

# Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus



*A Journey through...*  
**THE MOUNTAINS AND VINEYARDS OF  
GEORGIA AND ARMENIA**

**June 2nd - 14th, 2020**



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**Arrive-Depart** Tbilisi (airport designation TBS)

**Accommodation** in quality boutique hotels specially vetted for comfort and location.

**The package tour** includes 12 nights accommodation, 3 meals every day unless specified otherwise, a glass (or two!) of wine-beer with dinner, primary transportation in chauffeured minibus, additional 4x4 vehicles with drivers for day trips in the mountainous region, airport transfers, guides, entertainment, museum entrances, tips for local folks, and all snacks and coffee. There are no hidden fees. All you are responsible for is international airfare, trip insurance (required), tips for our guides and drivers, and any souvenirs you decide to bring back with you.

**Fees:** See registration

**Description:** This tour is designed for those that enjoy history, natural beauty, sites of historic importance, culture & civilization, local cuisines, wine, traditional singing, and learning about and exploring new places.

**Travel visas** are not necessary for Georgia or Armenia (for US or EU passport holders) - other nationalities check your country's visa requirements.

*St. Elijah church (facing page); Armenian seminarians (below).*

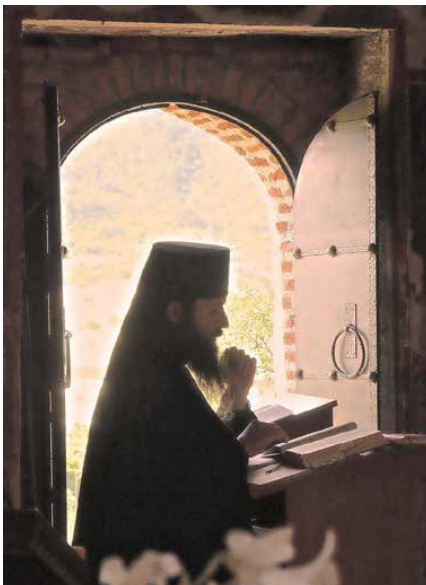


## TRAVEL PROGRAM...

This newly developed tour program focuses on the most important Christian sites in Armenia and East Georgia. Our tour begins and ends in Tbilisi, the thriving cultural and business capital city of Georgia. Our accommodation in the heart of the rejuvenated Old City places us within easy walking distance of many sites including churches, mosques, synagogues, carpet shops, and boutique cafes. We will visit several newly reopened museums featuring high quality exhibits on pre-Christian gold jewelry, medieval Christian embroidery, and the Soviet occupation. The middle of the tour will feature six days (five nights) in Armenia. We will tour the house museum of the avant garde film-maker Sergei Parazhanov, the Matenadaran manuscript museum, the outdoor carpet market, and other sites. The focus of our travels outside of the cities will be the UNESCO-recognized world heritage sites. Two of the most important medieval Christian churches are the Echmiadzin cathedral and seminary -- the spiritual center of Armenian Christianity,

and its Georgian counterpart -- the cathedral of the Life-Giving Pillar in Mtskheta. Some of the finest architectural masterpieces in the Caucasus take time to find: many are hidden in remote locations. Of these, the rock-hewn churches of Geghard and the monastery of Goshavank in Armenia, and the ridgetop monastery of Nekresi in Georgia are among the highlights. No trip to the Caucasus is complete without indulging in some of the delicious homegrown wine. Indeed, in the Alazani Valley, where we will stay for three nights at the end of the trip, viticulture is still visibly the culture of the land: many local villagers produce their own wine from their own grape varieties (more than 430 varieties exist in Georgia alone). We'll visit some local vintners, try their vintages, and take home the best. Every day is





14th c. Armenian manuscript; Georgian monk (above); 9th c. Sevanavank monastery, Armenia (below).

a feast of local cuisine with local wine. And as on all of our tours, we prioritize cultural experiences that feature local music.

### HISTORICAL VIEW

The southern slopes of the Great Caucasus range, stretching south to the headlands of the Tigris and Euphrates in the Eastern Anatolian Plateau, are the lands historically inhabited by Georgian and Armenian tribes. Herodotus and Xenophon described their cultures, and many great civilizations have coveted their mountain rivers and lush valleys. The list of conquerors includes the Hittites, Greeks under Alexander, Romans under Pompeus, Parthians, Sassanid Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Tamerlane, Saffavid and Qajar Persians, Seljuk and Ottoman Turks. Even the mythological hero Jason and the Argonauts traveled here in search of the fabled Golden Fleece. The history of the Debed Canyon in the borderlands between Georgia

and Armenia (a featured site on this tour), serves as a microcosm of these vast military movements as its temporary Georgian or Armenian occupants were besieged by Alexander the Great, the Mongols, the Safavid Persians, and the Seljuk Turks, among others.

### CHRISTIANITY:

Christianity played a decisive role in the parallel histories of Armenia and Georgia. Both were among the first states to convert to Christianity (309 and 326 respectively). In the fifth and sixth centuries, their religious paths would split along theological differences, the Armenians choosing the non-Chalcedonian miaphysite doctrine, while Georgians chose to remain allied with Byzantine-Orthodox doctrine. Christianity became an extremely important factor in the identities of both nations as they struggled to unite quarreling tribes against the superior forces of foreign armies. Indeed,





a third Christian nation in the Caucasus (the Albanians) completely disappeared from world history during the Middle Ages, presumably due to slaughter and forced conversion. Both Georgians and Armenians maintained active monasteries beyond their territories, such as in Greece, Antioch, Jerusalem, and elsewhere. These monasteries served an important educational function as scribes translated and inscribed Christian texts

into illuminated manuscripts. Within their home territories, Christianity became an important symbol of state identity and power, with the monarchy and local aristocracy sponsoring the construction of grand cathedrals in the city centers and ornately carved monastery churches in the remotest mountain valleys. Today, Christianity is in strong revival in Georgia, while in Armenia, religiosity has been slower to rebound after the So-

viet period.

#### AT THE CROSSROADS...

The road to independence in the Post-Soviet era has been fraught with the seeds of tension sown decades ago. Armenia fought a war with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno Karabagh region. Georgia fought Ossetian and Abkhazian separatists supported by Russia over territorial disputes. To the

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*Alaverdi Cathedral (above); Abbess Tevdora; Gremi fortress (below).*





*Khor Virap monastery, Armenia (above); Detail, khachkar cross-stone (below); 2nd c. Temple of Garni, Armenia (below right); Yerevan (below left).*

north, the North Caucasus nations remain restless even while defacto truces surrounding the 2014 Winter Olympic games take place on the 150th anniversary of the annihilation of the Circassian and Adyghean tribes on the north coast of the Black Sea. Meanwhile, UNESCO and the diaspora communities of both nations have taken an active role in protecting and rebuilding medieval Christian sites throughout the South Caucasus.



## ITINERARY...

### Day 1, Tbilisi

Guests arriving at the Tbilisi international airport (TBS) will be met by a chauffeur and transported to a boutique hotel in downtown Tbilisi. The first organized activity will be a champagne toast at 6:30pm, followed by a welcome banquet at 7pm.



### Day 2, Tbilisi

We know that you'll be excited to explore the fascinating capital city of Tbilisi, founded in the 5th century and retaining many important historical buildings. After visits to the impressive, newly renovated National Museum, there will be a walking tour of Old Town, featuring visits to the Catholic church, several Georgian Orthodox churches, an Armenian church, the one remaining historical mosque, one synagogue, the historic Persian baths, and the Narikala fortress. Option to attend Vespers service at 5pm to hear traditional chanting, or go off exploring on your own!





*Vineyards in East Georgia (above); Georgian singers and cuisine (below).*

### Day 3, Mtskheta

In the mid morning, we drive East to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia where we'll tour the 12th century Samtavro Convent, burial site of 4th century saints Nana and Mirian, and St. Gabriel, a 20th c. "Fool-for-Christ," and a recently canonized saint. We will also tour the monolithic 11th century Cathedral of the Life-Giving Pillar, the heart of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the iconic 6th c. Jvari monastery. An arch of a Roman bridge built by Pompeus in 65 AD exists in Mtskheta, and may be visible poking above the waters of the dammed Mtkvari river nearby.

### Day 4, Dilijan

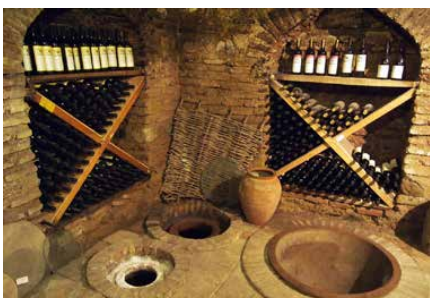
Departing Tbilisi, we'll travel south into the upland plateaus of Armenia. We'll visit the medieval monasteries of Akhtala and Haghpat while driving through the impressive basalt cliffs of the Debed Canyon. In the afternoon, we'll travel through the mountains into the forested Dilijan National Park, where we'll stay one night in the Paradise hotel. Time permitting we'll carve out time for a walk near the Haghartsin monastery before dinner.

### Day 5, Yerevan

In the morning, we drive to the shores of Lake Sevan, a massive highland lake at elevation 6200 feet. There we tour the 9th cen-



tury monasteries built on an island, then proceed towards the 13th c. Geghard monastery complex. Some of the chapels in this complex are carved directly into the stone, and have incredible acoustic resonance. We also tour the 1st c. Garni temple complex (UNESCO site) before arriving in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia where we'll stay three nights. Supper in Yerevan, where we'll seek out some live music!





### Day 6, Yerevan

On our museum day in Yerevan, we'll tour the National Museum and the exhibit hall of the Matenadaran, the repository of some 20,000 manuscripts including priceless medieval illuminated manuscripts in many languages. After lunch we'll drive to the Holocaust museum, before coming back for free time in the main carpet bazaar in Yerevan. In the evening, we'll drive

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*Jvari monastery - 6th c. (above); Goshavank monastery (below).*

to a functioning carpet studio, where workers hand-knot carpets using only traditional materials and techniques. Dinner at the carpet museum.

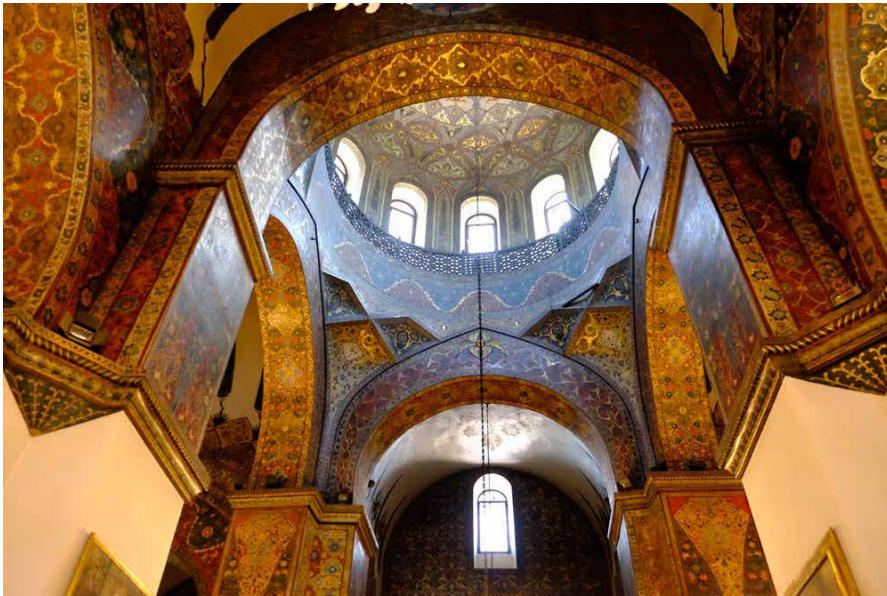
### Day 7, Yerevan

Venturing south, we tour the Khor Virap monastery at the foothills of Mount Ararat, site of St. Gregory the Illuminator's 4th century imprisonment. Nearby is the Echmiadzin cathedral and seminary, the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. We will meet the dean of the

seminary and have a chance to ask questions about Armenian Christianity. After lunch, we visit the 8th century Hripsime Church, an equal cross-dome church that is often a favorite among visitors. Time permitting, we'll also stop to marvel at the pre-Christian Zvartnots pagan temple and ruined Christian cathedral. Free evening in Yerevan, we'll have a list of recommended restaurants.







### Day 8, Iqalto

On this driving day, we'll return north to Georgia via a different route, with stops along the way to take photographs at vistas and cultural sites. Once in Georgia, we turn east and drive over the Gombori mountain range to the Alazani valley, the heart of Georgia's Kakheti wine-producing region.



### Day 9, Iqalto

After our long drive, we'll start this day with a one hour walk to the nearby Iqalto monastery and academy, founded in the 6th c. by Zenon the Syrian Father. Next we'll visit a convent to see the remains of exquisite gold and lapis lazule wall paintings. After a feast of a lunch at Nikala's famous local restaurant, we return to the hotel for a siesta



(large pool!). In the afternoon, we tour the 12th c. romanesque style Alaverdi cathedral before a wine-tasting and fancy sit down meal at the Babaneuri winery and resort.

### Day 10, Iqalto

Today we tour down valley, arriving first at the Gremi fortress and then the Nekresi monastery founded in the 6th c. by Abibos the Syrian Father. After lunch with a magnificent view of the valley, we tour the 19th summer palace of the Chavchavadze family (who later sold the place to the Romanovs), an important diplomatic family in the 18th and 19th centuries. They were the first to export wine from Georgia to France. In the evening we return to the hotel for a rest before a banquet on the terrace restaurant of the hotel.

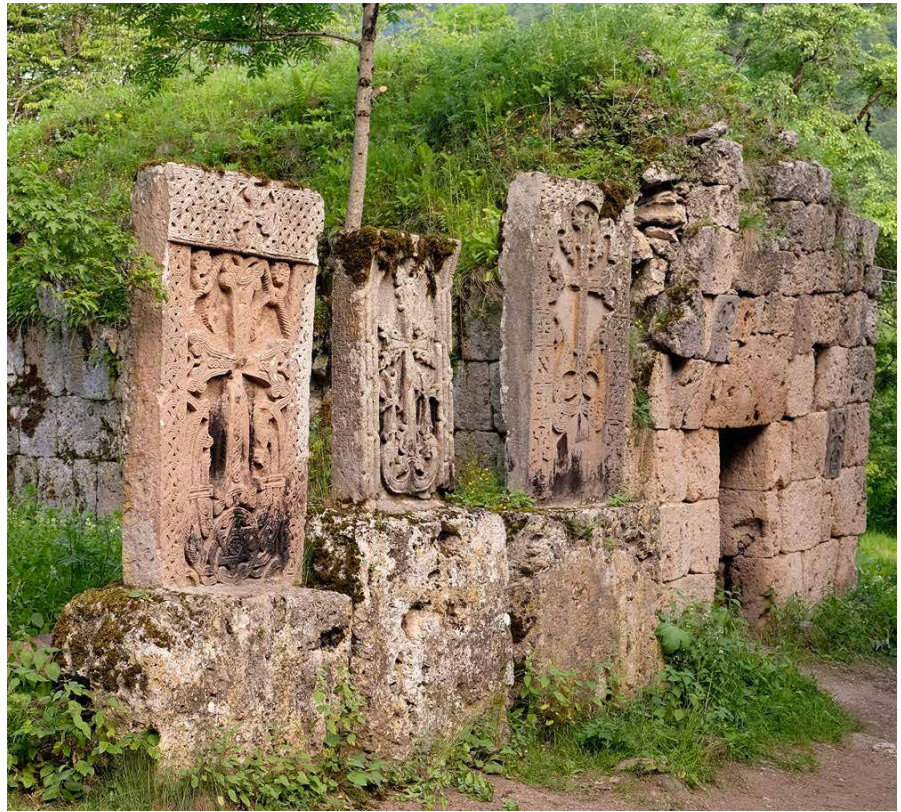
*Echmiadzin cathedral interior (above);  
Armenian priests (below).*

## Day 11, Tbilisi

Today we drive East, following the 4th century footsteps of St. Nino, Enlightener of Georgians. After converting the King and Queen in Mtskheta, she traveled to Ninotsminda and then on to Bodbe, where she founded a convent. At the Bodbe convent, we will join 15 centuries of pilgrims venerating the grave of St. Nino, and marveling at the natural beauty of the site. After lunch and walk in Sighnaghi, the nearby hilltop fortress town, we return two hours West to Tbilisi. Free evening to explore the Old Town area immediately around our hotel.

## Day 12, Tbilisi

On this final day, we are going to pack in a number of important site visits. First will be the all-important treasury of Georgia exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, where we see galleries and galleries of medieval re-



pousse icons and other treasures that were secreted away for safe-keeping in France during the Bolshevik revolution of 1921. In the afternoon, we will continue our walking tour of the Old Town area, while in the evening, John likes to invite singer friends to serenade the table at our fare-

well banquet. Airport transfers are all pre-arranged and paid, the schedule will be printed and posted at the hotel front desk.



*Armenian khachkar cross stones (above);  
Georgian nuns of Samtavro (left).*



## Tour Leaders...

John A. Graham, ethnomusicologist and chant scholar with a specialization in Georgian music manuscripts, completed his Ph.D. at Princeton University in 2015 and has lectured at Princeton and Yale. His passion for Georgian culture and history led to the first tour in 2006. In recent years, the portfolio of tours has expanded as hotel infrastructure expands to new regions and John charts new tour itineraries ahead of the crowds. John is fluent in the Georgian language, including its three medieval alphabets, and lives with his family in Tbilisi. He continues to sing Georgian traditional music as a hobby, often inviting friends to sing on tour! He is joined by co-leaders and performers along the tour route.

*Sighnaghi fortified town (above); Tour group at outdoor lunch (right).*



## ACCOMMODATION



Tbilisi: Garnet Hotel or similar (3+2 nights) is situated in the heart of the historic Sololaki district within walking distance of Tbilisi Old Town. The hotel is not excessively fancy but is new, neat, and clean, has an elevator for ease of access to upper floors, and is well-situated in town.



Tufenkian Heritage hotel or similar (3 nights) is located in the heart of Yerevan, two blocks from Republic Square with its singing fountains. It is also conveniently across the street from the main carpet bazaar. It has a small swimming pool, an active carpet weaving studio, and a restaurant.



Savaneti hotel or similar (3 nights) is located rurally in the Kakheti viticulture region to the East of Tbilisi. It sits in a village of vineyards, at the head of a broad valley, with views of the Great Caucasus mountains. The hotel has a large outdoor swimming pool.



## Post-Tour to Kazbegi highlands (June 14th-17th, 2020)

For those wishing to extend the tour, we offer a three-night, four-day extension trip up the Russian Military Highway to the Kazbegi highland region.

**Day 1:** Depart for the 16th c. Ananuri Fortress, featuring an ornately carved Russian iconostasis and original Georgian frescoes. Stop for photographs at scenic viewpoints such as the mosaic (left), before crossing the Jvari pass at 2400 meters. Check-in to the 4-star Rooms Hotel or similar (staying 2 nights).

**Day 2:** Walk to the 13th c. Gergeti Trinity monastery (option to drive). A drive through the Daryal Gorge to the Russian border follows lunch, with a stop at the medieval ruins of Queen Tamar's fortress and a tour of the 21st c. Monastery of the Archangels. Walking options in the afternoon! Aperitifs before dinner at the hotel, possibility to have dinner of meat dumplings with a local family.

**Day 3:** Return to the lowlands with stops along the way. Late afternoon in Tbilisi, dinner, hotel included.



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*Mount Kazbegi, 16,512 ft. (top); Gergeti Sameba Church; group at Mosaic monument (middle); Ananuri fortress (below).*



## TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS:

- This is a full tour package within Georgia and Armenia. Guests are responsible for their flights. We recommend online search engines such as [www.kayak.com](http://www.kayak.com), or by contacting your local travel agent.
- Please book a round trip flight to Tbilisi, Georgia (airport designation TBS). Send details to John Graham.
- Visas are not necessary for Georgia or Armenia for US or EU passport holders - contact with questions.

## INCLUDED - NOT INCLUDED

- Includes 12 nights accommodation in the hotels listed in the itinerary (or comparable hotels)
- Includes all meals as listed in the itinerary (two evenings guests are responsible for dinner - a chance to explore Tbilisi). A glass or two of local wine (as well as other drinks) is included with every dinner. Occasional snacks and coffees are also included throughout the day, we pamper our guests!
- Includes all transportation including luxury minibus or small coach (primary), plus extra 4x4 vehicles as necessary, taxis as necessary, and both airport transfers.
- Includes guides, entertainment, museum entrances, special access events... no hidden fees!
- The tour fee excludes only international airfare, individual travel and cancellation insurance (which is required, see registration form), and driver-guide tips (suggested \$5/day/guest, for each guide or driver, to be given at end of tour. There will be one guide, one driver for this tour).

## THE TRIP IS LIKE:

This trip is a small-group cultural tour, focused on visiting important historical monuments, discussions on history, valuable local experiences, contact with local people, indulging in a wide variety of cuisine and wine, and where schedules permit, attending opera-ballet performances, but also allowing time for spontaneous experiences that always enrich our tour. Traditional music will most certainly be a feature. The tour includes several scenic, easy walks, which are optional.

## WEATHER

The weather in June is typically gorgeous late spring weather! In the lowland cities of Tbilisi, it could be warm (75-85 F), but in the highlands of Kazbegi, it could be cool (65 F). Strong possibility of some rainy days, please have a raincoat! For sunny days, bring sunscreen and a sun hat.

## DRESS

Bring comfortable walking shoes, as the side-walks and steps are uneven and require ankle support. Light weight, comfortable travel clothes recommended. In churches, ladies should have headscarves, men should wear long pants (good suggestion for the whole trip as men in this part of the world do not often wear shorts). In some Georgian churches, ladies are requested to follow tradition by donning wrap-around dresses at the entrance of churches. We will do our best to abide tradition, as Georgia tries to revive cultural respect for the sanctity of religious spaces. Raincoats for rainy days, sunhats and sunscreen for sunny days. No formal dress code for evening dinners, dress as you would with friends.

## REGISTRATION FORM

### Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus, a cultural excursion through Georgia & Armenia!

**Tue. June 2nd, to Sun. June 14th, 2020**

Yes, I would like to attend this journey!

\$3350 Tour fee

\$490 Single supplement

Post-Tour option: Kazbegi highlands trip (details page 13). \$780/person; single supplement \$145.

\_\_\_\_\_ Your Balance. **Final payment of balance due by Feb 2nd, 2020 (4 months in advance of tour).**

To register for this tour and secure your place, please complete this registration form and send it with a deposit payment of \$1000 (per person), checks payable to "John Graham." 145 Windsor Dr, White River Junction, VT 05001. Credit cards can be processed through Paypal (add 3% Paypal charge). Direct bank transfer is the preferred payment method. Also, please kindly send a photocopy of the picture page of your **valid passport** (for hotel booking purposes).

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Name

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Address

City

State

Zip/Postal Code

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Home phone

Alt. phone

Email

Please select from the following:

double occupancy with 2 beds

double occupancy with 1 bed

single occupancy

I would like assistance booking flights

I request extra hotel nights (specify)

Please list your hobbies, passions, interests:

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

### WHAT IS INCLUDED

- Hotels as indicated on the itinerary based on double occupancy. A limited number of single rooms are available at an additional supplement. We reserve the right to substitute other hotels of a similar quality.
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner as mentioned in the itinerary. All house wines, beers, coffees, extras included.
- Admission to all sites as described in the itinerary.
- The handling of no more than one medium size suitcase per person.
- Private Coach transportation throughout, with extra vehicle rentals as necessary, plus two airport transfers by chauffeured taxi.

### WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

International air transportation to Tbilisi. Incidental expenses such as telephone calls, fax communications, à la carte orders or items not on the set menus, alcoholic drinks over and above table wine provided at evening meals, laundry, and any other items not specifically mentioned as included.

### TRIP INSURANCE

In the event participants cancel their trip, all non-refundable payments will be forfeited. **Trip cancellation insurance is required** for this purpose, and can be purchased with your travel agent or with an online vendor. Please kindly provide proof of purchase.

## REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

A passport with validity for at least six months beyond end of stay, along with any visas required by host countries. Note: American and EU citizens can enter both Georgia or Armenia for a stay up to 90 days visa-free.

## TOUR COSTS

Costs have been calculated on the basis of charges and exchange rates as of January, 2019. Should these change, "John Graham Tours" reserves the right to make appropriate adjustments to the tour cost.

## PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

While the trip is designed to accommodate a range of physical capabilities, it does require guests to be comfortable occasionally traversing uneven sidewalks, ascending and descending staircases and paths to scheduled itinerary destinations, and relaxing on scheduled bus trips. That being said, the tour organization prioritizes appropriate amounts of time at sites, meals, and in interactions with locals, with time on the bus kept to the bare minimum (you will be pleasantly surprised compared to other tours!).

## ALTERATIONS TO ITINERARY

"John Graham Tours" reserves the right to alter, modify or withdraw the itinerary if events beyond his control warrant it.

## ITINERARY DEVIATIONS

"John Graham Tours" assumes no liability or responsibility for any participant deviating from the group tour. Participants arriving and departing independently are responsible for their own transfers.

## CANCELLATION

Should cancellation occur prior to 90 days before departure, full refund will be granted less a \$100 service charge; within the following days prior to departure, the specified percentage of tour costs is non-refundable: 60-89 days - 30%; 45-59 days - 50%; 44 days or fewer - 100 % forfeiture of entire tour cost. Cancellations must be submitted in writing; trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. There will be no refund for any tour accommodation, service, or feature not taken, or if participant cancels for any reason while tour is in progress. Any additional costs due to leaving the tour are the responsibility of the departing passenger. In these times of uncertainty in the international realm, we also have to add that should cancellation or alteration of the program occur due to civil disturbances, acts of terrorism, war, natural disaster, and other events of force majeure or acts of God (including threat or fear of same), refunds will be made only to the extent that they are recoverable by "John Graham Tours," and that such cancellation or alteration may result in the total loss of funds paid by participants. Many destinations may pose a normal risk of political instability, civil unrest, etc. It is assumed each participant has reviewed the same with respect to their own comfort level of risk and personal safety, and your signature of this form releases "John Graham Tours" and its employees of any and all liability in connection with the foregoing. A decision to withdraw from the trip for these reasons or any others will be bound by the same terms of cancellation.

## RESPONSIBILITY

"John Graham Tours" and/or agents assume no responsibility or liability in connection with the service of any train, carriage, aircraft, motor coach, or other conveyance or hotel that may be used wholly or in part, in the performance of the tour. Neither will they be responsible or liable for any injury, loss, accident, delay or irregularity which may be occasioned by reason of any defect in any vehicle or through neglect or default of any company or person engaged in conveying or accommodating the passengers; nor for any delays, injuries, damages or losses resulting directly or indirectly from any acts of God, acts of governments, de jure or de facto, wars whether declared or not, hostilities, civil disturbances, terrorist activities, riots, thefts, pilferage, epidemics, quarantines, medical or customs regulations, or from any causes beyond the control of "John Graham Tours," and/or agents. In the event it becomes necessary for the comfort or well being of the passengers to alter or modify the itinerary or arrangements, such alterations may be made without penalty to the tour operator and are not grounds for cancellation with refund. Additional expenses, if any, shall be borne by the passenger. This agreement becomes effective upon acceptance into the tour by "John Graham Tours." These Terms and Conditions shall be governed by the law of the State of Vermont.

Your signature below confirms that you have read the Terms and Conditions and accompanying itinerary and agree to abide by its contents.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_