



NOMADIC SKIES

ARMENIA

SEEKING & TRAVELLING DEEPER

UNDISCOVERED ARMENIA

Exclusive small group cultural
and historical trekking expedition
led by international and local guides.



Discover Unknown Armenia:

A journey from the capital city of Yerevan, towered over by the snow-capped peaks of Mount Ararat, through the ancient prehistoric and Christian history of this ancient land and trek into the mountains and along ancient pilgrim and silk trading routes through landscapes, historic sites and rural communities seldom visited by tourism. Interact with local communities, culture and history in a way that few visitors to Armenia do.



An extraordinary 12 night / 11 day exploration, into the ancient and modern culture and remote landscapes of rural Southern Armenia.

The journey involves 6 days of pioneering trekking routes between ancient and modern villages far off the tourism beaten track.



An ancient land of tradition, culture and history within stunning mountain landscapes.

Armenia is an ancient land with a rich culture and identity. A cradle of civilisation which flourished on its fertile high plateaus and gained protection and sanctuary in its mountainous landscape. It is a land fought over by Byzantine, Persian, Roman and Islamic empires as an important centre and a major component of the ancient Silk Trading Routes. Armenia was also the seat of ancient kings who embraced early Christianity in the 3rd century making Armenia the first sovereign nation in the world to adopt Christianity and a centre for pilgrimage and ecclesiastical architecture, culture and learning. In modern times, Armenia was part of the Soviet Union and became independent in 1991. For the modern traveller Armenia is an enticing mix of prehistoric, ancient and modern history, culture and tradition within a stunning mountain landscape.

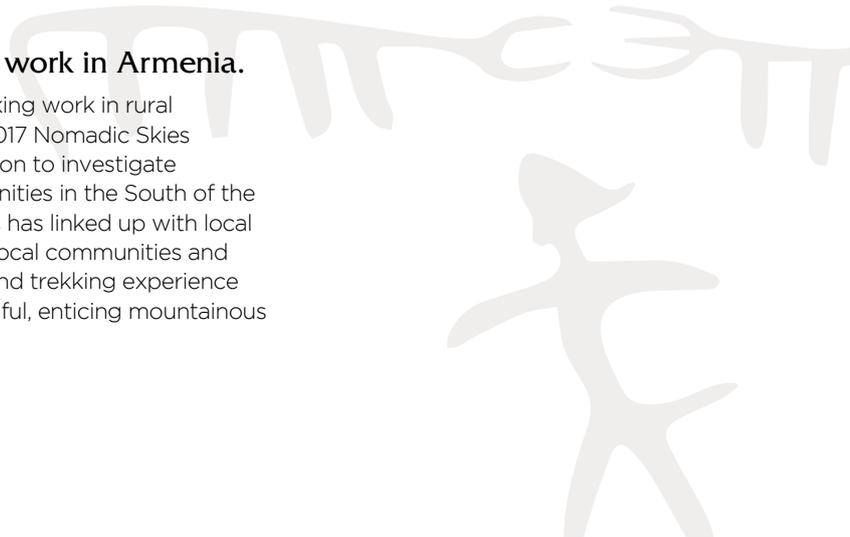




Nomadic Skies - Armenia

A unique journey built on our developmental work in Armenia.

Nomadic Skies founder, Gavin Anderson, has been undertaking work in rural development in Southern Armenia for the last 10 years. In 2017 Nomadic Skies worked with a small Armenian rural development organisation to investigate opportunities to develop tourism that benefits rural communities in the South of the country. As a result of this work, Nomadic Skies Expeditions has linked up with local travel professionals, local rural development organisations, local communities and the Armenian World Wildlife Fund to offer a unique travel and trekking experience that will take you to the rural heart of this fascinating, beautiful, enticing mountainous country.





Expedition Organisation

Expedition size:

8 to 12 members. The expedition will be led by Gavin Anderson (founder of Nomadic Skies) and local expedition manager Gevorg Gasparyan – an experienced Armenian mountain leader and expedition organiser.

Duration and organisation:

The 12 night/ 11 day expedition will be a journey from Yerevan by vehicle into the spectacular and ancient South of the country. The journey includes 6 nights in hotels (4 nights in Yerevan - 2 on arrival and 2 on departure, one in the southern town of Goris and one in the ancient village of Yeghegis) and 5 nights supported camping. - 4WDs with local staff will set up camps at our designated overnight spots before our arrival by foot.

Level of difficulty:

Moderate 6 days of trekking and hiking with an average of 5 to 6 hours walking a day. Some of this will be on small and rough paths.



Expedition Highlights:

- **Explore, Yerevan the modern capital of Armenia** – towered over by snow-capped mount Ararat, this sophisticated city is a wonderful starting point to explore the culture and history of this ancient land.
- **Delve into Armenia's ancient Christian heritage**, visit renowned and iconic Khor Virap Monastery (dating back to the 3rd century), 13th century Noravank Church situated within the narrow gorge of the Amaghu River and the 9th century Tatev Monastery perched on the edge of the Vorotan River Gorge.
- **Get deeply off the beaten track** and discover by foot ancient castles, churches, mediaeval tombs, carved stones and inscriptions. Cross medieval bridges and ascend to ruined fortresses and pilgrims caves.
- **Walk in the habitat of Europe's last big cat - The Caucasian Leopard.** In collaboration with the Armenian World Wildlife Fund (WWF) community rangers we will trek the hills of Southern Armenia to the habitat of the elusive Caucasian Leopard and the magnificent wild Bezoar goat.
- **Explore Armenia's 6000 year old wine making tradition of Areni village** visiting the recently discovered 6000 year old Areni cave winery and sample quality modern produced wines.
- **Undertake a 4 day trek** from the southern high hill lands through the Vorotan River Gorge into the mountains of Synik district. A pioneering and seldom trodden route using local paths and ancient pilgrim and trading routes through a varied landscape of mountain, forest, river gorge, ancient monuments, deserted villages and farming communities.



- **Be hosted in our partner villages** who will provide not only hospitality, local food and delicacies but will explain to us the history and culture of Southern Armenia. Hear stories of cave dwelling local partisans and bandits, the relocation of villages in the 1930s, life under communism and the more recent challenges and hopes of these rural communities.
- **Sample village food and dine under the stars in little visited villages** including a communal meal looking onto the floodlit UNESCO listed Tatev Monastery – from the little visited village of Tanzatap.
- **Stay in and explore the spectacularly situated ‘ghost villages’** of Old Harzis and Old Khot whose communities were forcibly evacuated in the thirties to more productive and safer lands on the Armenian plains.
- **Visit the cave city of Khndzoresk** dating back 1000 year and inhabited up until the 1950s
- **Try to fathom the meaning of the 7000 year old Karahunj standing stones**, reputed to be an ancient astronomical observatory, and an evocative foreground to the Armenian plains and their mountain backdrop.



Full Itinerary

- **Day 1: Arrival in the capital - Yerevan.**

The minute you arrive in Yerevan you will realise that you are truly outside Europe. Yerevan is positioned on the Ararat Plain with the snow-capped peaks of Mount Ararat towering above the city. The bustling, sophisticated and modern capital is also the centre for ancient culture. Your first night will be spent in a high quality boutique hotel in the city's centre.

- **Day 2 : Exploration of Yerevan's markets, museums and culture**

We will spend our first day exploring Yerevan and you can take it as fast or as slow as you like. Particular points of interest are the Impressive Republic Square, The History Museum of Yerevan, the Armenian Genocide Museum and the quirky Parajanov Museum (rebel Armenian film maker and artist). An ascent of the Cascade steps, with it's arts centre and museum, provides a panoramic view across the city and to Mount Ararat – a great vantage point as the sun drops. At night Yerevan comes even more to life with the musical dancing waters in Republic square attracting crowds of locals and the strong café culture. We will gather together for local cuisine and music within one of Armenia's cultural restaurants. Our second night will be at a high quality boutique hotel in Yerevan.

- **Day 3: Travel from Yerevan to the remote high mountain village of Khachik.**

We will leave Yerevan in the morning for the approximately 2 hour drive to Areni village. A village that has a 6000 year old wine making tradition that is alive today. On the way we will stop briefly at the iconic Khor Virap Monastery, built in the third century, which on a clear day has clear views to snow-capped Mount Ararat. We will then begin to travel out of the flat fertile Ararat valley into the Southern Armenian mountains and arrive in Areni, a major wine making area of Armenia – although much of the winemaking is small and domestic in nature. Small commercial vineyards are developing in this area – and we can view the archaeological remains of a 6000 year old wine production centre in the Areni Caves (one of the oldest in the world) and we will also visit a small specialist organic vineyard nearby where we will taste modern Armenian wine and, if to our taste, provision for the camping journey ahead. We will have lunch in Areni village.

In the afternoon, we will leave Areni and go off-the-beaten-track ascending to the small mountain village of Khachik (40 minutes drive from Areni). Khachik is a small mountain community close to the border of the Azerbaijani Autonomous region of Nakhchivan. At 1800M altitude

and overlooking nearby hills and the Ararat valley – there is no better place to watch the sun drop over Mount Ararat. Our camp will be established close to this small village which we will explore – visiting some of the traditional houses in the area. We will also visit a small private museum created by one of the village families for the local school – a quirky place whose owner is a great storyteller and a tapestry weaver. After watching the sun drop behind Mount Ararat we will be hosted by a family in the village for our evening meal – a first taste of fantastic rural Armenian hospitality in a village that has not had any involvement with organised treks or tours.

- **Day 4: Trek Khachik to Noravank (5 – 6 hours) and minibus to the start of our long trek at Vaghatin**

Khachik is at the centre of the Arpa protected landscape where the Armenian division of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has been protecting local habitats and wildlife. The area has seen a significant rise in the majestic Bezoar Goat and recently the re-emergence of the rare Caucasian Leopard (also known as the Persian Leopard) – Europe’s last ‘big cat’. It is also an area with numerous Caucasian Brown Bear (Syrian Brown Bear). As part of this conservation programme, WWF has been establishing community rangers/caretakers and we will be the first trekking group to walk with the community rangers through the Arpa protected area to the habitat

of the Bezoar Goat, Leopard and Brown Bear. We will depart in the early morning and climb the broad sloped hills above Khachik. There are fantastic views to Ararat Mountain and the hills of Armenia and after an ascent of a couple of hours we will drop towards the impressive Amaghu gorge where leopards have recently been filmed. The last part of our trek will be a descent into the Gorge to reconnect with the road head close to Norovank Monastery – an impressive (but well visited) monastery complex dating from the 13th Century. Despite the monastery being on the main tourist trail, it is well worth spending some time exploring the monastic buildings and the carved stones (known as Khachkar locally) and grave stones.

Our vehicle will meet us at Noravank and we will be taken by car deeper into the Southern mountains of Armenia to the village of Vaghatin (a 2 hour drive), where we will leave our transport behind and where our longer trek will begin the next day. The village of Vaghatin has a rich ancient and modern history. Close to an important Monastery (Vorotnavank), it was on a key ancient pilgrimage route and on the silk trade routes that crisscrossed Southern Armenia. Above the village are caves that were used as shelter by pilgrims and in the early 20th century by partisans and ‘bandits’ fighting Soviet control. Our camp will be set up on the ancient pilgrimage trail overlooking the village and Noravank Monastery. We will be the first trekking group to stay at





Vaghatin and local villagers will join our evening meal, bringing some local food (and probably local vodka) and explain to us the history of the village and the Vaghatin caves.

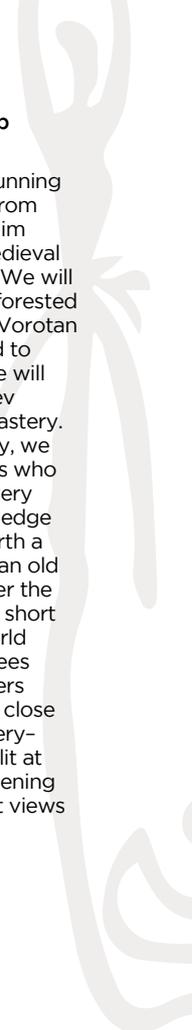
- **Day 5: Trek from Vaghatin to Old Harzis 'ghost village' (about 6 to 7 hours).**

This will be a varied day's trek (about 6-7 hours). We will initially walk between the villages of Vaghatin, Vorotan and Shamb on village tracks and then follow the Shamb Reservoir to the start of the Vorotan Gorge. We will then follow the River Vorotan through the forested and tight gorge along paths that only locals occasionally use. We will reach a small natural lake that is alive with frogs and begin an ascent from the gorge up to the deserted village of Old Harzis. This is an ancient village which was depopulated and then deserted in the mid-20th Century. The ruined village is hauntingly evocative, located on the edge of the Vorotan Gorge. Among the ruins are ancient tombs and carved stones, an intact church and the ruins of ancient houses. We will explore the village and our camp site will have been established with great views of the gorge, cliffs and mountains. Villagers tell us that again we will be the first trekking groups to actually camp in Old Harzis. Some villagers will join us in the evening to tell us more about the history of Old Harzis.



- **Day 6: Trek Old Harzis to Tanzatap Village (6 to 7 hours).**

This will be a relatively long but stunning day of walking. We will first drop from Old Harzis passing an ancient Muslim cemetery and using a beautiful medieval bridge to cross the Vorotan River. We will then begin an ascent through the forested slopes of the southern face of the Vorotan Gorge with vistas to the gorge and to the Southern peaks of Armenia, we will then descend to the village of Tatev beside the 9th Century Tatev Monastery. Like Noravank, two days previously, we will find Tatev popular with tourists who take day trips to the iconic Monastery which is stunningly located on the edge of the Vorotan Gorge. It is well worth a visit. From Tatev, we will descend an old path, leaving Tatev behind we enter the lovely village of Tanzatap. This is a short distance from Tatev, but also a world away; a farming community that sees few tourists other than a few walkers passing through. Our camp will be close to the village below Tatev Monastery—particularly impressive when floodlit at night. We will be hosted for our evening dinner in a village house with great views of Tatev monastery.





- **Day 7: Trek Tanzatap village to Badzraivan village (4 to 5 hours)**

We will be taking the high route through mountain pastures and forests. Armenian hill and mountain communities are heavily dependent on livestock farming with cattle and sheep providing the main economic lifeline for the communities. The villages collaborate to graze the cattle and sheep in the high mountain pastures which are lush and green after the winter snows have melted. We will pass through these high pastures with open views of the surrounding landscape before dropping to our final camp site next to the village of Badzraivan which we should reach in the early afternoon. Badzraivan is far from the beaten tourist route but at one time was on the ancient pilgrimage and trading routes and an ancient Caravanserai (a shelter for pilgrimage and trading caravans) is located close to the village on the edge of the gorge. Our camp will be set up near the village with a view into the Eastern end of the Vorotan Gorge. For those with remaining energy, we can descend from Badzraivan village to visit a waterfall and the ruins of Old Badzraivan which was completely destroyed by an earthquake and resulting landslide around two centuries ago (2-3 hour round trip). The only remaining building is an old church that is revered locally as a miracle – since it is surrounded by the debris of the earthquake but was infeasibly untouched by the falling boulders that lie scattered around. The village was not so lucky and

the area is now in thick forest – another evocative location in this area that has seen many historic ups and downs. We will have a camp meal – our last camp meal of the journey.

- **Day 8: Trek Badzraivan (3-4 hours) to Old Khot and onto Goris town.**

The last day of our longer trek will find us descending back into the Vorotan Gorge on village tracks. We will pass through forest and cross the Vorotan River for one last time before ascending to the superb Old Khot Village. Like Old Harzi, this village was gradually then totally depopulated in the early 20th Century. Authorities and villagers suggest that this was for protection from earthquake since the village was built below rock faces and on the steep slopes of the gorge. The village was clearly a prosperous one and there are the remains of large houses. It is certainly Armenia's most impressive 'ghost village' with ruins built into the steep hillside and cliffs and nature gradually reclaiming an area that was once a thriving town - a place well worth taking time to explore. After exploring the ruined village we will ascend to the new village of Khot. We will meet our minibus and will be taken to a hotel in Goris town where we will have the luxury of soft beds, clean sheets and hot showers. We will have a group meal in the hotel that evening.



- **Day 9: Exploration of the Goris area and bus to ancient Yeghegis**

After a leisurely breakfast we can explore Goris and for those who would like we can take a short circular walk to Old Goris and the limestone caves and rock formations above Goris town. Later we will visit Khndzoresk cave city, a settlement dating back over 1000 years that had at one time 1800 homes and 8300 residents living predominantly in caves hewn from the volcanic rock. The village was inhabited up until the 1950s and is now accessible by suspension bridge. As we head away from Syunik into the neighbouring Sisian Marz (district), where we started our trek, we will stop at the mystical Karahunj (also known as Zorats Karer) standing stones. These impressive stones are said to have been laid more than 7000 years ago and the numerous man-made circular holes in the stones and their alignment have led to claims that Karahunj is an ancient astronomical observatory. Whatever you decide is their origin and meaning, they provide a wonderful foreground to the Armenian high plateau of Sisian and its surrounding mountains. We will then continue our journey to Yeghegis village. Yeghegis was the seat of Armenian kings and the agricultural village is peppered with ancient monuments, Kachkar (carved stones) churches and tombs testifying to Armenia's diverse and ancient history. We will stay at our trekking partners eco-hotel near Yeghegis where we will have a meal to celebrate the end (almost) of our rural journey.

- **Day 10 Exploration of Yeghegis and an optional ascent to Smbataberd Fortress and Tshaghkats Kar Monastery before our afternoon journey back to Yerevan.**

In the morning we can undertake a last walk and ascend the hills above Yeghegis and visit the impressive Smbataberd fortress and Tshaghkats Ker Monastic complex, both superbly located high on a ridge above Yeghegis (a 3-4 hour round trip). Smbataberd Fortress dates back to the 5th century but was extensively rebuilt in the 11th and 13th centuries. The nearby Tshaghkats Kar Monastery complex is an evocative ruin with panoramic views. On our return we can spend some time exploring Yeghegis before a later afternoon departure to Yerevan (approximately 2 and a half hour journey). We will return to our Yerevan Hotel for well deserved rest and a quite evening meal at the hotel.

- **Day 11: Final day in Armenia – rest, relaxing, good food and fine company**

Our last day in Armenia will be a free one to allow you to rest, eat, shop or undertake more exploration. We will meet for a final farewell and celebratory meal with our local support crew.

- **Day 12: Departure from Armenia**

What's Included

- Airport transfers from Zvartnots International Airport Yerevan.
- 4 nights bed and breakfast accommodation in a high quality boutique hotel in Yerevan.
- 1 night in a boutique eco-hotel in the rural village of Yeghegis.
- 5 night supported camp accommodation during our trek.
- Evening meals in Yerevan.
- All meals during our travel and trekking outside Yerevan.
- Transport outside Yerevan.
- Fully supported camp trekking team.
- International and local guides during the expedition.
- Advice and support for flight booking and pre-travel preparation.
- 100% consumer financial protection through the UK Travel Trust Association.

And What's Not

- International flights (flights from London start at around £300 return and involve at least one flight transfer).
- Lunch during our time in Yerevan (to provide you with more flexibility for exploration).
- Personal travel insurance.
- Tips or gratuities for local staff.



To book or make enquiries contact:
Gavin Anderson

E-mail
gavin.anderson@nomadicskies.com

Telephone:
01854 613838

Online
www.nomadicskies.com

 facebook.com/nomadicskiesexpeditions

Hill Cottage, Mill Street, Ullapool
Highland, Scotland IV26 2UN UK

