Yeghegis (150 AMD), Malishka (100

AMD), and Vaik (150 AMD). Other minivans connect with surrounding villages. Times and venues variable, ask.

Taxi Taxis are more expensive, but the most convenient way to travel (you decide when to go, and where). From Yerevan, taxis depart from behind "Kino Rossiya" at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi. Taxis charge around 15,000 AMD for up to 4 people. Call taxis are cheaper, charging by the km. There are a number of taxi services in town—all provide this service.

In town taxis proliferate in the center. Typical fare is 500 AMD anywhere in center, or 100 AMD per km plus extra to wait. Taxis are useful in traveling the area, but negotiate; they know the routes very well and that tourists can pay more. Offer them 100 AMD per km plus an extra 1000 AMD to wait 30-45 minutes. Local call taxis can be rung at 21111, 22121, 22111, 25556, and 24499.

Car Yeghegnadzor is next to the intersection of the (M10) and (M2). The (M10) connects Yeghegnadzor with Shatin (13 km), Yeghegis (19 km), Hermon (27 km), Karagiugh (21 km), Aghnjadzor (23 km), Selim Pass (39 km) and Martuni (64 km). The (M2) connects Yeghegnadzor with Areni (19 km), Noravank (21 km), Vaik (20 km), Hehr-Hehr (35 km), Gndevank (38 km), Jermuk (53 km), Zangezur gates/Siunik (49 km), Sissian (88 km), Goris (117 km), Yerevan (190 km).

Petrol and gas stations are on the highway at town.

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

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

Phone, telegraphs

Area code is 281
Long Distance: 0281 + local number
From abroad: + (374) 281 + local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093/094 Viva Cell

The town is covered by both Armentel (5 Shahumian) and VivaCell (Mikoyan p) mobile phone services. International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, Orjonokidze p. See [HayPost \(HyePost\) site for list \(www.haypost.am\)](http://www.haypost.am) The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards and can send telegraphs.

Internet

Arminco has an office at 3 Mikoyan p (tel. 22113) and sells dial up cards. Yeghegnadzor teacher's college has internet access; they might share.

Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks; ATMs and exchange at banks; exchange points will change money at competitive rates.

ACBA-Credit Agricole Bank, 37 Vardan Zoravar Narekatsi p

Ardshinvestbank, 3 Momik 1 Ajapniak

Unibank, 1/1 Narekatsi 13 Narekatsi

Shopping

There are *mterks* and kiosks throughout town, congregated on Yerevanian, Orjonokidze and Nzhdeh pts.

Film, etc.

A *Photo* shop can be found in the center and film in *mterks* in town. Batteries are unreliable for digital cameras, bring your own.

Pharmacy

Apotekas (Armenian: deghatuner) can be found in the center of town, one is on Orjonokidze, Nzhdeh, and Vaik pta.

Hospital, Polyclinic

For a medical emergency, dial 103. If possible go to Yerevan for medical service or ask at your lodging for recommendation.

Polyclinic, Shahumian p, tel: 22260

OVERNIGHT

HOTEL GLADZOR, 1 Momik p, tel. 25165, has clean basic rooms in its worn building. No hot water, but they will gladly heat some for you. Basic, basic, basic, but cheap at SGL/DBL/LUX at 3000/5000/6000 AMD.

GOHAR'S GUEST HOUSE, 44 Spendarian p, tel. 2-33-24 or 2-33-73, is a moderately priced guest house with comfortable digs. The price includes breakfast and is negotiable. The house is past the soccer field.

ANTOINE TERJANIAN GUEST HOUSE

FOOD & DRINK

The town has a couple of *CAFES* in the center, and *RESTAURANT/MOTELS* on the highway a few km outside of town.

There are food shops in town as well.

Near Yeghegnadzor

➡ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: *Gladzor* (pop.)

✚ VERNASHEN – GLADZOR – ARKAZI S. KHACH COMPLEX

The complex consists of three sites: Vernashen Village with the Gladzor University museum; Tanahat Vank, the location of Gladzor University, and the nearby Arkazi S. Khach monastery.

All three can be visited in an easy trip from Yeghegnadzor, and if you have a jeep, two others can be added for a half-day trip: Proshaberd and Spitakavor Astvatsatsin.

Taken together, these sites form the heart of 13th century Vayots Dzor's culture, with Gladzor becoming the leading educational institution in all Armenia; students from throughout the kingdom and as far as Cilicia (Kilikia) received their education at Gladzor, and passed their learning to others throughout the Near East and Byzantium.

➡ **From** --- to (DD 39.79251 x 45.36373, elev. 1479m)    

✚ **VERNASHEN / GLADZOR - ՎԵՐՆԱՇԵՆ / ՂԼԱՉՈՐ (Վերնաշեն / Գլաձոր)** ▲ The complex includes a museum dedicated to the 13th-14th cc university in the otherwise unremarkable village of Vernashen, and the actual site itself, some 6 km distant on the rolling uplands nearby.

Background Gladzor was founded, ironically, after Armenia lost its independence. Its rise, and flourishing, is due to the fortunes of the region's ruling family, the Orbelians, who, like their brethren the Khaghbakians (Proshians) of Kotaik, the Khachen of Artsakh, and others, made compact with the invaders and by way of accepting Mongol suzerainty managed to preserve autonomous rights and gain some independence and favorable conditions for the development of culture.

Gladzor, as a part of the "Siunik School" had been operating as a center of learning for some time when it was officially founded in 1282. Tanahat Vank, the location of the university, was founded sometime in the 9th-10th cc, on top of an older

monastery possibly from the 5th-6th cc. The Siunik School, as a type is first mentioned in the 7th c. By way of comparison, the oldest European university, Bologna, was founded in 1088, and the second, Paris, in 1208, its most famous college, the Sorbonne, in 1257.

Gladzor quickly became renowned for its erudite teachers and students, including its founder Nerses Mshetsi and the famous medieval rhetorician, philosopher and pedagogue Essaiyi Nchetsi. Its students included Siunik's Bishop and the historian Stepanos Orbelian, the philosopher Hovhannes Vorotnetsi, and the religious figure Hovhannes Erznkatsi-Tsortsoretsi.

Founded in the same period as the great universities of Europe, Gladzor was equally important in its role as an institution of scientific thought, education and as a cultural center, with a body of literary output that rivaled much larger institutions in Europe.

Gladzor attracted students from all over Armenia, and Kilikia. Stepanos Orbelian described Gladzor as a fountain-head of knowledge, leading all Armenian science. *"The schools were very far advanced there. They were very rich, and were like the Athenian schools of Greece and Rome"*.

Gladzor was a 7 to 8 year institution with its own charter, examination process and degree program like that taught in medieval universities in Europe. It had an auditorium and classrooms, required oral examinations, and conferred degrees in a graduation ceremony.

The university's program was classically liberal arts, with a focus on the *trivium* (Latin for "the three ways", or "the three roads"; the three subjects taught first: grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (Latin for "the four ways" or "the four roads; the four subjects, or arts, taught after the trivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).

The quadrivium was considered preparatory for the serious study of philosophy and theology, also taught at Gladzor. In addition, Gladzor required students to study mythology, and the arts: miniature painting, sculpture and manuscript production.

The university thrived, under the leadership of the abbot Esaiyi Nchetsi until his death in 1338, which,

coupled with the collapse of the Mongol empire collapsed and raids by the Turkish Kara-Koyunlu and Ak-Koyanlu, forced the institution to close.

Nchetsi's protégé, Hovhan Vorotnetsi, moved the university to the more remote and safer Tatev, establishing a second generation of educational brilliance in the country.

Miniatures One of the most enduring products of Gladzor University is the large number of manuscripts that survived, written and illuminated in the scriptorium of Gladzor, along with others in Siunik that are collectively called the "Gladzor School").

In particular, the miniature art that developed at Gladzor got much of its inspiration from local traditions, mythology and folklore hailing to the pre-Christian era. Found in local decorative arts, the images used in the paintings included local totemic figures, idolized natural forces and allegorical tales of good and evil; their depictions found in manuscript vignettes, headpieces and marginal miniatures. Tolerated by the church, these figures became symbols of the new faith and were fitted into the Christian ideology. One example is the proliferation of the mythical siren in this period, prolific in Siunik sculpture, miniatures and decorative arts. Gladzor manuscripts became known as works of art in their own times; artists added scenes, floral designs and embellishments throughout their texts.

The most famous Gladzor miniature artists were Toros Taronatsi, Avak and Momik, who was also a sculptor and architect, the designer of churches at Areni and Noravank.

➡ **From Gladzor village, continue N on the village road (H47) for about 500 m to VERNASHEN (DD 39.79251 x 45.36373, elev. 14799m)**    

✚ **VERNASHEN - ՎԵՐՆԱՇԵՆ (Վերնաշեն)** ▲ (old name was Srkoghovk, then till 1946 as Bashkend, pop. 1000) is due north of Yeghegnadzor, with the last arable lands in the long valley that stretches northwards from the Arpa River.



At the north end of the village (where a sign points the road to Spitakavor) on the left is 17th c S. Hakob church, built from large blocks of stones carved at an earlier date, possible 5th century. The church has been converted into the Museum of the Architect Momik (Gladzor University). The museum (1000 AMD) is open 10-4.

Outside the building there a renumber o carvings from the university, including some detailed cornices, khachkars and tombstones. A row of seven modern sculptures represent the 7 branches of medieval learning, the trivium and quadrivium (see background for details).



Inside, there is an exhibition illustrating the history and achievements of the university, using maps, photos, copies of manuscripts and a few original pieces.

Camping is possible near the village; **overnight** in Yeghegnadzor hotel or village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **food** at mterks and kiosk, or in Yeghegnadzor; **springs** in village.

➡ From Vernashen, continue N and then E on the same road (H47) for about 6 km through the rolling hills of summer grass to a L turn that takes you in about 500 meters to **TANAHAH VANK (GLADZOR)** (DD 39.78032 x 45.39915, elev. 1641m)  

 **TANAHAH VANK (GLADZOR) - ՏԱՆԱՀԱՏԻ ՎԱՆԿ (ԳԼԱԶՈՐ)**  is the location of actual university of Gladzor, the educational and cultural center of Armenia for 60 years.

The current site is a shadow of the great center of learning that stood on this windswept hill; all around you there was a huge complex of auditoria, classrooms, offices, scriptoriums, dormitories and rectories, as well as shrines, sculptural workshops, a library and an extensive graveyard. Devastated in the mid 14th c, the university never recovered, its teachers and curriculum moved to Tatev monastery in lower Siunik, and the only surviving structures the older, more strongly built Ss. N'shan (13th c) and Stepanos (1273).



Some of the **foundations** for the large complex have been excavated and are partially rebuilt, which helps to shows how the complex worked; buildings and rooms were close, connected by narrow alleys and paths. The larger rooms near to the churches include a chapel or church (paved with gravestones) and a couple of lecture halls.

Others are smaller. The dormitories and service buildings are further out.



The complex is filled with **khachkars** of all sizes and types; from the most elaborate lacelike carvings favored in the 13th c to rudimentary cross stones and what seem to be classroom exercises (sculpture was one of the universities required courses). A few of the stones seem very old, and eye-holes can be detected on the end of a couple of prone gravestones, suggesting the site might have once been a Bronze Age observatory.

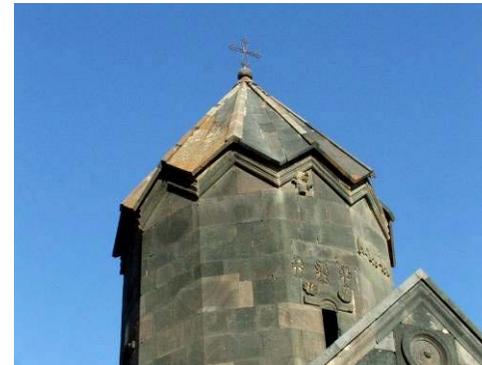
The smaller church, the basilica **S. N'shan**, appears to have been built over an older temple, its shape and size almost identical to the inner temple at Garni. The building is different in its carving out of the rectangular walls two narrow arched niches on the north and south walls to create a sort of inner cruciform. The church has a semicircular apse.



The entrance is marked with an arched frame made from quatrefoil and trefoil rows, over a carved scene of a horseman charging a wild animal with a spear in the foreground with a large peacock in flight to the right, and a sheep and two small birds in the background.



The wooden door has an impressive carving of a bishop's staff with dragon heads.



The larger **S. Stepanos** is well preserved, still boasting the emblems of its Proshian benefactors on the otherwise smooth walls of the ten-facet drum.

The church is named for the 8th century prelate S. Stepanos, one of the most important religious figures of the early Christian era.

A learned figure of the Armenian Church, Stepanos traveled to Rome, met the Byzantine Emperor and

was anointed prelate of Siunik at a time when the region was divided by petty bishops. He created three bishoprics in the region, completing the long-delayed conversion of the district.

In the history of Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Stepanos life, death and the destruction of the city of Moz are intertwined, with Arkazi S. Khach playing a featured role:

"After occupying the episcopacy for only a year, Stepanos was slain by a whore from Moz district. His body was taken to a chamber in Arkazi S. Khach, from which they laid it to rest in the monastery of Tanahat".

"Now a certain cenobite named Noah (Noy), saw a vision in which Step'annos' breast was covered with blood as he stood before the Savior, saying: "Behold this, Lord, for Your judgments are righteous". Notifying the cenobites in the district about the coming wrath, he admonished them to pray".

"Then behold, from On High an impenetrable darkness enveloped the borders of Moz, and the place shook for forty days. Ten thousand people were buried in the earthquake, for which reason the place was named Vayots' Dzor (Valley of Sighs), as it still is today".

"For those in pain, and those who are ill, there is much healing in Step'annos' relics, for those who seek the intercession of the blessed man. In this world God glorifies those who glorify Him, while in the next world, He gives them good things He has prepared, things "which eye has not seen, which ear has not heard, and which the heart of mankind has not experienced". (tr. R. Bedrosian)

The domed cruciform church has a rectangular exterior on the first floor, with niche buttressing on the side and back walls, and a bas relief frame on the western wall. The building is restrained to a fault, suggesting its purpose was other than a celebration of the donor's wealth; this was a scholastic center, focusing the mind on higher aims.

Camping is possible in the area, but better under the trees at Arkazi Vank, 1.5 km distant; **springs** at Arkazi Vank.

➡ From Tanahat Vank, return to the road (H47) and turn L (E), continuing for about 1.9 km to an intersection and a L (N) turn that takes you in another 1 km to **(Arkazi S. Khach Vank, DD 39.77961 x 45.42067, elev. 1645m)** 🏰 🗺

✳️ **ARKAZI S. KHACH VANK - ԱՐԿԱԶԻ Ս. ԽԱՉ ՎԱՆԿ** is a 13th century domed cruciform church that was completely rebuilt by locals in 1870-1871. The reconstruction was made with smooth gray basalt stone that was finely cut into uniform blocks, preserving the outline of the original domed cruciform church while modernizing the outside.

The effect is a little disturbing; the irregular tufa colors favored in the medieval period are replaced with a uniform color, cut and grade of stone, not at all what one expects of a major pilgrimage site said to have a piece of the true cross embedded in its old walls. The relic is said to have been given by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius to the wife of Prince Burtogh (Burtel) Orbelian, the 13th c “king” of Siunik.

This version of the legend is apocryphal (Heraclius as a 7th century emperor and the Orbelians are 13th c rulers) but the church remains a major pilgrimage destination based on the legend of the cross, and the annual Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Khachveratz).

Khachveratz is one of the five major feasts of the Armenian Church, based on the veneration of the cross in the 7th c. Persians had seized the cross when they conquered the city of Jerusalem. In 629, leading a coalition of forces (including Armenians), the Emperor Heraclius recaptured the cross and passed through Armenia with it where it was repeatedly raised up and venerated.

The Feast occurs every Sunday nearest September 14. The liturgy is marked with an “antastan” service (blessing of the fields) during which the processional cross is adorned with basil (a symbol of royalty) and the four corners of the church are blessed as a symbol for all the world.

The 13th century church was built over the remains of a 5th c church, and is associated with the death of the 8th c S. Stepanos, who was interred there shortly before being buried in a chamber in Tanahat Monastery.

The church is locked, but a nearby house has a key, and the occupants welcome visitors.

The **complex** also has two long rough **stone buildings** dating the reconstruction, one with a long wooden balustrade porch. The building opposite the church is almost in ruins, its metal roof barely held up over the collapsing stone walls. A small wooden cross over the entry marks this as a very special place, though, a **Tukh Manuk** that is likely the original worship space in the complex.

Camping is possible at the site; freshwater spring at the site.

➡ From Vernashen, take the L turn at the top of the village (signposted) onto a Jeep track that leads in 4 km from the north end of the village to just below **PROSHABERD (DD 39.82846 x 45.37182, elev. 2191m)** 🏰 🗺

✳️ **PROSHABERD - ՊՈՌՇԱԲԵՐԴ (Պոռշաբերդ)** ▲ (also Boloraberd) is located about 4 km north of Vernashen off a jeep track that takes off from the north end of the village. It is about 3 km east of Spitakavor S. Astvatsatsin. The fortress is on top of a small mountain that overlooks the entire region, and can be seen well before you reach it.

The history of the fortress is sketchy, although the walls show evidence of earlier structures dating to the Iron Age. The medieval history begins with the reconquest of the area in the late 12th century by the forces of the Georgian king led by the Zakarian brothers. As reward for services rendered in the field, the Zakarians granted to the Khaghbakian Family lands in Vayots Dzor. The Khaghbakians are more popularly known for a mercurial offspring, Prince Proshian, who gave them their nickname, the Proshians.

Forming alliances with the Orbelian Rulers of Siunik and kings of Georgia, the Proshians became landholders of vast lands, and put their wealth to good use; building churches, monasteries, castles and fortresses throughout the northern marz, in Gegharkunik, and Kotaiik.

At Vayots Dzor, Prosh commissioned the construction of Tanahat Vank (Gladzor), nearby Spitakavor and Proshaberd, or Boloraberd.

The fortress is by and large in good condition, with round towers and stretches of walls standing sentinel over the landscape. The view is wonderful, especially in late May or early June, when the area is blanketed with wildflowers and seas of windswept grass.

On the plateau to the west of the fortress there are series of steps, looking like holes. These may be part of the now lost Boloraberd Village, which thrived in the medieval era.

Camping is possible at the site; there is a spring about 2 km N/NE of the site, near some ruins.

➡ From Proshaberd, continue N on the jeep track for about 400 meters to next jeep track, where a L (SW) turn and another 1.5 km leads to **SPITAKAVOR (DD 39.83232 x 45.36974, elev. 2191m)** 🏰 🗺

✳️ **SPITAKAVOR ASTVATSATSIN - ՍՊԻՏԱԿԱՎՈՐ (Սպիտակավոր)** ▲ (“White Virgin”) is located within sight and across the river gorge from Proshaberd, but reached by following the gorge roads first N, then SW on another that meanders in 1.5 km to the monastery site.

There are traces of a small basilica, built on top of or incorporating the pre-Christian shrine that stood at the site. A convent of some kind is believed to have been formed in the 7th c, during the spread of convents like it throughout the kingdom.

The late medieval convent of Spitakavor S. Astvatsatsin is traced by inscriptions at the site to its founding in 1321 for the Proshians, who also commissioned the bell tower in 1330. It was one of the more important cultural, educational and religious centers of Vayots Dzor.

It apparently thrived past the end of the Proshian and Orbelian houses in the 1340s; when Turkish Kara-Koyunlu and Ak-Koyunlu tribes devastated the region following the collapse of the Mongol Empire. When Gladzor University closed in the 1340s, Spitakavor became the educational center for Vayots Dzor for quite a long time, led in the 2nd half of the 15th century by the famous philologist Vardapet Avakter, some of whose manuscripts survive.

The convent was abandoned in favor of safer places further to the south, though the church seems to have continued to celebrate the liturgy until the region was abandoned in 1604.

Timurid raids completely devastated the complex, destroying the gavit, pulling down defense walls and burning the service structures, none of which were rebuilt.

The **complex** is composed of foundations of an inner wall enclosing a small church faced by a now roofless gavit and the bell tower. Foundations of other buildings, khachkars and graves lay scattered around the main buildings. The gorge further divides the site into sections. At the very top of the hill are the remains of Boloraberd fortress.

The **church** was founded by Ye’achi Ishkhan and finished in 1321 for his son Amir Hassan. The church is more of a tower than a domed cruciform building, which is its type. It is built of polished white felsite stone. The small base is barely large enough to accommodate the tall cylinder of a drum and slender conical roof. Ironically, its narrow square and thick walls may have prevented it from being entirely destroyed during raids and earthquakes; the drum, dome and walls are so interconnected they create a monolithic structure in themselves.

The **interior** is a magnificent achievement of architecture, with one element flowing to the next in a harmonious whole rarely seen in 14th c churches. Semicircular apses are on both the east and west of the hall, with scoping above the arched windows north and south. The pendentives frame the narrow drum, its extreme height accentuating the sense of space in an otherwise very small building.

Interior carvings are very rich, including portraits of Jesus and the four evangelists.

Exterior walls are richly decorated with panels and geometric bas relief sculptures, so similar to those at Noravank some think they may have been done by the same masters.

One of the most interesting **carvings** is the large cross on the east wall with its curiously designed irregular and asymmetric arms which end with pentagonal stars.

The entrance to the church on the west side is beautifully framed with oriental patterns and bas relief columns and moldings. The **tympanum** is covered by a very important bas-relief portrait of Astvatsamair (Mother Mary), showing the Virgin and Child in a very lifelike pose; Mary inclining her head towards the baby Jesus, who does the same. The arch over the picture is made from rows of quatrefoils that create a stalactite effect and a perspective for the vignette below.

Another interesting carving depicts the Proshian rulers Ye'achi and Amir-Hassan II on the facade of the Church. A second shows Amir Hassan hunting.

Among the **inscriptions** at the church, one in particular mentions the purchase of a plot of land by an Armenians from a Jew, a surprising comment since European Jews were forbidden from owning property in the Middle Ages. This, coupled with the excavation of a number of Jewish cemeteries and inscriptions in Vayots Dzor, suggest they had found some tolerance in the Armenian lands of the time. The inscription described the plot of land as being a part of the village of Vernashen (then known as Srkoghovk), in the kingdom of Vayots Dzor.

The roofless **gavit** is attached to the church on its west side, with a unique three-story bell tower on its west side. The bell tower was built in 1330 for the couple Hovhannes and his wife Tanza.

The **courtyard** includes a number of ruined foundations for **monk cells** and other buildings.

Garegin Nzhdeh Grave Among the graves in the church yard is the final resting place for the Armenian Fedaiyi and resistance leader Garegin Nzhdeh (1886-1955). Born Garegin Ter-Harutiunian, the son of a village priest, in Nakhichevan, Nzhdeh joined the partisan forces fighting Turkish domination of western Armenia, becoming a leader in the Balkan Wars and WWI, where his tri'loops helped to drive Turks from western Armenia for the first time in 450 years.

Following the collapse of the Tsarist government and the invasion of Red Army, Nzhdeh took his forces to Siunik, where he successfully fought off Turkish, Azeri and Red Army forces trying to capture the territory. In 1921, he declared the region to be the Republic of Mountainous Armenia. He withdrew in July of the same year only when the Soviets promised to include Siunik in the

Republic of Armenia, foiling Stalin's and Ataturk's plan to create a land bridge between Turkey and Central Asia.

Nzhdeh escaped to Persia, finding his way to Germany in WWII where he tried to negotiate a plan to free all of historic Armenia from the Soviets and Turkey. He failed; captured by the Soviets and branded a traitor, he spent his last years in prison, dying there in 1955. In 1983 his ashes were secretly moved to Spitakavor from the Russian City of Vladimir.

Camping is possible at the site; **freshwater spring** at the site.

SHATIN NORTH ROUTE / Selim Pass:

➡ From Yeghegnadzor, go N on the Getap/Selim road (M10) past the first turnoff to Shatin (at about 9 km) to about 10.1 km and the second R (E) turnoff to the river gorge above **SHATIN** (DD 39.83061 x 45.29968, elev. 1251m)  

✚ **SHATIN - ՇԱՏԻՆ (Շատին)** ▲ (till 1935 Hasankend, pop. 750) is the location of an old village with an even older church, Shatinvank, which originated sometime in the pagan period before it was reconstructed as a church in the early 4th c., and then again later in the 5th-13th centuries. The village also has the remains of a once substantial Berdakar fortress, a bridge and a shrine.

Shativank

(DD 39.8347 x 45.31024, elev. 1612m) The vank is located off the gorge about 4 km from the village, at the end of a dirt road that takes off from the cemetery across the river at the far end of the village.

The current site is a 17th c reconstruction of a monastery officially founded in 929 (but which itself was an expansion of earlier structures at the site). The 10th c founding is credited to the House of Siunik; Prince Smbat and his wife Sophie. The name Shativank was for the monk Shatik Menakiats (“menakiats” means reclusive, or hermit), a leader of the early community.

The monastery was reconstructed during the last Persian era of domination—a 150 year reprieve for the country which just suffered through 150 years of savage warfare between Persia and Turkey for control of the strategic Southern Caucasus highlands—the monastery benefited from super-power exhaustion and a slowly growing economy. As villages began the long period of resettlement by Armenian émigrés, the trade routes reopened and churches were rebuilt.

It was initiated by a rich merchant from the Persian Armenian city of Jugha (of Nor Jugha Khachkar fame). The new complexes were small, the population and income insufficient to build anything more than a walled compound, a church, belfry, and service buildings. And relatively few of the hundreds of churches and monasteries in the country were rebuilt, Shativank being one of the

chosen few, along with Tatev, Harichavank, Khor Virap and Mughni.

The reconstruction retained much of the older structures, repairing and adding as the times suited.

Shativank did not survive the new revival; it was destroyed during Persian raids in the late 18th c, and earthquakes and Soviet neglect partially ruined the vank in the 20th c.

Villagers intend to restore the vank, which I hope will not mean the usual plastic-marble-tiled-white-washed-wonders I find in other villages doing the same. There is a dignity to these ancient churches that are often ignored in the rush to create new Taj Mahals for local new-rich tastes. One hopes Shatinvank’s noble character will escape the poured concrete fate of others.

Complex

The complex includes some substantial defensive walls, S. Sion basilica, khachkars, monk quarters, a grain silo and waterworks. Excavations of the site and its surroundings uncovered 15th-16th cc items made from iron, glazed ceramic, faience glass—even a heating system.

The large **fortifications** are built from the rubble of pervious structures, many fragments of which can still be seen in the walls. Much of the stone is well cut and fitted, a sign of careful planning; these were not hastily put up. The ramparts on the S end are particularly well fitted; the round tower in particular is a beautifully laid section of the fortress.

The small **S. Sion** is a 1655 reconstruction of the earlier 5th-7th cc basilica, which bears signs of a pre-Christian life in the foundations and layout of the plan. The church preserves its walls and roof, and boasts a section of a gavit that stood at the west end of the building.

The triple-nave church has a small aperture in the center of the hall roof, topped with a roofed open air chimney. There are two entries; west and south, both walls for which appear to have had some kind of gallery, perhaps from the 10th c structure. The altar walls include bas relief sculptures underneath each of which are written in black Armenian grapar: “Vernatuneh” and “Karengetseh” which can be translated to mean “A stone fallen from the Upper Room”.

Other than some frame molding and a few details, the church is unadorned; wall paintings were the extent of the decoration from the 17th c, which must have been quite nice; the fragments that remains show oriental style favored of the Persian court: multi-colored lines, geometric patterns and flourishes of grape and flower vines.

The two-story **monk quarters** ran along the walls, and generally ring the sides of the complex. They included offices, a dining and meeting hall, cells, and kitchen. Other structures of the periods included a watermill, spring and grain silos. Those in the SE corner are in the best condition.

To the NW are the remains of a **grain silo**, a once substantial structure suggesting the size of the community, which received its grains from nearby villages as a form of tithing.

Khachkars in the area are from the various periods of the vank’s use, with a few embedded in the ground looking to be very old. Those from the 17th century are rather easy to spot—they show the “Persian” floral, animal and vegetal imagery then popular in the country.

SE of the walled compound are the substantial remains of a fortified **water tunnel** and clay pipe that ran for 3 km to bring drinking water to the community. Its existence from the medieval period and renovation demonstrates how precariously existence was felt by the community; even during the “peaceful days” of the 17th-18th cc.

Tsatur bridge (ca. 1666), which connects the monastery with the north bank of the river, has an inscription that mentions 90 members of the monastery community; quite large for the time.

Other sites

About 2 km S of Shatinvank, on top of a mountain and reached only by foot from Shativank or more easily by a jeep track from Spitakavor, are the remains of the 5th century **Berdakar Fortress**.

The village has a **shrine** S, and to the NE junction of the roads to Artabuink (old Yeghegis) and Yeghegis (old Alayaz), where the half-ruins of a church at old Hostun, once a suburb of Medieval Yeghegis before it was destroyed by earthquakes.

Hostun

Hostun (Vostink) village was mentioned long ago in chronicles along with the 10th c Vostik Monastery. The site is 4 km west of Yeghegis historical site on the right bank of the Yeghegis River.

The old village is very close to the ruins of historic Yeghegis and probably adjoined that city. Village remains include the church and two small cemeteries. The **church** was reconstructed in 17th-18th cc in three-nave basilica style. It has 4 columns supporting the arching, a semicircular apse on the eastern side flanked by two annexes with altars. The entry is on the south.

The church was built of rough stone, using mortar. The interior walls have blocks and fragments of stone from the older church, including cemetery stones and ornamented khachkars, one of which is dated 1251. The church is half ruined.

Camping is possible near the village; overnight in village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); freshwater spring at the site.

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: Hors (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: Karaglukh (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: Taratumb (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: Aghnjadzor (pop.) **at the southern foot of the mountain pass, near the village of Lernantsk (Aghdenk). It belongs to the type of single-nave caravanserais and is also built of basalt. The foundation date is unknown. A not very big hall (7.8 x 10.8 m) is covered with a cylindrical vault built on 6 supporting arches.**

➡ From --- to (DD 39.94945 x 45.23624, elev. 2353m) 🏠 🗺️ 📶

✂️ **SELIM PASS / CARAVANSERAI - ՍԵԼԻՄԻ ԼԵՐՆԱՆՑԵ / ԿԱՐԱՎԱՆՍԵՐԱՅ (Սելիմի Լեռնանցք / Կարավանսերայ)** ▲ sits at the side of the old caravan road (under an asphalt pin curve) about 1 km from the summit of Selim Pass (2410m). It is easily reached via the (M10), about 35 km N of Yeghegnadzor.

The caravanserai can be more prosaically described as a motel for camels and their riders; overnight spots on the long Silk Road that plied Central Asia, the Caucasus and Anatolia on their way to Persia and Europe. Laden with silk and spice, the caravans from Asia traded their burdens in Europe for western goods destined for the east.

Often mistakenly called *the* Silk Road, in fact there were dozens of routes connecting China with the west, most by land, but some by sea; favored or avoided according to destination and the vagaries of the times.

Just about every large town in Armenia had a caravanserai (or two), and there are a number that still survive, at: Lernantsk (just 12 km S, in the village of Aghnjadzor), Aruch, Dvin, Jrapi, Ijevan, Kotrats, and Arakelots Vank, to name a few. But none are as well preserved (reconstructed) as the one before you.

The caravanserai is quite late in Armenia's history; inscriptions on the right wall inside the doorway attribute its construction in 1332 to Prince Orbelian Chesar and his brothers, during the reign of Abu Said Bahadar Khan, "ruler of the world". Abu Said (sometimes referred to as Busayyid Khan by Arab writers) is considered the last enlightened ruler of the Mongol Empire; his death in 1335 ended the Ilkhan khanate.

The following 9 years of internecine warfare produced no less than 8 khans, each of which was shortly deposed and murdered. The invasions in Armenia intensified, and the requirement they wear a blue badge to mark them as non-Muslims, made easier the plundering of the country by Mongol and Turkic tribes who spent the next 300 years fighting over the Caucasus.

A barely legible Persian inscription on the door lintel suggests an earlier version of the inn. It

gives the dates 1326-1327. This shows that the Orbelians were not responsible for the original construction, but its renovation, or the addition of the sumptuous entrance, preserving the original lintel in the process.

Excavations point to an earlier structure in the 13th century, when the main hall was built. The second period is dated to the Orbelian construction of two small rooms. It is likely that an even older caravanserai would have been at the site; caravans through this area go back to the 1st c BCE, when Rome took an interest in the strategic area.

The complete Orbelian inscription reads:

"In the name of the Almighty and powerful God, in the year 1332, in the world-rule of Busayyid Khan, I Chesar son of Prince of Princes Liparit and my mother Ana, grandson of Ivaneh, and my brothers, handsome as lions, the princes Burtel (Burtegh), Smbat and Elikom of the Orbelian nation, and my wife Khorishah daughter of Vardan [and ...] of the Senikarimans, built this spiritual house with our own funds for the salvation of our souls and those of our parents and brothers reposing in Christ, and of my living brothers and sons Sargis, Hovhannes the priest, Kurd and Vardan. We beseech you, passers-by, remember us in Christ. The beginning of the house {took place} in the high-priesthood of Yesai, and the end, thanks to his prayers, in the year 1332.

Note: Prince of Princes Liparit is the grandson of the sponsor of S. Karapet in Noravank. Burtel commissioned the tall Astvatsatsin (Burtelashen) at Noravank, and Elikom is the great grandson of the last free Orbelian Ruler, Elikum, who was forced to make compact with the Mongols in 1238.

Destroyed in the Timurid and later invasions, the caravanserai was renovated in between 1956-1959 to its present state.

The building The inn is built from basalt, laid out on an east-west axis. The structure consists of two buildings that adjoin each other; an entry hall on the E end and a long hall (13.0 x 26.0 m) divided into three aisles by squat pillars supporting the roof arching. There are three air holes at the top, allowing some light, but mostly the escape of odor and smoke from the room. The space between the pillars is made into as long feed

trough with a water trough in one of the corners. The western end was divided into rooms for caravan leaders.

The room served two purposes; protecting animals from inclement weather and as a preventive against night-time thievery.

The entry room (5.35 x 9.0 m) is also vaulted, with three sets of support arches that end at window casings on the E and half columns on the W walls. The Orbelian inscription is on the wall opposite the entrance, the E wall. The room is decorated with quatrefoil (Stalactite) carvings over two niches, once painted in red.

The southern entry is lavishly decorated with quatrefoils (stalactites) over the entryway, and a half-round lintel with a Persian inscription. The two bad-relief carvings are emblems of the Orbelian family; a winged animal (siren) and a bull.

To the east of the caravanserai is a large half buried vaulted chapel.

Camping (cold nights) is possible near the site or above the pass; overnight in Aghnjadzor, 16 km S (rustic: 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); freshwater **spring** at the site.

SHATIN NORTHEAST ROUTE:

➡ From --- to (DD 39.86569 x 45.32705, elev. 1493m)   

✂ **ARTABUINK (YEGHEGIS) - ԱՐՏԱԲՈՒՅԼԿ (ԵՂԵԳԻՍ) - (Արտաբոյնկ / Եղեգիս)** ▲ (till 1946 Erdapin, then Yeghegis, from 1994 Artabuink, pop. 700) was refounded in 1830 by settlers from Khoi region in western Armenia. The small village straddles a tributary to the Yeghegis River, and is hemmed in by two mountain ridges,

The village has two exceptional sites; not least because the trips there take in stunning views of the landscape, part of which are the two sites themselves, nestled in the mountains.

Tsakhatskar Monastery (DD 39.89033 x 45.35416, elev. 2052m), is reached by taking a R turn across the river about 1 km N of the village, then follow it another 1 km or so to a L fork that leads sharply uphill onto a large sloping meadow, at the top of which is the beautiful complex. As you wend your way up, behind you will see the outline of the massive Smbataberd behind you.

Tsakhatskar consists of three parts, dominated by their respective buildings: S. Hovhannes mausoleum church, S. Karapet church, and a collection of dining halls, monk quarters, assembly rooms and service buildings, decorated with magnificent khachkars. If you choose to hike to the vank and take the shortest (steepest) path after reaching the large meadow, you will pass through a large cemetery just under the vank, with a wonderful collection of tumbled down khachkars.

The view, and the vank's place in it, cannot be overstated; it is a perfect example of design complementing its environment; from the way the buildings are placed below the top ridge, to their blending into the natural surroundings, whether under a blanket of snow or surrounded (and covered) with wildflowers.

According to the 13th c Orbelian historian Stepanos, the vank was built in the 5th c as a burial church for martyrs of that century's war against the Sassanids (the Battle of Avarair in 451 being a pivotal event in rallying Armenian resistance). The vank was rebuilt during the reign of King Abbas I Bagratuni (930-950) by a certain Stepanos, bishop.

Its current buildings are from the late 10th-early 11th cc (depending on who tells the history). The farthest east building is the **Mausoleum Church** (S. Hovhannes) faced with giant khachkars on its western façade. The building, dating to 939 in some accounts, was either rebuilt or renovated at the same time as the nearby S. Karapet (ca. 1041). The small chapel is beautifully adorned with two great khachkars and a now-walled giant window with double arch. The two story entry room leads to a narrow single-story hall, which is the original site for the grave monument.

The domed cruciform church is **S. Karapet** ("the forerunner" or John the Baptist) attributed to Abbot Vartik. The domes cruciform church has four annexes in its corners, and is highly decorated with carvings, inside and out. The altar apron has a series of vases on its frontispiece, much like that at the 5th c Ptghni cathedral, which may show the carvings' age. The dome is supported by pendentives (spherical triangles).

The exterior walls have niche buttressing, with elaborately carved top arches. The wall carvings include a number of emblems, some of which identify donors, or which may be family crests of the fallen in the 5th c war. They include grapes and pomegranates over the S doorway, and eagle holding a lamb in its claws (the Proshians), and a lion and bull in combat (the Orbelians and Bagratunis). The eastern window framing is especially elaborate.

Further west there are several buildings, including an impressive **hall** with side niches (the east end roofing is preserved) and foundations for other buildings, including an adjoining vaulted hall, a small gavit-like structure, monk cells and other service buildings. In the area just W of the large hall, among the stones and khachkars, there is a large stone bath tub.

Smbataberd (DD 39.87250 x 45.339, 1825m) is on the mountain ridge immediately S of Tsakhatskar. It is reached by backtracking to the bottom of the mountain, and starting back to the river, taking the L dirt path (Jeeps) that leads in winding way to the base of the magnificent fortress.

The 9th c fortress straddles the ridge between Artabuink (old Yeghegis) and Yeghegis (old Alayaz) villages on an impenetrable spot. The location was

so perfectly placed (a buried water pipe carried water from the monastery to the fortress, some 2 km away), no invader was able to penetrate the keep; it is said only when invading forces used a thirsty horse to sniff out the buried pipe that they were able to force the occupiers to surrender.

The long stretch of surviving walls are mostly on the northern end, and they are substantial; with a series of round towers jutting from the thick walls of cyclopic smooth stone. The entire top of the ridge was surrounded by the walls; enough space for hundreds of inhabitants, and there is a citadel at the very peak, a large castle that was reserved for the powers-that-were.

Camping is possible near the village: overnight in village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); freshwater spring in the village.

➡ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Hortabegh** (pop.)

➡ From --- to (DD 39.8719 x 45.35214, elev. 1544m)   

✂ **YEGHEGIS (ALAYAZ) - ԵՂԵԳԻՍ (ԱԼԱՅԱԶ) (Եղեգիս / Ալայազ)** ▲ (until 1994 Alayaz, pop. 500) is located on the Yeghegis River, and, befitting one of Armenia's richest medieval cities, is full of sites, including the impressive Zorats Church, S Karapet, khachkars and the 12th-13th cc Jewish cemetery.

The medieval city was the Proshian (Khaghbakian) capital in the 13th-14th cc, destroyed by earthquakes and raids. By the 15th c, the Proshians were a spent force, and the entire valley was emptied during the 1604 forced migration of the country to Persia. Nomadic Turks moved in during the ensuing centuries, and by the 1988 conflict with Azerbaijan, the village was mostly populated by Azeris. When the population changed at the start of the Karabakh conflict, refugees from Sumgait renamed it Yeghegis after its original name.

As you approach the village, at the intersection with the road to Artabuink, on your right is the remains of medieval **Hostun**, a suburb of old Yeghegis and also destroyed by earthquake. The

ruins are scant; villagers having centuries ago reused the suburb's stone for other projects.

On entering the village, you pass two monuments. The one on the right is the covered 12th-13th century **great khachkar**, encased with a peak roof. The khachkar is faded, but the top frieze, showing an enthroned Christ flanked by two saints.

Another **khachkar** is on the left, opposite the stone mill.

Inside the village, near a mterk shop, there is a **walled yard** with gravestones and khachkars commemorating the Orbelian family. Two khachkars standing side-by-side are topped with a sort of elaborate tympanum, which may have come from its use in a now missing church. The carvings are dated 12th-14th cc.

Taking a left in the village (ask), the narrow road leads to the ancient **Astvatsatsin** basilica (DD 39.87220 x 45.35929, elev. 1599m), rebuilt in 1703. The triple-nave church was rebuilt using a variety of stone blocks from various ages. Above the western door, a window casing with quatrefoil arching frames an old khachkar. The archway over the door is also made from quatrefoil carvings, with two crowned sirens on either side of the arch.

The siren was popular in the medieval period in Vayots Dzor, and the crowned figures may symbolize royalty; above and behind each figure are what look like staffs or branches of a tree of life.

The hall has thick, strong arches to support the roof and divide the hall into three aisles. The central ends at the semicircular apse, which is flanked by annexes in each of the eastern corners.

Continuing on, the roads lead to 13th c **S. Karapet** (DD 39.87303 x 45.36314, elev. 1575m), a well preserved domed cruciform church. The small building is fronted with a collection of **khachkars** and **tomb stones**, some very old. A half buried khachkar facing the entry to the yard has the Armenian letters "Թ Վ Չ Ծ" ("in the year 750"), dating it to the year 1301 in our calendar. One in particular stands out for its dating. Written in large Armenian letters in the corner spaces between the cross wings are "Թ Վ Ղ Ը" ("in the year 98") which places the cross in the year 699 in

our calendar. Others are dated to 1301, 1381, 1325, 1342, 1345 and 1349.

The small **church** is beautifully proportioned, with a smooth round drum topping the square hall. The corners that support the dome are fronted by columns with large capitals. Other than the carving above the eastern window casing and the smooth capitals, the church is basically unadorned.

The southern side has a **sepulchre** with a flat white marble tombstone. Inscriptions attribute the building to Nerses Nahatak.

Zorats Yekeghetsi (DD 39.8717 x 45.36465, elev. 1635m) is east of the village, on a hill overlooking the river. Recent excavations have uncovered a number of foundations from the early medieval times, when the monastery was established. They include well preserved walls and window casings.

A number of **rough tomb stones** lie on the ground in front of the church, and they are quite revealing; each bears a carefully carved eye hole at one end. These were Bronze Age standing stones that, when positioned in the cromlech they came from, allowed the observer to scan the night sky for phenomenon (star and solar positions, the changing seasons, orbiting planets, etc.). The stones suggest this is a very old worship site.

Other stones are from later periods, including several nicely carved khachkars. The church was dedicated in 1303 by a grandson of Prince Tarsaiyich Orbelian, whose castle was in Areni. It was extensively renovated in the 20th c with ongoing excavations in the surrounding area.

Zorats is completely unique in Armenian churches, there are no surviving structures like it in the country. There is no indoor hall; the only roofed spaces are the eastern altar apse and its flanking annexes, all of which are open to the large western yard. And the altar is raised more than usual.

The reason is simple: the church was dedicated so that warriors sitting on their horses could receive the sacrament and the blessing of the church before going to battle. The blessing of troops and their horses before battle were commonplace, but no other church in Armenia was built exactly for that purpose, and with the idea of brining both steed and soldier into the "church".

The village center has the scant remains of an ancient **Katoghkeh**, dating to the 10th c, but bearing marks of being made from an older building.

Down in the river bed, and reached by backtracking to the village center and taking a lower road to a parking spot that crossed a bridge to the S bank, is the **Yeghegis Jewish cemetery** (DD 39.86917 x 45.36237, elev. 1491m). The 13th-14th cc graveyard consists of over 60 stones that have been carefully excavated and their inscriptions recorded. The gravestones resemble fallen columns, with finely carved Hebraic inscriptions on their long sides.

The inscriptions include quotations from the Bible and various Hebrew names. "Niftar baba dar David behodesh Tamuz shnat aleph-taf-resh - dokhran tav lenichot nafshata" reads one inscription, which in Aramaic wishes the deceased "good memory and rest for the soul." In another, a father mourns his young son and expresses his belief in the eternity of the soul, citing passages from Isaiah's prophecy on the resurrection of the dead. On a third tombstone there is a blessing of Aaron the priest from the Temple, in beautiful Hebrew.

One of the most beautiful inscriptions is dated the 18th of Tishrei of the common era year 1266, dedicated to the memory of "the virgin maiden, the affianced Esther, daughter of Michael. May her portion be with our matriarch Sar[ah]..." The opposite side quotes "Grace is a lie and beauty is vanity" from Proverbs 31:20 of the Hebrew scriptures and continues with a statement that Esther was "God-fearing". This stone was found in the bank of the nearby flour mill.

(for more about the stones, see <http://www.jewishgen.org/cemetery/mem/armenia.html>).

The gravestones date from the mid-thirteenth century to 1337, the same period that Yeghegis was at its zenith. The actual dates on the stones use a system devised in the Seleucid era, which began in 312/311 BCE, when Seleucus, one of Alexander the Great's generals, seized Babylon and established the Seleucid dynasty. This system of dating is still used by the Jews of Yemen.

These stones are the first physical proof that there was a Jewish community in medieval Armenia, and

a seemingly prosperous one. An inscription found at nearby Spitakavor Astvatsatsin describes the sale of a plot of land from a Jew to an Armenian—completely surprising considering Jews were forbidden from owning land throughout the medieval period. The stones and inscription suggest that this community may have found some tolerance and peace in the Orbelian domains.

Some of the stones from the cemetery—along with Armenian khachkars—were reused as foundation stones for a nearby foot bridge and as a floor for a water mill. The rest are well preserved, in an open area with foundations of a walled area and in a nearby grove of trees.

Continuing upriver, you will pass a couple of good **camping** spots, and some small **mineral water springs**.

The village has a number of small **shrines**, **ruins** and **khachkars** scattered around. Among the later, a group of four richly decorated stones close to the road, carved by Mkhitar Aplik Margareh in the mid 13th c.

NE of the village in a remote spot are the ruins of the 13th c **Giulum Bulaghi Vank**.

Very friendly villagers are happy to show you around. The village can be reached by taxi at 2500 AMD from Yeghegnadzor, or 350 AMD using a regional minivan.

Camping near the village (good spots on the river near the Jewish cemetery); **overnight in village home** (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **freshwater spring in the village & mineral springs on the riverbed**.

SIDE TRIP: **Arates** (pop.)

➔ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Vardahovit** (pop.)

➔ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Getivank/Koturvank** (pop.)

➔ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Goghtanik** (pop.)

➔ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **East Road to Hehr-Hehr Vaik**

➔ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Hermon** (pop.)

➔ From --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Kalasar** (pop.)

➔ From --- to (DD)

YEGHEGNADZOR to VAIK ROUTE:

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Agarakadzor** (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to **ARCHERI CAVE** (approx. DD 39.68781 x 45.33282, elev. 1660m)  

✳ **ARCHERI CAVE - ԱՐՃԵՐԻ ԶԱՐԵՆՁԱԿ (Արճերի քարանձավ)** ▲ (Bear Cave) is located south of Yeghegnadzor and Agarakadzor on a stiff mountain trail. The entrance is not easy to find; a guide is required to locate the site, as well as to visit—the cave has blind alleys with sections that have not yet been mapped.

The entrance is located 1660 meters above sea level, and the cave is more than 3 kilometers deep (about 3300 m with a vertical extent of 145 m (-95 m, +50 m).

Formed by thousands of years of calcite deposits dripping from ground water, the formations and varieties of colors are stunning. The water that is dripping now to form these formations is probably more than a hundred years old, filtering from the top of the mountain through layers of granite, slag and tufa to the cavern chamber.

The formations glow under light; some pure white, others as translucent as smoky glass, still others gold and red in color.

If you are a serious spelunker, this is one of the main destinations for you in Armenia, along with the bat colony at Magili and Mozrov Cave. Both are nearby.

Practical The cave has a constant temperature of +9°C so dress warm. Use sturdy boots, a hardhat with light, and a flashlight.

Guides are necessary to visit this cave. See [Adventure Tour Operators](#) (p. 2) for a list, or contact the Speleological Center (tel. 010-550986, URL: www.armenius.com/speleo/).

Camping is possible near the site; **overnight** in nearby village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); freshwater **spring** in the gorge.

➡ **From** --- to **MALISHKA** (DD 39.73457 x 45.39199, elev. 1177m)    

✳ **MALISHKA/MOZ - ՄԱԼԻՇԿԱ / ՄՈՁ (Մալիշկա / Մոզ)** ▲ (pop. 3000) is still famous for being the largest village in Armenia, though half the population is now in Russia working. Returning every 6 months or so, they maintain the tradition.

The village has a new church, donated by a very wealthy Russian-Armenian oligarch, and, to the W, the tumbled remains of the earliest recorded settlement in Vayots Dzor, **Moz**.

Founded in the Bronze Age, the settlement benefited by its location on the river, and what was then a rich natural area.

A regional capital in the early Christian era, Moz is mentioned in the chronicles of S. Stepanos, an early Christian martyr and patron saint of a church at Tanahat Vank (see [S. Stepanos](#) on p. 15). The city disappeared during the Vayots Sar volcanic eruption and earthquake in the 8th c, replaced by Yeghegnadzor and Yeghegis.

The site includes bare remains of its once teeming self; there is a Bronze Age burial ground, an early fort and a church from the 7th c.

Excavations have uncovered a number of artifacts from the city's heyday, including khachkars, medieval glass, pendants and rings. They are on display at the Yeghegnadzor museum.

Other sites in the Malishka region include a 13th-15th cc Ghaluchai fort 2 km SE and the Bronze Age-Medieval Soliani fortress in Doshalti.

Camping is possible near the village; **overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); food at roadside stand or café; freshwater **spring** in the village.

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Zedea** (pop.)

➡ From Artashat City. Take the R fork for about 1.5 km to the car park for **VAIK** (DD 39.691296 x 45.437343, elev. 1243m) 🏠



✚ **VAIK** - ՎԱԻԿ (Վայկ) ▲ (originally Soylan, from 1956-1994 Azizbekov, pop. 2250) is on the highway between Yeghegnadzor and Jermuk, on the left bank of the Arpa River.

The Soviet name was for one of the few ethnic Azeris members of the 26 Baku commissars, old style Bolsheviks who were the vanguard of the Red Army's invasion of the region. The commune was led by Stepan Shahumian until July 26, 1918 when the Bolsheviks were forced out of power by a coalition of Dashnaks and Mensheviks.

After their overthrow, the commissars attempted to escape but were captured by the White Army and placed in a Baku prison. On September 14, Red Army soldiers broke into the prison and freed the commissars who then boarded a ship to Krasnovodsk, where they were promptly arrested, and on the night of September 20, 1918 executed by a firing squad between the stations of Pereval and Akhcha-Kuyma in Turkmenistan.

NAVIGATING THE TOWN

Vaik is very easy to navigate; there are two streets running east and west, the main being the highway, which is where all services and shops are located. The bus stop, shuka, post office and town offices are in the center, on either side of the main square, which is widening in the highway.

SIGHTS

On the west edge of the town there is the new **S. T'rdat church**. The domed cruciform type is made from white basalt with two bell towers in front. The construction was paid for by a local who struck it rich in Russia.

Paskevich Bridge About 1 km E of town, in a gorge on the left there is a **medieval bridge** rebuilt by General Paskevich in 1827. The bridge is lodged between two large boulders, under which there is a shallow pool popular with youngsters.

OTHER

Arpi Mineral Water Plant, Vaik, is notoriously famous for being the source of water slapped with a recall order by the USA's Food and Drug Administration. The recall was due to exported water having excessive amounts of arsenic. The water is sold under the Jermuk label, which calls to question why water labeled coming from the springs in Jermuk is actually coming from Vaik Armenia?

As a follow up, Jermuk denied anything was wrong and refused to change their bottling methods or the water, enlisting their friends in the Armenian government to cry foul and accuse the USA of picking on little ole Armenia. As if. Best to avoid Jermuk water until they pass a round of tests. Arsenic in the water? Yikes!

PRACTICALITIES

IN AND OUT AND AROUND

Minivan, Bus Daily buses/minivans connect Vaik (Bus Stop at the main square) with Yerevan (Gordsaranaiyin Bus Stop, next to the Gordsaranaiyin Metro Stop: come up the escalator stairs and exit the metro using the right-hand doors. Walk down the street so the metro bridge is behind you. Cross the next street and continue to the large intersection, turning L. There should be minibuses and taxis by the street. Bus leaves 7-8 am, 1200 AMD). The bus from Vaik to Yerevan leaves at 8 am. All north-south buses drive through Vaik bus stop and can be used to reach the town.

Regional Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) are caught at the bus stop on the town square, and connect Vaik with Yeghegnadzor (100 AMD), Malishka (100 AMD), and Jermuk (300 AMD). Other minivans connect with surrounding villages. Times and venues variable, ask.

Taxi Taxis are more expensive, but the most convenient way to travel (you decide when to go, and where). From Yerevan, taxis depart from behind "Kino Rossiya" at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi. Taxis charge around 15,000 AMD for up to 4 people. Call taxis are cheaper, charging by the km. There are a number of taxi services in town—all provide this service.

In town taxis are in the center. Typical fare is 500 AMD anywhere in town, or 100 AMD per km

plus extra to wait. Taxis are useful in traveling the area, but negotiate; they know the routes very well and that tourists can pay more. Offer them 100 AMD per km plus an extra 1000 AMD to wait 30-45 minutes. Call taxis are at 22210, 22227, and 21107.

Car Vaik is on the (M2), between Yeghegnadzor and the turnoff for Jermuk. The (M2) connects Vaik with Yeghegnadzor (20 km), Hehr-Hehr (16 km), Gndevank (18 km), Jermuk (33 km), Zangezur gates/Siunik (29 km), Sissian (68 km), Goris (97 km), Kapan (164 km).

Petrol and gas stations are on the highway inside town.

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

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

Phone, telegraphs

Area code is 282
Long Distance: 0282 + local number
From abroad: + (374) 282 + local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093/094 Viva Cell

The town is covered by both Armentel (12 Jermuk Hwy) and VivaCell mobile phone services. International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, Central Square. [See HayPost \(HyePost\) site for list \(www.haypost.am\)](#) The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards and can send telegraphs.

Bank, Exchange

Money exchange points are in the center.

Shopping

There are *mterks* and kiosks throughout town, congregated in the center. The shuka is in the center.

Film, etc.

A *Photo* shop can be found in the center and film bought at *mterks* in town. Batteries are unreliable for digital cameras, bring your own.

Pharmacy

Apotekas (Armenian: deghatuner) can be found in the center of town.

Hospital, Polyclinic

For a medical emergency, dial 103. If possible go to Yerevan for medical service or ask at your lodging for recommendation.

A *Polyclinic* is in the center

OVERNIGHT

Vaik has a surprising variety of overnight venues for such a small rundown town (no don't due to local trade from the Military Base). The prices are quite reasonable, and Vaik's central location in makes it worth considering for an overnight, especially if you want to explore the southern rim and the mountain passes to Hehr-Hehr.

MARIA, 3 Arshavir Melikian p, tel. 23209, 093-994479, is a restaurant-hotel (read: tête-à-tête central) with 7 rooms with heating, hot water and satellite TV. Despite its main focus, it is anxious to attract tourists and has a restaurant, café, and sauna. Not badly priced with SGL/DBL/LUX at 8000/8000/10,000 AMD. Breakfast not included.

PAPU'S MOTEL/RESTAURANT, Yeghegnadzor Highway (M2), next to Café and S. T'rdat Church, tel. 21610, 091-995889, has 2 rooms in its castle tower of a guest house, restaurant and lodge. The building overlooks the river gorge and Papu, the owner and main chef, cooks tasty food. Ask him for his Kashem soup; it is one of the best dishes I have ever had in Armenia. DBL at 8000 AMD, and they can fit a third in on a couch.

VARTANANK HOTEL, 79 Jermuk Cross roads, el. 21433, 21764, is used mostly for tête-à-têtes by locals, but they are eager to host tourists. The small hotel has 3 rooms for rent with heating, TV set, telephone. Rooms (DBL) at 2000-5000 AMD.

Vorskan, Vaik-Goris Hwy, 5th km, tel. 093-029602, 093-720071, has 5 rooms with hot water, heating, satellite TV, and sitting room with DBL/QUAD at 8000/15,000 AMD.

FOOD & DRINK

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

CAFÉ is on the west end of town, next to the church. Armenian cuisine at decent prices. \$-\$\$

PAPU ARMENIAN CUISINE, next to Café and church, tel. 21610, 091-995889, is located off the highway in a small round building that overlooks the dramatic river gorge. Papu is a professional chef who prepares good Armenian fare along with local dishes as ingredients come into season. One of his best is Kashem, a bean soup made with a walnut base—not to be missed! \$-\$\$

VARTANANK HOTEL, center of town off the highway, is used mostly for tête-à-têtes and local oligarch lunches, but it serves some tasty khorovats. \$\$-\$\$\$

There is a **SRJARAN** next to the Bus Stop; cheap eats. \$

There are food shops in town as well.

NORTH

☞ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Arin** (pop.)

SOUTH

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Azatek** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Zaritap** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Por** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Akhata** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Gomk** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Kapuit** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Horadis** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Khndzorut-Old Khndzorut** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Nor Aznaberd** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to **MARTIROS** (DD 39.5861 x 45.52133, elev. 2153m)   

✂ **MARTIROS - ՄԱՐՏԻՐՈՍ (Մարտիրոս)** ▲ (pop. 350) is located in a remote spot of the southern marz. The village is reached by taking the southern road from Vaik past Zaritap.

The **historic town** is located about 2 km from the new village, where a 19th c basilica and medieval graveyard stand sentinel. The inscription on a **huge khachkar** opposite the church bears witness to the founding of the town in 1286, at the command of Prince Prosh Khaghbakian and his son, Baron Hassan.

The **basilica** was built in 1866 using pieces of earlier structures, and completely rebuilt again in the 1980s, along with a number of still-unfinished buildings for a future theological seminary.

Backtrack towards the modern village where a dirt track angles from the road around a hill and across and around a field to a massive **standing khachkar** with khachkars, fragments and bases scattered about. The khachkar field is made of remnants of very old standing stones, the large one dating to the early Christian era, when many “cross stones” were carved on top of pagan

monuments. Some bear signs of being part of a cromlech or ancient observatory.

A dirt path strikes across country SE of the village to a dam and beyond, about 100 m uphill, a small stone opening onto the rock-cut 13th c **S. Astvatsatsin** church and chapel (DD 39.58616 x 45.5213, elev. 2124m). The complex was founded by Matevos Vardapet in 1286, and sponsored by the Proshians, who also commissioned a rock cut church, mausoleum and chapel at Geghard.

The carved church is in good condition. Though not as elaborately carved as at Geghard, it shows signs of having been painted, which must have richly adorned the site. Owing to water seepage, the paint and deeply incised decorative lines are faded and not as impressive as they must have once been. But the idea remains, and the massive effort to carve such a space out of solid rock (using the same method as at Geghard—carving from the top down), gives pause.

The small dome with aperture is smooth, and it seems to rest on pendentives that are cleverly carved to resemble long triangular spheres. The four wings of the cross end in arched niches.

Below and left of the church are monk caves (as at Geghard) and an underground passage to the nearby stream, no longer accessible.

Camping is possible near the village; **overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **freshwater spring** in the village.

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Sers** (pop.)

☞ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Bardsruni** (pop.)

VAIK TO JERMUK (HEHR-HEHR):

➡ **From** --- to **HEHR-HEHR** (DD 39.77246 x 45.53934, elev. 1663m)   

✳️ **HEHR-HEHR - ՀԵՐ ՀԵՐ (ՀԵՐ ՀԵՐ)** ▲ (also spelled "Herher" or "Her Her", pop. 450) is located on the Hehr-Hehr River about 14 km from Vaik and 10 km N on the Hehr-Hehr road from the (M2) highway.

Background The village is quite old. Excavations in the area show settlement in the Neolithic period which continued into the medieval period, when it became the 13th c seat for the Shahurnetsi family, who received the fief of Hehr-Hehr valley in return for allegiance to their liege lords, the Orbelians.

The vassal Shahurnetsis were 13th c opportunists, along with hundreds of other upwardly mobile medieval families who traded their military allegiance for wealth and local power. They worked within a feudal system that divided vassals and Nakharars from peasantry and slaves, and the acknowledgement of fealty of a vassal to his lord reminds us of the same in Western Europe. Each one had to supply fighting men in case of need, the figures varying from 50 to 20,000. Feudal chiefs were also invested with public functions, similar to the fief-offices of the West.

Sites

En route to the village from the S, you will pass a couple of 14th century khachkars at the side of the road. Look uphill from here to the E; there, on a rocky ridge, is **S. Gevorg or Chiki Vank**, which can be reached by hiking uphill for this point. The vank is more easily reached from a road on the other side of the river (see details below).

Also seen from here is a summit that formed the base for **Kapuit Berd** (Blue Castle), so named for its blue-tint stone. The natural formation was filled in with ramparts to make an almost impregnable castle (though not enough to thwart the Mongols and Timurids who ruined it). A great climb for climbing enthusiasts, with a good view of the valley below.

Inside the village, there is a 19th c **S. Gevorg Yekeghetsi**, a triple-nave basilica with two pairs of support columns. The church is adorned with local offerings of paper religious prints, plastic statues and crucifixes, and candle offerings.

It also bears whole and fragments of khachkars and tombstones in the walls, along with very old gravestones in the surrounding area.

S. Sion Menastan

S. Sion ("Holy Zion", also "Goshavank") is about 500 meters NE of the village, between two gorges on a slope overlooking the Hehr-Hehr River. The small complex is better known to locals as Goshavank, which means 'double' in Turkish, so is not its original name.

The monastery is described in chronicles from the 8th c, but both church structures are of the same size and layout as shrines common in the pre-Christian era, showing a much earlier origin. The graveyard is littered with very old burial stones, some seeming from the Iron or Bronze Age.

Whatever the original founding date, by the high Middle Ages, the monastery was extremely important in religious and political circles, and produced a number of stunning manuscripts and khachkars, the latter on display at the site. Khachkar art at the monastery reached great heights, exploring lifelike human depiction in its carvings, and the new gothic style imported by the master Momik from Kilikia (see [Noravank](#), p. 6).

The monastery was abandoned during Timurid raids and the forced migration of Vayots Dzor to Persia in 1604. It was never refounded, though local initiative rebuilt the churches in the 17th or 18th century, using pieces of the old monastery on the older structure, S. Sion.

The **complex** consists of two small, adjoining basilicas, S. Sion and Astvatsatsin, a shrine, a graveyard and khachkars, on a promontory overlooking a dramatic chasm of stone, water and wildlife. The yard has foundations of a wall, monk cells, service buildings and a number of excellently carved khachkars.

S. Sion The northern S. Sion is oldest church, a tall rough cut stone structure with khachkars embedded in the walls from a later renovation.

The single nave hall is unique for having semicircular apses at both ends, suggesting it may have been founded as a church in the place of a Hellenistic-era temple, switching the altar locations to effect the change. This was common practice in the early Christian period, which converted many

pagan sites to the new religion by removing the altar from its previous western orientation.

S. Sion has a chapel attached to its north, another common feature of pre-Christian worship sites that were converted to churches. Other north chapels like this can be found at Tezharuik (Kotaik), Sevanavank, Zolakar (Gegharkunik) and Geghard, among others.

S. Astvatsatsin Adjoining S. Sion to its S is Astvatsatsin, a single nave church (1282-1283) using well cut polished stone set with mortar.

Astvatsatsin's E apse is very unique, with a double open apse and two altars, divided only by a column and short wall. This is very unusual for Armenian churches, and points to very old practices, which may have been duplicated with this Christian church (shrines at the Bronze Age temple site in Metsamor had double altars and the 4th c church at Tegh has a double altar, though in two adjoining rooms).

On the southern wall an inscription reads:

"By the will of Almighty God, this is the memorial inscription and the indelible monument of the glorious Baron Varham, son of Vasak, grandson of the great Magistros, and of his pious wife Sandukht and of their handsome offspring Ukan, and of the powerful and great general Varham, and of his Christ-loving mother Mamkan, and the well-born lady wife of Gontza, who built this church with much toil and ornamented it with rich plate for my long life and that of my wife and our children Ukan ... An offering to the Holy Monastery in the year 732 (1283 of the common era)."

Khachkars Among the khachkars at the site you can find a wonderful exploration of the human form on one closest to the church entry. It shows a (now faded) figure of Jesus on the cross, unusual for medieval khachkars, which refrained from this kind of human depiction following the iconoclastic period and to separate the Apostolic church from Orthodox rivals. The Christ figure is flanked by two indecipherable saints standing on the ends of the Tree of Life. The khachkar is otherwise exquisitely carved in great detail with a myriad of geometric patterns, delicate figures and lacelike interweaving patterns. It is a masterpiece of carving.

This and others at the site, along with monument khachkars in the village and some at S. Gevorg Chiki Vank are assumed to have been made by the same artists, an anonymous master who was probably the chief architect for the Shahurnetsi House.

Others are equally compelling, with just as elaborate carving. Some are quite old, carved in the early Christian period, while most are from the monastery's heyday; the 13th-17th cc.

Chiki Vank

Taking a SE dirt road from the east end of the village that crosses the river and passes the cemetery, continue for about 1.5 km uphill to a R (SW) path that ends in about 500 m at the Grigor Lusavorich Shrine (1296) with and **S. Gevorg or Chiki Vank** of 1297. You can see the small building from the highway S of the village, the E.

Made from polished sandstone, the tiny hermitage is set on a sharp ridge and includes a square western façade that shelters the entry, framed with thick molding and a half round line forming a peaked arch flanked by birds. A cross is on the tympanum.

The single nave church has a single window in its east apse, and is set on a sacred rock, looking for all intense and purposes to be the village Tukh Manuk, an otherwise pre-Christian shrine that has been converted to the Christian fold long ago.

Camping is possible near the village; **overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); freshwater **spring** in the village.

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: (*Karmrashen*, pop.)

CANYON ROAD TO JERMUK:

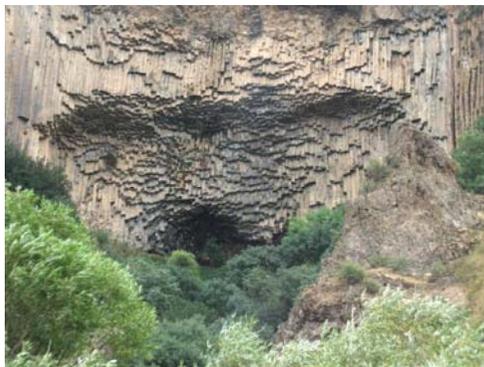
➡ **From** --- to (DD 39.69089 x 45.55542, elev. 1392m)   

✳️ **ARPA CANYON - ԱՐՓԱԻ ՁՈՐ (Արփաի ձոր)** ▲ runs 24 km from the (M2) highway to Jermuk, through some of the most spectacular canyon walls in the country. The turnoff is on the west side of the Arpa River bridge, 7 km from Vaik (the east end turnoff is the upper road to Jermuk).

The lower road is in poor condition but as you wend your way around fallen boulders and navigate the potholes, it is impossible not to also gawk at the spectacular rock formations and caves that line the eastern cliffs. Huge sections appear as curtains of basalt "organ pipes", multi-layered and towering above caves and the river bed. Others are made from frozen lava spews and molten flows that congealed millions of years ago.



The riverbed is wide and green, with stands of trees along its 24 km path to Jermuk Reservoir, the rest filled in with tall grass, wildflowers, bushes and wild fauna. The cliffs are natural habitats for hawks, lammergeiers (bearded vultures) and eagles, while the river is home to freshwater trout and crawfish.



The area is perfect for camping and hiking—except for a few fish farms and the occasional tourist, few

ever explore the canyon, which grows wilder and more spectacular upriver of the Gndevank. There are a number of springs on the river, plus a waterfall or two depending on the season.

Camping is possible in the gorge; **overnight** in *Gndevaz village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair) or at motel on highway, or at Jermuk; food at highway restaurant or Jermuk; freshwater springs in the riverbed.*

📍 **From** --- to **GNDEVANK** (DD 39.75970 x 45.61038, elev. 1361m) 🏠 🚗 📶 🌊

📍 **GNDEVANK - ԳՆԴԵՎԱՆԶ (Գնդեվանք)** ▲ is on the left bank of Arpa River, off the lower canyon road to Jermuk. It is about 11 km from the (M2). An alternate route popular with hikers starts at Gndevaz village on top of the canyon and hike down the canyon trail (about 45 minutes). To Jermuk, Gndevank it is a 13 km hike through the beautiful upper canyon.



Background Gndevank was founded in the 10th c on the site of an older monastery, itself a replacement of a pre-Christian worship site. Excavations have uncovered artifacts from the Bronze and Iron Ages, and caves in the area were settled in the Neolithic era.

According to the 13th c historian Stepanos Orbelian, the upper village, Gndevaz, was founded by Sophie Siuniats (Sophie Princess of Siunik, wife of Prince Smbat Siunetsi) immediately following the construction of the monastery, naming it

Gndevaz after the vank and donating it (and the population) to the church.

This historical version is now considered an error, as vanks in Armenia were uniformly named after their communities, not visa versa. It is now believed, after excavation, that the village Stepanos wrote about was not the upper village, but a now abandoned one adjoining the vank, spread out to the south.



This was in the 10th c, and it is reported to have become one of the largest and most important settlements in Vayots Dzor, while the vank quickly became one of the most important manuscriptoriums in Siunik.

In 1008 a 22 km water line was added to irrigate the monastery's lands, enriching the monastic community well into the 13th century when the monastery, like others in Vayots Dzor, was first sacked by invading Mongols. A "Pax Mongoliana" was established in Siunik when the Orbelians made compact with the Khans, permitting another 90 years of cultural brilliance.



The monastery was renovated in 1309 by Prince Grigor, and continued for another 25 years until the entire kingdom came suddenly to an end with the Mongol interecine wars starting in 1335, followed by Turkic and Timurid raids and the long dark ages of the 15th-18th cc.

The monastery was deserted during the 1604 migration to Persia, and not reconsecrated until it was renovated again in 1691 under the direction of the monastery vardapet Petros.

The vank was again deserted in the Soviet era, and damaged by the 1931 earthquake. It no longer works as a monastic community, but renovations undertaken between 1965 and 1969 repaired the damaged church and gavit.

Complex The **location** is impressive, set on a shelf overlooking the river gorge, with the steeply rising hills behind leading to the upper plateau.

The **complex** includes a church, gavit, residential quarters and fortifications, with a church yard and cemetery.



S. Stepanos Church

The main building is S. Stepanos Church, dedicated in 936. An inscription on the church walls attributes the construction to Princess Sophie, and the now lost frescoes to the artist Yeghishe:

"Vayots Dzor was a ring without a (precious) stone. I built this church and set the stone into the ring."

The church is typical for the period; a domed cruciform type with annexes on its eastern corners. The annexes were used as depositories, for manuscripts and church plate. There are two entrances; west and south.

What sets S. Stepanos apart and explains Princess Sophie's words, were the sumptuous **frescoes** by Yeghishe that adorned the interior. Covering the entire inner space, the few fragments that survive are enough to show the masterpiece it was. Portraits of Christ, the apostles, the saints and angels were framed by beautifully rendered geometric and floral designs.

Even today, more than 1000 years later, the remnants of the white plaster is enough to imagine what it must have felt like to enter this spectacular space from the world outside; entirely clasped in brilliant white with images of the bible, the passion and the lives of the saints surrounding you as you worshipped. For the mass whose lives were painted in toil and the mundane, this world might well have felt like a glittering jewel in the ring of the kingdom.

Built 400 years before the architectural jewels at Areni, Noravank and Gladzor, Gndevank was the main religious community for Vayots Dzor, and its most beautiful temple of worship. Sadly the frescoes were lost long ago, to raids and neglect, but mostly to the elements which are not kind in this part of the world. Surviving fragments include bits of a portrait of Jesus on the eastern apse.

The spacious hall is made up mostly of that under the wide dome, which is supported by pendentives, the corners of which have bas-relief carvings of symbols for the four evangelists (Mathew=Human or Angel; Mark=Lion; Luke=Ox; John=Eagle). The four wings end in semicircular apses.

Exterior Well built from polished stone set with egg mortar, the church's exterior walls show the interior cross form, jutting equally out from the large 12-facet drum with the lower corners filling out the square base. The exterior walls include niche buttresses at the ends of each cross wing, with windows on the upper level.

Gavit

The gavit was added to the west wall of the church in 999, under the supervision of Abbot Kristapor. The vaulted building is unique for not being a square and for having a second, narrow area that juts to the north, covered with a lower sloping roof from the main hall.

This style—while unique in medieval Armenian architecture, seems to actually be inherited from more ancient structures that did the same; placing a secondary room or apse to the north of the main part.

The gavit roof is supported by vaulting resting on transverse arches supported in turn by wall columns and a row of arches at an east-west axis, supported by low thick columns to the north. From the inside the southern wall archways appear to have been filled in; in fact they were stuccoed, like the church, and painted. Signs of painting on the various wall carvings can still be seen, red being the most popular (or most likely to survive the ravages of time).

A dark, narrow room is made from the northern row of arches and wall piers further north, supporting a low vaulted roof. This was presumably used as work spaces, perhaps separating manuscript work from the activities of the main hall.

The main room has an open window at the eastern end, over a small white khachkar and the tympanum for the church doorway. The tympanum bears an inscription attributing the 1309 renovation of the monastery and walls to Vardapet Kristapor. It reads in part:

"... I, Petros Vardapet, completely renovated this Surb Yekeghetsi, and put a wall around it, in the year 999, as a memory for the souls of myself and my parents ... Jesus Christ bless us ..."

There are a couple of fine khachkars in the gavit, on the eastern wall. The one on the left is carved from red stone, with great detail in the framing and a top inscription. The right khachkar is striking; carved from white stone with a highly detailed sun symbol under the cross. The carving is deeply cut, looking like crochet thread rather than solid stone.

Outside the gavit there a number of beautiful khachkars, and an interesting **medieval tombstone** carving showing a hunter seated on a horse, his arrow pulled across the bow, aimed at two fighting bucks.

Just by it a white felsite **khachkar** leaning against the gavit wall, with eight crosses (the number 8 standing for the beginning of life, or the resurrection) and beautifully carved geometric squares at the top and center of the stone.

Opposite is a very old **ram stone**, hallmark of the pre-Christian era (Bronze-Iron Age), which was emulated by Turkic tribes in the 13th c. This may be from either age, though it bears signs of being of the older type.

Wall Fortifications and Residence Quarters

The walls were built during the 1691 renovation, when the vank was refounded. They were rebuilt using pieces of the old wall, plus a number of fine khachkars that are carefully set into the inner walls.

Along the northern **fortification** there are two rooms, one of which was a ginetun (wine cellar). Attached to the southern and western walls are rows of monastic **buildings** of various sizes, some two-story with vaulted ceilings. The main hall is impressive, on the S side of the complex, have a large hall, basement, kitchen with large fireplaces.

Camping is possible near the site; **overnight** in Gndevaz village home (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **food** at highway restaurant or Jermuk; freshwater **spring** in the village and at the site.

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **North Canyon Road to Jermuk**, (pop.)

MAIN ROUTE TO JERMUK

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Gndevaz** (pop.)

➡ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Kechut** (pop.)

JERMUK

➡ **From Artashat City.** Take the R fork for about 1.5 km to the car park for **JERMUK** (DD 39.83871 x 45.66548, elev. 2108m)  

✳ **JERMUK - ՋԵՐՄՈՒԿ (Ջերմուկ)** ▲ (pop. 800) is located on both sides of the Arpa River, at its confluence with a number of mountain streams that widen the gorge to nearly 1 km across. The town is 25 km from the (M2) highway on the eastern end of Vayots Dzor marz.

Jermuk is first and foremost a rest area, and worth the stop for anyone wanting to take a break from the hectic pace of a tour or just everyday stress. Whether you come for the beautiful upland nature, the hiking and camping in the nearby forests; or come for a spa treatment that includes regular and water massage (you haven't lived until you have had a water massage!), soaking in the mineral springs and relaxing; or all of the above; Jermuk is a great stop on the way.

Jermuk is Armenia's largest spa area, built around a number of natural springs with minerals that are considered useful in treating certain health problems. In its Soviet heyday, it was one of the most popular spas in the Union, packed in summertime, its small airport busy carrying spa goers from all over the Soviet Union to the town. The new spa is drawing on that fame to attract wealthy Russians.

It may be working; the town is undergoing a massive renovation, with new parks, flower beds and pavement in the public parks, and upgrades at several premiere spas.

It is not as cheap as it once was, when a day treatment, 3 meals a day and overnight cost only \$8. In the days of monopolized living it now costs upwards of \$100 a day at the posher places, though you can still get decent lodgings and treatment for \$25-\$50 at less upscale joints.

The focus is still on family in Jermuk, and for those seeking a night life, you'd be better off at a lakeside disco at Sevan or in a ski lodge at Tsaghkadzor. But for some well deserved R&R (and you *do* deserve R&R, right?) with much

cleaner air and terrific nature; Jermuk's resort cannot be beat.

BACKGROUND

Settlement of the area goes back to the Paleolithic Period, when the soothing properties of the mineral springs had become a draw. As recently as 10,000 BCE volcanic cones in the area were still active, feeding a moist, warm climate that supported a lush landscape. As they slowly died off, the dormant cones spewed hot mineral waters from fissures, the hot water called the "last breath of a dying volcano" by 20th c researchers.

The town is first noted in written history in the 1st c BCE, as a sort of Roman spa. During the Arshakuni period (1-428), it had become a summer residence and resort for the Siunik kings. Then the resort was walled in with mainly wooden structures, and though there is believed to have been a Roman style villa at the resort, no excavations have confirmed this. The water's medicinal properties were well known in the medieval period when they were described in chronicles and it became a favorite treatment spot for those who could afford the trip.

The name came from a 19th c description of the site, by the historian Ghevond Alishan. Remarking on the then 60 hot springs found in the area, Alishan wrote, "Jermuk is an old village and has been famous for its waters from historic times; for the iron water and treatment at the hot baths."

In 1925, the water was analyzed, the findings showing a large variety of ameliorative properties in the mineral content of the springs, either through soaking or drinking the water. The waters are believed to be helpful for everything from Diabetes and gastro-intestinal ailments to debilitating arthritis and muscular pain. For the rest of us the water is simply a great soak to ease aches and pains and help get calm a gippy tummy.

The modern spa was built in 1951 as the only Armenian health resort open to the entire Soviet Union. While the spa at Arzni was reserved for party big wigs, Jermuk was open to all comers, and it was hugely popular. 90% of spa goers were from outside the soviet republic. There were originally six spas that worked year-round, and old-timers remember the days when the airport was stacked with airplanes that brought visitors to the town. In its prime, it had 2000 visitors a day.

The town fell into disuse in the 1990s, as previous visitors opted to travel to Europe for their spa treatment. Lately, though, some have begun to return, lulled by nostalgic memories of their pre- Soviet visits and preferring the waters at Jermuk. Coupled with visits by well-to-do Armenians, the spa has been experiencing something a minor revival, with middle class families flocking to the less expensive pensionats and spas n town.

Ecology The area is alpine, with cultivated pine and endemic forests nearby. Jermuk is located among high altitude mountains (2500-3000m) which are carpeted with tall grass and wildflowers, the aroma of which often permeates the crisp, clean air.

The climate is typical for mountain areas, with cool summer days and long, snowy winters. Autumn is gorgeous, with bright colored trees dotting the landscape and snow-covered mountain peaks in the distance. Jermuk experiences 2400 hours of sunshine and 9-20 precipitation days a year.

Water

The waters at Jermuk are naturally carbonated mineral waters with 4.5 g/l mineral content (hydrocarbon, sulphate, chloride, natrium-kalium-calcium-magnesium). By comparison, Jermuk's waters compare favorably with European spas, in some respects more beneficial by content.

SPA WATER COMPARISON: KARLOVII VARI (KARLSBAD), CZECH REPUBLIC and JERMUK		
1 Liter	Karlovii Vari	Jermuk,
CATIONS		
Licium	0.0033	0.0037
Amonium	0.0001	-----
Kalium	0.1042	0.0890
Natrium	1.7180	1.2110
Magnum	0.0465	0.0744
Calcium	0.1025	0.1480
Strontium	0.0003	0.0038
Ferum	0.0001	0.0008
ANIONS		
Chlorine	0.6170	0.4757
Brom	0.0014	0.00005
Phtor	0.0024	0.0001

Sulphate	1.6620	0.9000
Hydrophosphorous	0.0001	0.0150
Hydrocarbon	2.1000	2.2430
Hydarsenium	0.0001	-----
Azol	0.4	0.5-0.8
Dry left (105C)	5.3900	3.7920
Water temperature	73	64

Treatments

Treatments at the spa vary, depending on the ailment and physician prescriptions. All treatments are supervised by physicians and staff.

Treatments run the gamut from drinking water with different concentrates, to soaking, hydrotherapy, colonics and massages. The same treatments that can be found in western spas are here.

NAVIGATING THE TOWN

Jermuk is extremely easy to navigate; there is one main street with off streets that rarely extend more than a block or two. There is one way into town from Yerevan; the large single span bridge that stands 98 meters above the river floor.

The main street is Shahumian p, which extends N and S through town and intersects with the bridge. Most of the town's sanatoriums (spas) face this street, including Ararat and Olympia; plus the town park and lagoons and cafes.

Further S a traffic circle intersects with Miasnikian p, where the upscale (and oldest) spa called Armenia sits next to the Rotunda. The area around the traffic circle there are a number of cafes, restaurants and small lodging venues.

Further S is the town proper, with shops, shuka and additional lodging, including discount lodges, apartments and guest houses.

To the N of the bridge, Shahumian passes the large 1950s Jermuk Ashkhrar (nee Lechkomissaya), the central park (Verona Hotel), additional cafes and restaurants and a number of sanatoriums and pensionats (Sanatorium 1, Pensionat 1), with side streets that wind through

a leafy area of small hotels and pensionats (Narek Pensionat and cottages, Gladzor Pensionat).

The river gorge has a couple of restaurants (Dar, Karandzav), a waterfall, and a number of hiking trails into the forests. It is reached by a road that crosses the river using the old bridge below Gladzor Pensionat. The gorge can be reached via switchbacks roads that descend near Gladzor Pensionat (left bank) and the bottling factory (right bank).

SIGHTS, ACTIVITIES

Springs

Jermuk is famous for its mineral springs. The area has hundreds of cold and hot water springs, and from there, about 40 are tapped for use in the spa. The waters vary in temperatures from cold (bottled at the Jermuk bottling company), to hot. At the Rotunda, the mineral waters vary in temperature from 30° to 55° C. There is even a spring that has recorded a high of 65 C. The temperatures of spring water used in the spas are regulated to match treatment needs.

Other than the springs in the spa resort itself, locals know of a handful of open springs that can be used by anyone who stumbles upon them. A few are known generally, and can be reached by short hikes that take off from the waterfalls. Others are less known, and require a guide to get there. They are worth it if you have the time and like hiking in the woods.

Rotunda

This neo-classical arcade was built in the 1940s by Soviet architects, and remains one of the nicest buildings in the town. The building is made from honey-colored basalt with onyx and marble mosaics. Facing the town lake in front and a pine tree forest to the back, this is an idyllic spot to "take the waters".

The arcade has a number of taps, each of which dispenses mineral water at a set temperature. The temperature of each is marked on the wall above its fountain. Temperature ranges between 30° to 55° C.

The water in the rotunda is free to drink at the fountains or to bottle for later use. For most visitors to Jermuk, this is the extent of their treatment; taking advantage of cheaper lodging in

town while making daily trips to the rotunda to drink and visit with other spa goers.

Ski Slopes, Ski Lift

Jermuk has just opened winter ski runs in its nearby mountains, reached by a new ski lift. The skiing adds a new dimension to recreation at the resort, allowing winter sports fans to ski and ice skate while taking the waters at the spa.

Waterfall

The waterfall is located in the old center of town, in the Arpa River gorge. To get there, take paths from the center, or follow the road under the bridge S for about 500 meters to a parking area and footpath that leads to the falls.

The falls are splendidly located at the river, and a foot bridges at the bottom allows you to get a full view. The water volume varies depending on the season; spring and early summer thaw are the best times to see the most water, with the most dramatic effect.

Church

A new church is being built on the outskirts of town, next to the airport. The church, Astvatsatsin or S. Grigor (depending on which construction worker you talk to), is being donated by a local Oligarch. The construction is mostly poured concrete with a facing of polished gray tufa stone.

Statue

The **Israel Ori Statue**, in the center of the traffic circle next to Jermuk bottling plant, is dedicated to a 17th-18th cc Armenian (1658-1711) diplomat and patriot who spent decades trying to gain Russian and European military aid in liberating Armenia from Persian and Turkish hands. His failed venture is still one of the more interesting chapters in Armenian history.

The son of A melik (wealthy landowners and semi-feudal lords under the suzerainty of the Persians), Ori was born in Sissian. When only twenty, Ori became a member of a 7 man secret commission organized by the Catholicos Hakop Jughetsi with the support of Georgian King George XI, to recruit European and Russian aid in the liberation and defense of the Armenian people.

When the Catholicos died, the plan was abandoned, but Ori independently resolved to complete the mission and journeyed to Venice, Paris and Vienna. He joined the French army of

Louis XIV, where he entered into contact with the French court, vainly soliciting aid. In 1695 Ori ventured to Germany, where he befriended the Prince elect Johann Wilhelm, who gave him a letter of recommendation to the emperor of Austria and the ruler of Florence. Having no document appointing him representative of Armenia, Ori was forced to return to the country to obtain the necessary documents.

At Angeghakot, in 1699 Ori, together with melik Safraz held a secret meeting with 11 meliks from Siunik, where they agreed to officially ask for military aid from European states. Ori returned to Europe and met with Emperor Leopold I in 1700 who advised him that Russian support would be necessary for the success of his plan. In 1701 Ori left for Moscow.

In Moscow Ori met Peter the Great. Peter promised to render assistance to the Armenian people after the end of Russo-Swedish War. In the meantime Ori met Pope Clement XI in 1704 who offered him his support.

The plan presented to the Russian Court included a large invasion force with naval support. Ori was called on to lead a preliminary expedition to conduct reconnaissance and to infiltrate the Persian court to prepare Armenian subjects for an eventual invasions. French missionaries in Persia warned the Persian court of the Russian plan, but Ori was able to continue his work, visiting Isfahan and Shamakhi, where he met with Armenian and Georgian political figures, leaving a favorable impression on them of Russia. On return to Russia in 1711, Ori suddenly died, and with him, the plans for an early liberation of the country.

Ori's failed mission nonetheless set the stage for Russian entry into the Caucasus, and did much to leave a favorable impression of Russia in the local mindset. It is probably due as much to his decades of early diplomacy as to other events in the following decades which lead to the quick and total liberation of the Southern Caucasus 100 years later.

Parks

There are parks in town, both worth visiting for a stroll or to relax.

The **main park** is on the north side of the bridge (R after you cross the bridge), then L (W) of the street after one block. The park has a lagoon,

boat and paddle boat rentals, and a collection of mammoth-sized sculptural busts of famous Armenian partisans form the 19th-20th cc. Woodland trails comb the pine forests and lead to deeper trails that take off in different directions into the uplands and high mountain forests.

The **gorge park** lies most on the right bank of the Arpa River, around the waterfall and under the bridge. There are some wilderness trails (one of which allegedly leads to a hot mineral bath), that lead into the high forests off the right bank.

The **town park** has a series of small lagoons, flower beds and walkways that meander up to and around the Rotunda.

Jermuk Bottling Company

The Jermuk Bottling factory is located on the opposite of the bridge from the town, at the traffic circle. The factory bottles water siphoned from springs in Jermuk and others in the marz, including one at Vaik. There are a total of seven bottling factories owned by the company, which also sells Pepsi-Cola. No tours and no free samples.

Note exported Jermuk bottled at Vaik has been the focus of a product recall order in the USA by the FDA for testing with excessive amounts of arsenic.

PRACTICALITIES

IN AND OUT AND AROUND

Bus Daily buses leave Yerevan from Kino Rossiya, Tigran Mets and Agatangeghos. Look at the side or back parking area for the bus. Ask the day before for the ETD; it is erratic.

Minivan, Minivans connect Jermuk (Bus Stop in center) with Yerevan (Kino Rossiya). All north-south buses drive by the Yeghegnadzor bus stop and can be used to reach the turnoff to the town, note it is 28 km from the highway to Jermuk. If you take this route, stop in Vaik; taxis there can take you the rest of the way for around 10,000 AMD.

Regional Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) are caught in front of the Cinema Aragil, and connect Jermuk with Vaik (200 AMD), Kechut (100 AMD), Gndevaz (100 AMD), and Yeghegnadzor (350 AMD).

Taxi Taxis are more expensive, but the most convenient way to travel (you decide when to go, and where). From Yerevan, taxis depart from behind “Kino Rossiya” at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi. Taxis charge around 20,000 AMD for up to 4 people. Call taxis are cheaper, charging by the km. There are a number of taxi services in town—all provide this service.

In town taxis proliferate in the center. Typical fare is 500 AMD anywhere in center, or 100 AMD per km plus extra to wait. Taxis are useful in traveling the area, but negotiate; they know the routes very well and that tourists can pay more. Offer them 100 AMD per km plus an extra 1000 AMD to wait 30-45 minutes.

Car Jermuk is located at the intersection of the (H43) and (H42), both originating on the (M2) Yerevan-Sissian Highway. Starting from the (M2): The (H43) follows the left bank of the Arpa River, passing Gndevank (10 km) on its 24 km route to Jermuk. This road is badly maintained but is the more scenic route and the only one that passes the monastery and the lake shores.

The road on the opposite bank, the (H42), takes the highland route and ends in Jermuk in 25 km. The (H42) continues N of Jermuk for 24 km of badly maintained road to the border with the Kelbajar Corridor in the disputed territories of Nagorno Karabakh. From there is another 46 km to Kelbajar.

From Jermuk to: Kechut (6 km), Gndevaz (15 km), Gndevank (15 km), Vaik (33 km), Yeghegnadzor (49 km), Selim Pass (88 km) and Martuni (113 km), Yerevan (170 km), Zangezur gates/Siunik (46 km), Sissian (95 km), Goris (122 km), Kapan (189 km).

Petrol and gas stations are just outside of town and on the (M2).

COMMUNICATION, ETC.

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

Phone, telegraphs

Area code is 287
Long Distance: 0287 + local number
From abroad: + (374) 287 + local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093/094 Viva Cell

The town is covered by both Armentel (1A Dzakhapniak) and VivaCell (“Lechkomissia” on the main street in) mobile phone services. International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, 1 Dzakhapniak p. [See HayPost \(HyePost\) site for list \(www.haypost.am\)](#). The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards and can send telegraphs.

Internet

Internet is available at hotels (Olympia, Armenia) and at a café in the center of town.

Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks; ATMs and exchange at banks; exchange points will change money at competitive rates.

Arshinvestbank, 1 Ajapniak

Shopping

There are *mterks* and shops throughout town, congregated on the main streets.

Film, etc.

A *Photo* shop can be found in the center and film in shops in town. Batteries are unreliable for digital cameras, bring your own.

Pharmacy

Apotekas (Armenian: deghatuner) can be found in the center of town.

Hospital, Polyclinic

For a medical emergency, dial 103. If possible go to Yerevan for medical service or ask at your lodging for recommendation.

Jermuk has a *Polyclinic* and a *hospital*.

OVERNIGHT

Spa (Sanatorium), Pensionat

ARARAT MOR EV MANKAN SANATORIUM, 18 Shahumian p, tel. 22485, 22839, 091/093-411203, email: arsba@inbox.ru, has rooms and

treatments. Amenities include heating, TV, VCR, telephone. The sanatorium is on the mend, though very clean and professionally run. Families and tourist welcome. Prices include 3 meals a day and treatment. Per person at 8000/9600 (hot shower)/ 12,800 (hot shower, TV) per person.

GLADZOR SANATORIUM, 1 M. Adamian p, tel. 21175, 091-201175, is located in a large building that sits over the river gorge. The family-focus spa is on the mend, so services and amenities vary. A lot of young people take advantage of the cheap prices. Rates from 8000 to 25,000 AMD per person.

JERMUK ARMENIA COMPLEX, 2 Miasnikian p, tel. 21290, 21419, 010-281224, email: jermuk_armenia@yahoo.com, URL: www.jermukarmenia.com, is where oligarchs and oligarch-wannabes stay. The first to be renovated, the décor is decidedly nouveau riche. Spa includes treatments, meals and completely renovated rooms. Amenities include satellite TV and Internet connection. So exclusive they don't advertise their rates (one of those' if you have to ask, you can't afford it" kind of places, only with out the service and product to match), but SGL/DBL/DEL/LUX at 30,000/60,000/90,000/96,000 AMD.

JERMUK ASHKHAR SANATORIUM (FORMER LECHKOMISSIYA), 20 Shahumian p, tel. 22443, 21208, 26242, 22433, 21208, URL: www.jermukashkhar.am, is a large pensionat/Spa that is very popular with visitors. Amenities include hot showers, TV/VCR (some rooms), refrigerator, telephone, swimming pool, billiards, cinema, tennis sauna. Rates are per person and include treatment, with SGL/ DEL SGL/DBL/DEL DBL/Jr STE/Sr STE/Pres STE at 20,000/ 30,000/ 15,000/ 20,000/ 20,000/ 25,0000/ 50,000 AMD.

JERMUK OLYMPIA (SANATORIUM N3), 16 Shahumian p, tel. 21243, 22366, 010- 259144, 093-707909, email: olympia@jermukolympia.am, URL: www.jermukolympia.am, is the second renovated spa in Jermuk, run by a coop of physicians and nurses. The premises are well done, and the atmosphere more peaceful than Jermuk Armenia. Rooms and facilities are all newly remodeled, with billiards, tennis, game room, dance hall. Prices include full board and treatment, with SGL/ DBL-TRP/ Semi-LUX/ LUX/ DELUXE at 25,000/ 20,000/ 25,000/ 30,000/ 45,000 AMD per person.

NAREK SANATORIUM, 3 M. Adamian p, tel. 21280, 010-285171, is conveniently located in town, but in a leafy area of the town that is more peaceful and quiet. The spa is in the process of renovation, and finished rooms are clean and newly painted. Amenities include hot showers, TV, VCR and refrigerator in Lux rooms. The spa has just opened three cottages that are well appointed and a Jermuk bargain at 40,000 AMD for up to 6 people. Rates include meals with SGL/SGL (hot water)/Lux at 5000/7000/9000 per person.

JERMUK HEALTH SANATORIUM, Shahumian p, is located near Pensionat 1 and Restaurant Forte. The old building has not been renovated, and works only in season. Not that clean, but cheap at 2500 AMD per person plus 3000 AMD per day for full board. A place to crash if you are on a budget, don't mind roughing it and are just in town to take in free water and sight see.

Hotel

CASCADE HOTEL, Shahumian p (S of Hairik and Life Hotels), el. 21199, is a new micro hotel with two-story suites with all amenities and Euro-design styling. The rooms are clean, with kitchenettes and well priced with DBL/QUAD at 15,000/30,000 AMD.

HAIRIK HOTEL, Shahumian p (in the block S of Life Hotel), tel. 21814, 093-077093, is a micro-hotel amongst a string of shops. The hotel has hot water and basic, clean rooms at 15,000 AMD for up to 4 people.

LIFE HOTEL, 10A Shahumian p, tel. 21255; 21256, 093-721256, is a small and very popular lodge for locals and budget-minded tourists. It has 4 rooms and 2 double-rooms. Amenities include TV, DVD player, refrigerator, hot water and telephone. Price per room is 10,000 AMD.

VERONA, behind and to the S of the Sport-Culture Complex in the main park (turn L on Shahumian from the bridge, then R to skirt around the Sport complex), tel. 091-402615, 091-211101, is newly built in a pretty location facing one of the lagoons in the main park. The hotel has 12 rooms of varying size and level of amenities, though all have a hot shower and TV. The hotel has a tennis and volleyball court. Rates are per person and include full board, with DBL/Semi LUX/LUX/LUX (Jacuzzi) at 12,000/14,000/16,000/20,000/22,000 AMD.

Guest House, Apartment

ANUSH GUEST HOUSE, 5B Vardanian p, tel. 22441, 22600, has recently remodeled rooms with a living area, bath and kitchen; hot water. Priced right at 5000 AMD per person, breakfast not included.

YEVMMARI, 3 Shahumian p, tel. 21814; 093-077093, 094-704744, has 7 rooms, hot water, TV, refrigerator and telephone. Per person rates do not include breakfast but well-priced with 2/3-4/4-6/6-8 people at 8000/12,000/15,000/18,000 AMD.

FOOD & DRINK

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

\$\$ = 2000-3500 AMD

\$\$\$ = 3500 AMD or more

Most eat at their spa or pensionat, but there are *CAFES* and *RESTAURANTS* throughout the town, with a couple in the gorge. Prices are comparable to Yerevan, if the food more plain.

There are food shops in town as well.

CAFÉ, by the bridge, has basic fare for basic prices. \$-\$\$

KARANDZAV, River gorge, entry by bridge, is located in a modified cave and patio half way down the gorge. Reached by narrow step steps that have one of the more dramatic views of the bridge. Basic fare. \$\$-\$\$\$

GNDEVANK, Shahumian p, north of the main park, serves a basic menu of khorovats, fish and grill. \$\$-\$\$\$

JERMUK, located next to Gndevank is a slightly upscale

CAFÉ, Adamian p, is opposite the side of Narek Pensionat. Simple outdoor café with basic fare. \$-\$\$

DAR, river gorge at old bridge, has basic fare, with an emphasis on fresh fish. \$\$-\$\$\$

SRJARAN AREVIK, Adamian p, next to another Café, serves basic food in an outdoor setting. \$-\$\$

FORTE, N Shahumian p, is located at the N end of town. The restaurant serves Armenian food. \$\$-\$\$\$

HAIKAKAN KHOHANOTS (Armenian kitchen), central park, offers fresh fish (you pick the one you want from a pool), khorovats, grill. \$\$-\$\$\$

JERMUK ARMENIA CAFÉ, Miasnikian p, has snacks and sweets to go with their ice cream and coffee. \$-\$\$

CAFÉ, Shahumian, Main Square, opposite the World War II monument, serves a basic menu at Yerevan prices. \$\$-\$\$\$

Jermuk to Siunik

↻ **From** --- to (DD)    

SIDE TRIP: **Artavan** (pop.)

↻ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Saravan** (pop.)

↻ **From** --- to (DD)

SIDE TRIP: **Vorotan Pass / Gates of Zangezur**

Resources

Jews in Vayots Dzor, Gerald E. Ottenbreit, Jr.,
<http://www.umd.umich.edu/dept/armenian/news/stone2.html>