

Rufus Reade Tours



IN THE STEPS OF QUEEN TAMAR

EASTERN TURKEY AND GEORGIA
(WITH AN ARMENIAN EXTENSION)

14TH SEPTEMBER TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024

OPTIONAL EXTENSION TO ARMENIA
30TH SEPT TO 7TH OCT 2024

ESCORTED BY RUFUS READE



HIGHLIGHTS

Turkey Outstanding 13th century Great Mosque & hospital at Divrigi

The evocative ruins of the Armenian capital at Ani

Georgia The 12th century Cave Monastery at Vardzia

The old city centre of Tbilisi

The monasteries around Telavi

The wonderful fresco-filled interior of the Monastic Academy of Gelati

Armenia The capital of Armenia, Yerevan

The medieval monastery at Geghard

13th century Norovank Monastery in its secluded valley

The remote 9th century monastery of Tatev

FLIGHTS

The cost of flights is not included in the price of the holiday. Our target flight will be met. It is due to arrive in Samsun (via Istanbul) on Turkish Airlines flies from London Heathrow or Edinburgh on 14th September (book through ticket and don't split the ticket!). Fly back to the UK on 30th September 2024 from Tbilisi, Georgia or on 7th October from Yerevan, Armenia with various airlines, usually changing flights in Italy, Greece, Malta or Germany. There is the option to get the sleeper back to Tbilisi and fly from there. Please don't book flights until your booking has been confirmed. Flights can be booked with Karen Rodger at Traveller Counsellors, though you may have your own preferred means of booking travel arrangements.

Tel 0131 224 0157 karen.rodger@travelcounsellors.com

JOURNEY DETAILS

Turkey and Georgia

Dates: 14th to 30th September 2024

Duration: 16 nights

Min: 10 travellers

Max: 15 travellers

Price: £3790

Single room supplement: £565

Deposit: £380

Armenian Extension

Dates: 29th Sept to 7th Oct 2024

Duration: 8 nights

Min: 5 travellers

Max: 15 travellers

Price: £2264 (*See footnote*)

Single room supplement: £164

Deposit: £220

The deposit is non-refundable fourteen days after the tour has been formally confirmed with a confirmation invoice: see our terms and conditions of booking.

What's included: accommodation in 3 & 4 star hotels on a bed and breakfast basis. Meals are indicated throughout the itinerary as (B/L/D). B: breakfast / L: lunch / D: evening meal. Accommodation and sequence of visits in the itinerary are for illustrative purposes, subject to availability and local advice.

Optional overnight sleeper train from Tbilisi to Yerevan. The tour is escorted by Rufus Reade & Andrew Haughton.

What's not included: your international travel to/from Turkey/Georgia/Armenia/UK personal travel insurance (which is a condition of travel), drinks, laundry, phone-calls, visas for any of the countries visited (currently free of charge but things change!). **Passport validity:** some British passports have a validity of 10 years and six months. Most countries do NOT recognise any validity beyond 10 years, and require 6 months validity from the time of arrival (nine and half years from date of issue!).

NB The price of the extension drops to £1947 if we have 10 or more opting for this extension.

Summary

This tour loosely covers an area in Turkey, Georgia (and optionally) Armenia once ruled by the fabled Queen Tamar of Georgia. She is one of the most highly esteemed rulers of the territory. The tour crosses from Turkey into Georgia, with an optional extension into Armenia. Our visits include some sites of international importance: one of the most fabulous mosques in Turkey, the deserted city of Ani, the cave lavra of Vardzia. The landscape is very beautiful, and hugely varied: from grass-covered steppe-lands to riverine tree-lined valleys. On our optional extension our overnight sleeper train takes us into the Armenian capital where modern architecture gives no hint of the ancient monasteries and the remains of a long history which lie just beyond the city limits.

ITINERARY

September 14: Arrive in Samsun on the Black Sea coast (Turkish Airlines connect daily from Istanbul) and transfer to our hotel for overnight. (-/-/-)

September 15: drive to Amasya, a lovely small town straddling the Yeşilirmak River. Early prototypes of Ottoman mosques were first developed in this picturesque town. We'll have time to have lunch here and see a bit of the town, before continuing to Sivas for two nights in 4* (B/L/-)

September 16: city tour of Sivas, intermittently a capital of the Seljuk empire, and significant for the Sivas Congress of 1919. Overnight Sivas. (B/L/-)

September 17: we will continue southeast to Divrigi in order to see what must be one of the most interesting mosques in Anatolia: the Ulu Camii and Hospital^{R*}. We'll continue to Erzurum. Overnight Erzurum 4*hotel. (B/L/-)

September 18: some buildings from Erzurum's medieval past survive in the form of the Cifte Minareli Medrese and the Yakutiye Medrese. The

town is well known for Oltu stone, a form of jet, which is fashioned into jewellery. Overnight Erzurum. (B/L/-)

September 19: it's a little over two half hours drive to Kars, which being a 'border' town, has an history intertwined with the Georgian, Armenian, Kurdish and Russian cultures as well as Seljuk and latter Ottoman Turks. Overnight Kars 4* hotel. (B/L/-)

September 20: our excursion today takes us right to the Armenian border, to the ancient ruined city of Ani, a former Armenian capital, 'city of a 1001 churches' sitting on a gorge separating it from modern Armenia. Sacked in 1236, badly damaged in an earthquake 83 years later, it was fully abandoned in the 17th century. This must be one of the most evocative sites in all of Turkey. Return to Kars for overnight. (B/L/-)

September 21: we'll cross over the Turkish/Georgian Border at Sarpi, and head to Batumi, for check-in at the hotel. Overnight at a Hotel Bloom (3*) in Batumi. (B/L/D)

September 22: we will begin with a walking tour of this vibrant city which is full of architectural interest. We'll explore the Piazza Square, Church of St. Nicholas, Europe Square, theatre of Batumi, walking down to the statue of Ali & Nino and Batumi port. Later we'll drive to the Batumi Botanical gardens, offering a huge

variety of flora from nine phyto-geographic areas. (B/L/D)

September 23: we are in fabled Colchis, where Jason and his Argonauts came in search of the Golden Fleece. This also the land that celebrates Prometheus: we'll visit a cave associated with the God of Fire. Our next stop will be in Kutaisi, where we will stretch our legs in the old town centre. Continue to the UNESCO World Heritage Site – Gelati Monastery^{R*} and Academy (12th century). Continue to Borjomi via Rikoti tunnel. Overnight in Golden Tulip (4*) Borjomi. (B/L/D)

September 24: Georgia boasts a number of 'lavras', monastic cave settlements: the one at Vardzia is outstanding. Much of what

we see dates back to the 12th century. We then drive to Tbilisi for three nights in boutique Hotel Strofi (3*). (B/L/D)

September 25: we'll take a walking tour of Old Tbilisi, with its blend of Asian and European charm. We will see the highlights of the Old Town with beautiful churches, a mosque (unusually serving both Sunni and Shi'ite communities), the synagogue and the Sulphur Baths. There will be an opportunity to visit the golden treasury of the National History Museum. (B/L/D)

September 26: today we'll leave Tbilisi for an excursion to the ancient capital at Mtskheta, where will visit the Church of Jvari^{R*} (6th century) and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11th century) both World Heritage Sites. In the afternoon those with spare energy can join the optional walk in Sololaki district of Tbilisi rich with 19th century architecture. We can visit the fabulously decorated home of a 19th century merchant – now the Academy of Arts. In the evening we will take a funicular ride to Mtatsminda mountain to enjoy our dinner at a deluxe Funicular restaurant with the great views over Tbilisi. Overnight at a hotel in Tbilisi. (B/L/D)

September 27: we will leave Tbilisi to drive to Kakheti, Georgia's wine-making region, an area of vineyards and ancient

monasteries. First, we'll visit Bodbe Nunery, the revered final resting place of St. Nino of Cappadocia, set among tall cypresses. Continue to Signaghi - known as the city of love. Our next stop will be a winery where we have lunch as well as a wine tasting! Our dinner will be with a family of a local painter and winemaker. Overnight at Seventeen Rooms (3*) in Telavi. (B/L/D)

September 28: a short distance from Telavi are some remarkable monasteries which have survived in different ways: Gremi has an atmosphere which reflects its place as the capital of Kakheti in the 15th-17th centuries. The church occupies a mound dominating the plain. We then continue to the Nekresi monastery complex with the oldest church in Georgia (4th century). For lunch we'll visit a local family where we hope to see traditional bread being baked in a clay oven. After lunch we'll drive to the Alaverdi cathedral (a working monastery). Dinner and overnight in Telavi. (B/L/D)

September 29: before leaving Telavi, we can spend some time in the local food market. After our return drive to Tbilisi, we can explore the Dry Bridge Flea Market. Rest of the day at leisure for independent activity. We are planning a simple early supper for the benefit of those catching the evening sleeper train to Yerevan. Overnight at Hotel Strofi (3*) in Tbilisi. (B/L/D)



September 30: Early transfer to the airport for flights back to the UK. (-/-)

OPTIONAL EXTENSION TO ARMENIA

We hope to secure first class sleeper compartments on the train from Tbilisi to Yerevan. Since we are going to press before the train timings are announced we are hoping the schedule remains unaltered!

September 30: early morning arrival by train into Yerevan. Transfer in search of breakfast! It'll be too early to check into hotel (and secure rooms). After breakfast, we'll drive to Garni, a 1st century temple dedicated to the goddess of cleanliness Mihr. We will continue to Geghard Monastery, a place of ancient worship with an incredible atmosphere - call it sanctity if you will. We will visit a local

house where we will see lavash, a paper thin bread, being made. We'll have a simple lunch of lavash and cheese. First of three nights in Yerevan (3* Hotel "14 Floor"). (B/L/D)

October 1: we will start the tour with the tour of the 'pink city', the capital of Armenia: Yerevan. Amongst our visits we'll go to the Manuscript Museum of Armenia, the Matenadaran, with its huge and valuable archive of ancient Armenian manuscripts. We will go to the edge of town to the Erebuni museum and fortress, reminders of Armenia's link with the Urartians (9th to 6th centuries BC). We'll visit "Ararat", a brandy distillery. Overnight in Yerevan. (B/L/D)

October 2: we'll drive out of the city to the very heart of the Armenia faith: The Cathedral of Ejmiatsin,^{R*} founded in 303, (& now the official residence of the Catholicos of Armenia). The cathedral complex includes a museum with some exquisite items on display. Nearby are the ruins of the circular Zvartnots Temple, (7th century), which may prompt comparisons with ruins we saw at Ani. Overnight in Yerevan. (B/L/D)

October 3: leaving Yerevan we will drive to Khor Virap Monastery (founded 4th century), which is associated with the arrival of Christianity in Armenia. If we are lucky with the weather, there are lovely views of Mount Ararat,





October 5: leaving Dilijan, we will visit Fioletovo to meet the Molokans Russian-speaking community, often known as ‘Old Believers’. We’ll continue along the Shamlugh River to the medieval Haghpat and Akhtala monasteries. Return to 14 Floor Hotel, Yerevan. (B/L/D)

October 6: visit to Parajanov’s museum: Parajanov was an iconoclast film director, an

which is an important icon for Armenians despite being over the border in Turkey. Our drive takes us on to Noravank monastery (12th century), the pale honey stones echoing the rocky gorge. On our way back we will visit Areni, at the centre of Armenian wine production, where we may have a tasting. Continue for dinner and overnight at 3* Mirhav Hotel, Goris. (B/L/D)

October 4th: we plan to visit the monastic complex of Tatev (originally 9th century). Access used to be by a slow and bumpy road, but now we

can take a 12 minute ride there along the longest reversible cable car in the world! Afterwards, our road takes us along a route used since at least medieval times: we’ll stop on the ancient Silk Road at the ruins of the Selim Caravanserai. We’ll continue to Lake Sevan, the largest lake in the Caucasus. On the shore stands the Sevanavank collection of monastery churches (10th century). From here we will drive to dinner and overnight in the Tufenkyan 3* Hotel, Dilijan. (B/L/D)

influential (and much persecuted) voice in Soviet cinema. We’ll go on to visit the weekend arts and crafts market, called by the French word ‘Vernissage’. The rest of the day at leisure in Yerevan. Overnight in 14 Floor Hotel, Yerevan. (B/L/D)

October 7: transfer to the airport for our flights to the UK.

NB, sites marked with ^{R*} are undergoing restoration as we go to print. Their predicted status for autumn 2024 is not known.



Schematic map of our intended route: starting in Samsun, Turkey, and ending in Tbilisi, Georgia (main tour about 1980km) or Yerevan, Armenia (extension). The complete route covers 2800 km of which about 300 km is on an overnight sleeper train.

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