

ARMENIA

# GUIDEBOOK

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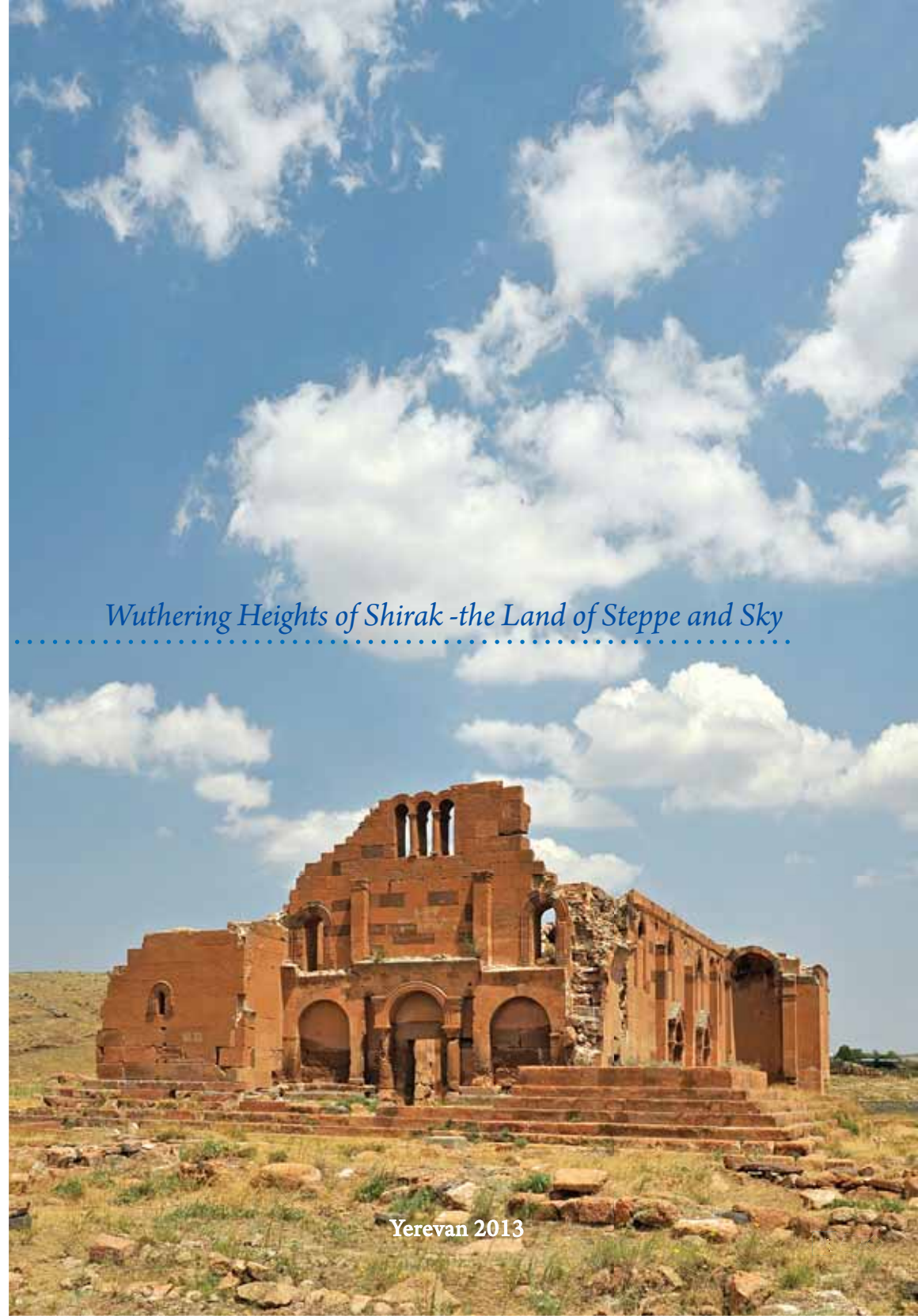


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## *Wuthering Heights of Shirak -the Land of Steppe and Sky*



Yerevan 2013



### FOREWORD

Mix up the vast open spaces of the Shirak steppe, the wuthering wind that sweeps through its heights, the snowcapped tops of Mt. Aragats and the dramatic gorges and sparkling lakes of Akhurian River. Sprinkle in the white sheep flocks and the cry of an eagle. Add churches, mysterious Urartian ruins, abundant wildlife and unique architecture. Then top it all off with a turbulent history, Gyumri's *joi de vivre* and Gurdjieff's mystical teaching, revealing a truly magnificent region filled with experiences to last you a lifetime.

However, don't be deceived that merely seeing all these highlights will give you a complete picture of what Shirak really is. Dig deeper and you'll be surprised to find that your fondest memories will most likely lie with the locals themselves. You'll easily be touched by these proud, witty, and legendarily hospitable people, even if you cannot speak their language. Only when you meet its remarkable people will you understand this land and its powerful energy which emanates from their sculptures, paintings, music and poetry.

Visiting the province takes creativity and imagination, as the tourist industry is at best 'nascent'. A great deal of the current tourist flow consists of Diasporan Armenians seeking the opportunity to make personal contributions to their historic homeland, along with a few scattered independent travelers. Although there are some rural "rest-places" and picnic areas, they cater mainly to locals who want to unwind with hearty feasts and family chats, thus rarely providing any activities. So where to go, then? Finally putting its post-earthquake economic stagnation behind, Gyumri will thrill you with its Belle Époque center, lively art scene and delicious cuisine. On the other hand, just a ten minute drive can show you an entirely different world: slow paced villages clad in dust, herds of cattle that wander aimlessly across the roads and groups of children gathered to see the "stranger" who has wandered into their territory. Are you an outdoorsy and adventurous person? If so then consider a visit to the North. With its magnificent landscapes and pristine nature, the area is a perfect destination for horseback riding, long-distance cycling or hiking, or more leisurely activities such as bird watching, fishing or camping out under a sprawling mass of stars. Are you eager to experience culture? Then head south, where every step will unfold another page of Shirak's glorious past.

This brochure has no pretensions to be an exhaustive guidebook about Shirak. Its objectives are rather to present the basic facts about its nature, history and culture, along with accommodation options and other practicalities, and to propose new itineraries and trails. Moreover, its primary goal is to boost your imagination and inspire you to take a step forward and explore the region from your own viewpoint.







## HIGHLIGHTS OF SHIRAK

### *Natural Heritage*

The natural assets of Shirak include some fantastic places to visit, explore and discover. Shirak offers plenty of scope for light hiking and backpacking trips. There are good paths around Arpi Lake, the Akhurian River Gorge, Javaqh and Bazumi Ridges, and a more strenuous hike to the top of Mt. Aragats. Ecotourism and rural tourism are possible in Arpi Lake National Park and around the Trchkhan waterfall, where visitors can explore nature by hiking, cycling and horse-back riding. Lovers of bird watching and other wildlife observation will be thrilled in Arpi Lake National Park, where many rare species of flora and fauna can be spotted. Winter activities include cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing and sledging. Snowmobiling can also be practiced all around the province, though it is forbidden within the borders of Arpi Lake National Park.

#### **01. Arpi Lake National Park**

The Arpi Lake National Park is located to the north of Shirak, next to the border with Georgia and Turkey. It was established in 2009 on an area of 21179 hectares. The Javakhq-Shirak ecosystem with its mountain steppes, sub-alpine grasslands, as well as, lakes and wetlands is unique to the Caucasus eco-region. Arpi Lake is also deemed to be a site of “international importance” under the Ramsar Convention. The ecosystem is recognized as a globally important staging and breeding ground for migratory and resident bird species, of which several are listed as endangered in the IUCN Red Data Book. So far, more than 190 bird species have been recorded in the area, of which about 120 are breeding in the park. The lake is the habitat for the biggest colony of the Armenian Gull (*Larus armeniacus*) in the world and the only breeding site of the Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelicanus crispus*) in Armenia. Some endangered species that are regularly seen in the park include the Corn Crake (*Crex crex*), Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*), Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) and Common Crane (*Grus grus*). Migrant waterbirds could be found at the north-eastern and western shores of Arpi Lake, where they gather on mudflats, shoals, and on the islands of the lake, as well as around

marshes along the Akhurian River. Local breeding avifauna is particularly notable for the diversity of birds associated with wetlands and mountain meadows.

The national park is a habitat for 89 species of butterflies and about 700 species of vascular plants, including a number of endemics of the Caucasus and Armenia. Many of these are very ornamental: orchids, gladiolus species, poppies and many others. In addition, Arpi Lake National Park is the only habitat of Darevsky's viper in the world. The best time to visit during the breeding season is mid-April to late June, while visits in late August to late October would be particularly rewarding for observing raptor migration.



#### **02. Trchkhan waterfall**

The Trchkhan waterfall, called the “Armenian Niagara”, with its 23 m long drop is the highest in the country. The waterfall, which is on the Armenian Government's list of natural monuments, is located on the right bank of the Chichkhan River's Trchkhan tributary at 1786 m above sea level. Surrounded by the beautiful Bazumi Mountains, it is situated on the border with Lori Province, approximately 33 km away from Gyumri. The river Chichkhan is rich in trout which swim upstream during the reproductive season. According to a local story, one day the villagers noticed the fish swimming upstream of the river and jumping over the waterfall. That is why they named it “Trchkhan” which in Armenian means “jumping”. The waterfall's area is composed of sand stones, lime-stones, and tuff conglomerates of the Eocene Epoch. Different kinds of unique plants and birds registered in the Red Data Book can be found in its surroundings.

Recently, the waterfall was endangered by the construction of a hydro-electric station on the Chichkhan River. A civil initiative named “Let's Save Trchkhan Waterfall”, supported by many ecological organizations, succeeded to stop the construction. Finally, the Government of RA adopted a special protective territory with the aim of providing appropriate protection.



### 03. Akhurian River Gorge

As it passes through the province, the Akhurian River creates several interesting gorges. The most spectacular parts lie north of Amasia, around Vahramaberd village and south of the Akhurian Reservoir. The gorge near Amasia is a great place to spot some rare birds, butterflies and plants. During medieval times, several bridges were constructed over the Akhurian River. Today, the bridge near Ani, which may date back to the Bagratuni Dynasty, is one of the few left. Another one, a 34 m span bridge in the nearby Jrapı village, was left under the water's surface during the construction of the Akhurian Reservoir.



### 04. Mantash Reservoir

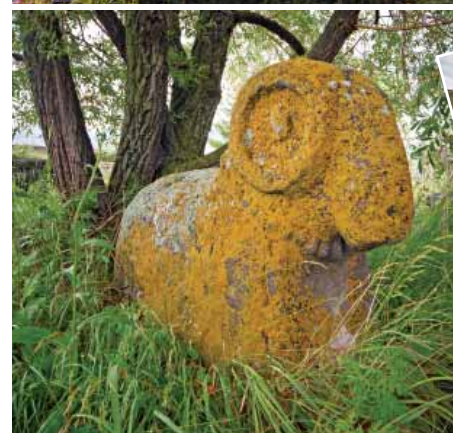
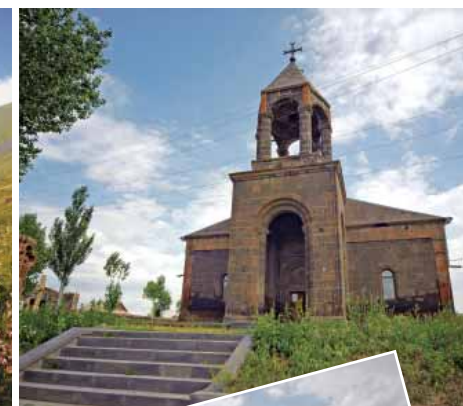
The Mantash Reservoir, nestled in the foothill of Mt. Aragats, is one of the most beautiful places in Shirak. Containing over 8 million cubic meters of potable water at an altitude of 2,600 meters above sea level, the reservoir is a favorite resting place for mountaineers on their way up or down from Mt. Aragats. Due to safety measures, fishing and camping around the reservoir are strictly forbidden, although its chilly, pristine waters are abundant with the famed Alabalagh trout.

### 05. Natural Monument "Turtle" Stone

Turtle Stone near Dzorakap village is a natural stone monument included on the list of Armenia's Natural Monuments. Natural monuments are rare in Shirak Province, therefore, this sculpture in the shape of a turtle has become one of the loveliest places for locals and visitors alike to gather and contemplate the legend ascribed to it, which leads people to believe that lying on this stone can bring good luck.

## Cultural Heritage

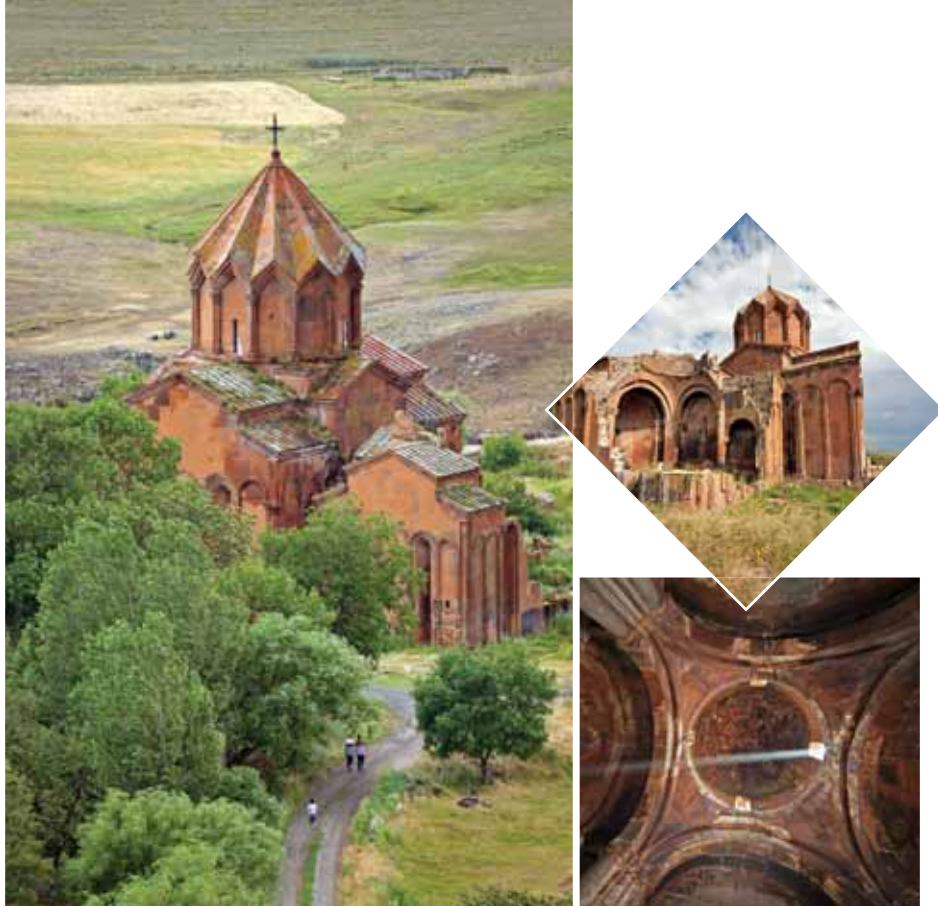
With more than 2500 registered cultural monuments, it can be inferred that there are pieces of history found all over the province. Shirak has a very rich cultural heritage, dating from prehistoric to modern times. Upper Shirak is the richest in pre-Christian monuments of all of Armenia's regions, while Gyumri preserves the largest collection of authentic 19th century Armenian architecture. The downside is that cultural monuments are not easy to find due to the lack of signs with road directions and site information. Asking the locals will not be very helpful either, not only because of the language barrier, but because in most cases the directions will be too complicated to follow. The best option is to have a skillful guide, able to provide accurate navigation and a good interpretation of Shirak's cultural heritage.



### 01. Kumayri Historic District

The Kumayri Historic District, which represents the old part of Gyumri, is an open air museum with more than a thousand buildings dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries.





## 02. Marmashen Monastic Complex (10th-13th c.)

The Marmashen Monastic Complex is definitely the most visited tourist attraction in the Gyumri vicinity. It is located on a plateau overlooking the left bank of the Akhurian River, 14km northwest of Gyumri. Built between 986 and 1029 by Prince Vahram Pahlavuni, Marmashen was one of the largest and most important medieval cultural centers of Armenia. Once surrounded by walls, Marmashen now consists of two groups of structures, some of which have undergone extensive restoration. The first is the main complex with three surviving churches, a ruined gavit (an Armenian-style entrance to the church), the remains of a large round church and a small chapel. The second group, a couple hundred meters away, has a small 7th century church and an old cemetery. Archaeological excavations have discovered the remains of an early Christian chapel and many other archaeological sites in the vicinity of the monastery, from Urartian fortresses to medieval khachkars and settlements. The most important is the cuneiform inscription of the Urartian King Agrishiti I. The ground around the monastery is a popular picnic place and many Armenians come here to have barbecues (khovrats), especially during the weekends. The pink stones which contrast nicely with the landscape and the vicinity of the Akhurian River make this spot very picturesque.



## 03. Harichavank (7th-13th c.)

Harichavank is a 7th-13th century monastery located near the village of Harich, 3 km southeast of the town of Artik. Harichavank is known as one of the most famous monastic centers in Armenia and was especially renowned for its school and scriptorium. Archaeological excavations of 1966 indicate that Harich was in existence during the 2nd century BC, and was one of the more well-known fortress towns in Armenia. The fortified compound overlooking a river has a tiny chapel on a cone shape rock jutting up from the river. It has split off from the monastery due to an earthquake, and is now impossible to access. Note: pay attention to dangerous, unmarked holes in front of the church entrance that once served as food storages.

## 04. Horom Citadel (3rd-2nd mil BC – early Middle Ages)

Horom Citadel is an ancient Bronze Age through Urartian fortification erected upon two large hills, approximately 1 kilometer east of the village of Horom. The 9th century BC citadel is considered to be one of the most important archaeological sites in Armenia because of its unique architecture. Recent archaeological excavations have been underway at the site. Well preserved fortification walls were uncovered as well as large amounts of cultural artifacts. The grandeur of the site and the views from its fortified walls are impressive, but the state of preservation is poor (access road serves as a local waste disposal).

## 05. Beniamin Archaeological Site (5th-2nd c.)

An archaeological site in the village of Beniamin is one of the best examples of Shirak's culture from the 5th-2nd c. BC, when the province was a part of the Achaemenid Empire. The excavations comprise the foundations of a royal palace, a fortress, numerous buildings, columns, streets and other artifacts which cover a large area. The excavations are ongoing and new finds are revealed regularly. Tourists are welcome to see what has been uncovered so far, but without a good interpretation of the site the visit might not be very satisfying.





#### 06. Ani

The most breathtaking view in Shirak Province is looking across the Akhurian River gorge into Turkey at the ruins of Ani, the medieval capital of the Armenian kingdom that covered much of present day Armenia and eastern Turkey. The city is located on a triangular site, visually dramatic and naturally defensive, protected on its eastern side by the cliffs of the gorge and on its western side by the Tzaghkotsadzor valley. A stronghold of the Kamsarakan Dynasty from the 4th century, the city was bought by Prince Ashot Bagratuni (the Meat-Eater) in the first half of the 9th century. The rise of Ani began in 961, when Bagratuni king Ashot III made it the capital of the Second Armenian Kingdom. The Bagratunis enlarged their city to an area of about 1,500 hectares, built a series of outer walls and spanned the Akhurian River with bridges. Called the "City of 1001 Churches", Ani stood on various trade routes and its many religious buildings, palaces, and fortifications were amongst the most technically and artistically advanced structures in the world. At its height, Ani had a population of 100,000–200,000 people and was the rival of Constantinople, Baghdad and Damascus. Captured by the Byzantines in 1045, Ani was then taken by Seljuks in 1064. After losing its power, the city saw many invasions and destructions before finally being abandoned. Today much of the monumental construction remains, while the rest of the structures have melted away with time.



#### 07. Yereruyk Basilica (4th-5th)

The Yereruyk Basilica is a 4th to 5th century church in the village of Anipemza, situated on the left bank of the Akhurian River, only 8 km southeast of Ani. It was most likely built through the efforts of the Kamsarakan princes, who owned this land at the time. Being one of the earliest Christian monuments in Armenia, it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List in 1995.

#### 08. Site of Hoghmik Habitation (3rd mil. BC – 3rd c.)

The site of Hoghmik habitation is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in Shirak. It is located near the village of Hoghmik, just four kilometers from Amasia. In 1987, archeologists accidentally discovered a complex of pagan temples while surveying the area before the construction of the Kaps Reservoir. Today only one-twentieth of the complex has been studied. The complex was built before Christ, during the reign of Artashes II (reigned 34 BC-20 BC). One of the distinguishing features of the Hoghmik complex is that all of the temple roofs were flat, but the central temple was domed. It functioned until the 3rd or 4th century AD. After the adoption of Christianity, the temples were not destroyed but gradually sealed shut.





#### 09. *Jrapı Caravanserai (11th c.)*

An 11th c. Silk Road caravanserai was rebuilt by Jrapı when the Akhurian reservoir was constructed. A “caravanserai” was a roadside inn built to shelter people, goods and animals along ancient caravan routes. Next to the Jrapı Caravanserai can be found a stone by stone reconstructed, black and red tuff 1874 church, and the foundations of a single nave 11th c. church.

#### 10. *Gusanagyugh Fort (12th-13th c.)*

The ruins of a medieval fort made of black tuff can be seen in the center of the Gusanagyugh village, 18 km south-west of Gyumri. An information panel in 5 languages with data about the village’s cultural heritage is installed next to it.

#### 11. *St. Stepanos Church of Lmbatavank Monastery (7th c.)*

St. Stepanos Church of Lmbatavank is located on a hillside southwest of the town of Artik. The church has a small cruciform central plan with a single octagonal drum and dome above. In the interior of the church are important frescoes that date back to the 7th century. A tale says that Turkish invading forces tried to fire cannons at the church. After firing twice and missing, they tried once again and hit a cannon in their own vicinity instead of the structure. The commander saw that what they were firing upon was actually a church and stopped the attack. The plateau below the church offers a complete view of the town of Artik.



#### 12. *St. Astvatsatsin Church (5th c.) and St. Gevorg Church (7th c.)*

Saint Astvatsatsin Church, built in the 5th century, and Saint Gevorg Church, built in the 7th century, are located close to Artik’s central square. St. Gevorg is the larger of the two churches and had previously been used as a storehouse in Soviet times. The first attempt to restore the church was made in the early 1990s. Both churches are partially in ruins, with restoration interrupted by the collapse of the USSR. Since 2006, a fund-raising campaign is ongoing to reconstruct the St. Gevorg Church.



#### 13. *Arakelots Vank (11th c.)*

The single nave Arakelots Vank is situated on the eastern side of the village of Pemzashen. The other buildings of the monastery are in ruins, except for the lower fragment of the bell tower. The structures are built from red tuff stone.

#### 14. *Markaravank (10-13th c.)*

Placed on the western end of Pemzashen is a domed Markaravank-style church with the St. Sion Church constructed in 1001. An old cemetery with tombstones and khachkars surrounds the church.

#### 15. *Hogevank Monastery (5th–13th c.)*

Located in a tiny Sarnaghbyur river gorge, the complex consists of a cruciform type 11th c. church and the foundations of a series of 4th-6th and 7th c. nave churches that were replaced by the monastery.

#### 16. *Shrine of Gregory the Illuminator*

The shrine with sacred water is placed in a cave which is reputed to have been visited by St. Gregory the Illuminator.



### 17. Seven Brothers Saints Chapel (4th-5th c.)

The Seven Brothers Saints Chapel is located 1.5 km north of Hatsik village. According to the legend, one night the brothers dreamed the same dream in which they were told to come to this place and build the chapel. The custom before entering the sacred place is to walk around it clockwise three or seven times.

### 18. Tsak Kar (1st-2nd mil. BC)

The famous pagan shrine, Tsak Kar near Hatsik village is a huge stone with a hole just big enough for a person to squeeze through. Legend says that it was created by a horse, which hit the rock with his hoofs thus making a hole. People believe Tsak Kar can cure illnesses and that those who succeed to pass through the hole will acquire eternal happiness. Today, the nearby area is a picnic place frequented by locals who pass through the hole 3 times for the sake of healing and more than anything-for pure fun!

### 19. Sepasar Fortress (4th-3rd mil. BC)

Bronze Age cyclopic castle ruins, at the top of a hill rising above Mets Sepasar village, are under active archaeological excavations.

### 20. Lusaghbyur Sacred Natural Site

Lusaghbyur is a sacred water spring located halfway between the Hartashen and Musayelyan villages. The uniqueness of this spot is the ability of the rock to attract pebbles like a magnet. The place is frequented by many locals who come to pray, picnic and drink the sacred water. In Armenia, some water sources are revered to the same extent as Christian holy places. In front of them on Sundays and Fridays, candles are burned and prayers are offered. For Armenians, the worship of water sources is connected with the belief that they bestow health.



## Gyumri

*"If you want to know Armenia, you must come to Gyumri," is a statement profoundly believed by all citizens of Shirak's capital town. There is significant devotion and dedication in the Gyumretsis' love of their city, which went from being one of the country's most vibrant areas to become one of the most tragic.*

### HIGHLIGHTS

Every sightseeing tour around Gyumri should start from the city's central and best-known **Vardanants Square**. During the 19th century, this area was filled with buildings, mostly small shops and workshops. The square was constructed in the 1930s, under Soviet rule, based on the original plan of the renowned architect Alexander Tamanyan.

**Church of Surb Amenaprkich** (St. All Savior's Church), is located to the south of the square. Constructed between 1858 and 1873, it was designed to resemble the Cathedral of Ani, since the inhabitants of 19th-century Gyumri (then called Alexandropol) saw their city as the historical successor to their glorious medieval capital Ani. The church was heavily damaged by the 1988 earthquake and is currently under reconstruction.



There is an interesting story about the beginning of St. All Savior Church's construction. During the 1850s, in the central part of Alexandropol, Armenian Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches were built. Spurred by this, the members of the Armenian Apostolic Church decided to build a church right in-between both of these churches, and exceeded them with the new church's size and appearance. The first day of church construction began with a big celebration for the citizens. Everyone wanted to make a contribution by donating or participating in the construction. Even women brought soil with their own aprons. The construction of the church was led by a famous stonemason Tadevos Antikyan who often went to Ani to study the remarkable mother cathedral created by Trdat the Architect, the chief architect of the Bagratuni kings.





**Surb Astvatsatsin Church (the Holy Mother of God Church)**, also known as Yot Verk (Seven Wounds), is found at the north-east corner of Vardanants Square. Built from 1873 to 1884 in western Armenian architectural style, it had a wooden dome which was substituted with stone after the 1988 earthquake. Earlier, there was a chapel erected by the Kamsarakan princes, where the icon “The Seven Wounds of the Holy Mother of God” was kept. At the end of the 1860s, the holy fathers of Echmiadzin decided to move the icon out of the city. Local people did not agree with that decision and rebelled against them. After long negotiations they agreed upon the following: the icon would be left in Alexandrapol, only if a new church would be built for preserving the icon. That is how the church was built and named the Yot Verk (“Seven Wounds”).

Generously decorated with paintings, Yot Verk’s interior differs from other Armenian churches. The peculiarity is that it is the only Armenian Church which has iconostasis and five different altars for various religious communities. During the Soviet period, Yot Verk was the only church in service in the area, and not just the residents of Gyumri but also many people from Akhalkalak and Akhaltska from Georgia attended its religious ceremonies.

Starting from Vardanants Square, the historical part of town spreads predominantly to the north and west, occupying the central part of modern-day Gyumri. With more than 1,000 buildings dating back from the second half of the 19th century to the 1920s, the **Kumayri Historic District** is one of the few places in the country with authentic urban Armenian architecture. Built of black tuff, it features the “Armenian Belle Époque” style of elegant living that symbolized this city of craftsmen and merchants.

Take a walking tour around the Kumayri Historic District and discover the architectural beauty of some remarkably preserved buildings, such as: Dzitoghtsyan House (1872), Sergei Merkurov House (1869), “Chislani Shenk” (1920), The Trade College (1912), Tsaghikyant’s Brewery (1898), Poloz Mukuch Pub (1860-1880), Sheram Music School, “Sahakanushyan” Ladies School (1880-1900), The Aslamazyan Sisters House Museum (1880-1890), Hotel France (1880-1890), Children’s Culture Center (1880-1890), Mher Mkrtchian Museum/Khasharan (1880-1900), Avetik Isahakyan House (1880), “Bari Luis” House (1890-1900), the former bath house (1860s-beginning of the 20th c.), Hovhannes Shiraz Museum (1883), The Dowry (1900), and a multi-family dwelling (after 1920) in Jivani Street. More information about the 57 selected buildings can be found in the Gyumri walking tours booklet, in the Italian language, with texts prepared by the City Research Center of Gyumri and the Kumayri Preserve Museum. It is not hard to find knowledgeable locals who will be willing to show you the city, presenting each building, street and monument with special devotion and vigor, so characteristic of Gyumreysi people. At night, you can take a romantic ride through the cobble stone streets in a horse and carriage and feel like you are passing through an open air museum of 19th century lifestyle.



Other sites of interest include:

- **Sev Ghul** or Black Fort is a Russian fortress dating back to the 1830s. The big, round fortress is built on the top of the hill overlooking Gyumri. It once protected Russian troops from the Ottoman Empire. In case of a siege, the fortress could accommodate 15,000 soldiers and officers.
- **Red Fort** is another old, Russian fort which currently stations the 102nd military division of the Russian Federation. The complex is closed to visitors.
- **Mother Armenia** is a 1975 Soviet Era monument erected on a hill next to the Black Fort. The statue is 18 meters tall, but including its base it rises 41 meters into the air. The front side of the monument has an ordinary appearance of a victorious Armenian woman, but if you look from the Turkish border you can see only the back of the statue which resembles a dragon. The statue received immediate complaints from Turkey when it was built, the Turks calling the statue a political provocation. Although the complex is a little bit neglected, the views from the top of the hill are stunning.
- **St. Gregory the Illuminator Church** is a 19th century church whose dome caved in during the earthquake. As a neighborhood church that served the working class population, the church still awaits renovation.
- **Saint Nikolai the Wonderworker** is a Russian Orthodox Chapel built in 1879-1880. The church was nicknamed “Pelpelan Zham” (Shimmering Chapel) due to its once gleaming, silver roof. Although the roof is now covered with aluminum, people of Gyumri still call it Pelpelan Zham. The chapel is located on the corner of Teryan and Nalbandyan Streets on a hillock known as “The Hill of Honor”. This is because in the 19th c. it contained a Russian military cemetery where Russian soldiers and doctors who were killed in the Russian-Turkish wars of 1853-1856 and 1877-1878 were buried. At that time, Pelpelan Zham served as a funerary chapel. In the mid 1950s, during the Soviet Rule, a children’s dispensary and playground were built in the middle of the graves, completely destroying the cemetery. In 2011, the area of the Hill of Honor and the church was renovated and restored. An altered replica of a statue, which was put in Kars after defeating the Turks during the Russian-Turkish War, was erected next to the church. It represents a soldier mourning for his dead comrades-in-arms and an eagle with the Turkish flag in its talons.
- **Ankakhutyan Hraparak (Independence Square)** built in the 1940s, is the second-largest square in the city. Independence Square is occupied by a large green park, centered with the statue of an Armenian girl raising a cross; commemorating the victims of the 1988 earthquake. The reputable Gyumri Fine Arts Academy is located on the western side of the square.
- **Charles Aznavour Monument** is dedicated to the world-famous French singer and actor of Armenian descent. This monument represents the people of Gyumri’s appreciation for Aznavour’s assistance after the earthquake. Az-



navour, together with the Armenian-French composer Georges Garvarentz, formed a foundation called “Aznavour for Armenia” (APA) eight days after the earthquake. Aznavour was able to collect \$6 million with about 85% of these funds coming from non-Armenian French nationals. In 1989 Aznavour and Garvarentz composed a song “Pour toi Arménie” (For you Armenia) as a call for help for the Armenians. It took six weeks from the creation of the song to completion of the disc with almost two million copies sold. Aznavour made his own contribution of close to \$2 million from the sale proceeds of this song. With all of the collected donations, the foundation was able to build 47 schools and three orphanages for the victims of the disaster.

- **Gorki (Central) Park** (1890s, 1925-1928) is the largest and the most beautiful park in Gyumri. The large tufa gateway, located at Gusans Square, leads into the oldest part of the park, originally home to military offices and a gymnasium. Inside the park there are many sculptures and busts of famous people. The 150 year old building on the left was a theater and hosted the premiere of the opera “Anush” in 1912. On the other side of the park, the Rotunda has spectacular views of the Akhuryan Valley, the Mother Armenia statue, and the Sev Ghul Fort. Don’t miss the Ferris wheel ride, offering panoramic views of the whole town.
- From the end of the Middle Ages until the 19th century, Armenian folk music was profoundly influenced by the tradition of the gusans (bards). **The Gusans Statue** on Gorki Square commemorates two of Gyumri’s most famous 19th century gusans, Sheram and Jivani, who are considered the fathers of contemporary Armenian folk songs. Their compositions are played at most Armenian celebrations, especially weddings.
- **“Mushurba” Monument** (“running water”) represents one of the symbols of Gyumri from the old times. The mushurba (or kelkelan) is a special cup made of copper, silver and, rarely, gold. There is an interesting mechanism in the cup which prevents the air from coming out when water is poured into the cup and, thus, bubbles appear making a loud gurgitation sound. Mushurbas, made only by Gyumri craftsmen, were very popular at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.
- **Gyumri’s Shuka (bazaar/open air market)** is the oldest and the largest in Armenia. Here you can find everything, from food and spices to cheap clothes and household hardware. This is the busiest part of town with sellers lining both sides of Shahumyan Street (south of Vardanants Square).





- **Old Alexandrapol Brewery**, another one of the city's landmarks, is frequently visited by beer fans and tourist groups. The first written records about the Alexandrapol Brewery refer to the 7th of May, 1898 when famous brewer Tsaghikyants bought Hotel Grossi and reconstructed it into a brewery. Tsaghikyants used traditional technologies while at the same time introducing a number of innovations. Barley was used as a raw product and ice, brought from the Akhuryan River, was used for cooling the fermented beer. After the earthquake of 1988 the brewery was fully destroyed. Only in the 2000s was it reconstructed by Samvel Balasanyan, who preserved the initial architectural style. There is a chapel in the yard that was recently reopened after serving as a granary during Soviet times. Take a tour around the brewery, see the production process, light a candle in the chapel and finish your visit in the old cellar, tasting the natural raw beer directly from the huge barrels.

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Web Site: [www.aleksandrapol.am](http://www.aleksandrapol.am)

Working Hours: Visits to Alexandrapol Brewery should be scheduled in advance.

- **The Papoyan's Wrought Iron Workshop** is one of the few wrought iron workshops left in Gyumri with a seven generations long tradition. Garik, the youngest of the Papoyan masters, will show you the process of wrought iron shaping and his collection of wrought iron furniture.

Contact: Garik Papoyan, Craftsman

Address: 44, Teryan Str., Gyumri

Phone: (+374) 93 32 06 43

## RURAL TOURISM

Many villages in the Shirak province, especially those situated in the North, all have the potential to become tourist destinations. The opportunity to be close to authentic Armenian villagers, taste their food products, see the production process and experience all of the peculiarities of village life, while surrounded by beautiful nature, is something that should be explored and developed. At the moment, rural tourism in Shirak is still in its beginning phase, and there are just a few households that offer B&B services. If you don't mind the basic conditions and the language barrier, you will be rewarded with great hospitality, delicious meals and genuine warmth that will make your stay the experience of a lifetime.

Some of the suggested rural destinations going from north to south are villages around Arpi Lake, Musayelyan, Dzorashen, Karmrakar, Karnut, Lernakert and Sarnaghbyur.

- Arpi Lake's adjoining villages include **Berdashen, Zorakert, Ardenis, Tsaghkut, Garnarich, Shaghik, Darik** and **Mets/Pokr Sepasar**. Besides multiple activities related to the national park, all of these villages offer a unique opportunity for developing agritourism and stepping back in time to a simpler way of life.

**Activities:** bird watching, mountain biking, horse riding, canoeing, hiking, cross country skiing, snow-shoeing, agritourism

**Attractions:** Mid-Bronze Age site (Mets Sepasar), medieval chapel with an old gravestone (Mets Sepasar), bridge from the Russian empire period (near Krasar), Vishap stone (Darik), several khoyakars (Darik), a pagan sacred site (Darik), an old graveyard (Ardenis), cyclopean walls (Ardenis), an old oil press (Ardenis), ruins of a fort (Tsaghkut), and remains of a fort (Zorakert).





### Useful contacts:

#### Berdashen Municipality

Contact: Hambardzum Akhtskhetsyan, Head of Community

Phone: (+374) 94 86 31 95,  
(+374) 55 20 06 57

#### Ardenis Municipality

Contact: Mergel Gharibyan, Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 98 48 92 72  
Contact: Shakro Kazaryan, MCA Deputy Director  
Phone: (+374) 93 82 40 05

#### Tsaghkut Municipality

Contact: Arzuman Karakhanyan, Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 93 10 81 08

#### Garnarich Municipality

Vanik Manukyan, Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 98 70 16 75  
E-mail: garnarij@mail.ru

#### Shaghik Municipality

Artak, Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 94 49 84 83

#### Mets Sepasar Municipality

Contact: Soghoyan Sergey, Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 94 83 31 90,  
(+374) 96 83 31 90

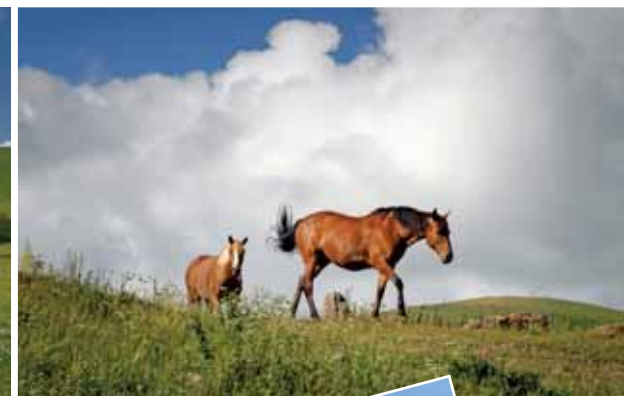
- **Musayelyan** is situated in the foothills of the Bazumi Ridge, 2000 meters above sea level. The village offers a unique opportunity for tastings at Ashotsk Cheese. Since its foundation in 1973, The Ashotsk Cheese Factory is the largest enterprise in Armenia producing hard and brine cheeses. Its wide range of assortment includes Emmental, Dutch cheese, Cheddar, Lori, Shirak, Chanakh, and Suluguni. Cultural assets of the village include the half ruined St. Trdat Church (1894 AD) and a medieval graveyard on a nearby hill. Some old gravestones show the influence of animal features shared with Pre-Christian rites. Halfway between Hartashen and Musayelyan is Lusaghbyur, a sacred spot with a stream of water coming out of the rock. In the mountains, near the village of Hartashen is a field of mysterious megaliths. It consists of 3 lines of stone columns stretching for several kilometers. No information is available about its purpose and time of creation. An aerial look could help in understanding and capturing the complete image. Surroundings of the village offer numerous possibilities for an active holiday. Hiking in Bazumi Ridge, mountain biking, or cross country skiing are great examples. An interesting 35 km long cycling tour can be made to Tashir in Lori province, taking a winding road between mountains (not passable until May), which passes through a beautifully stark landscape.

**Activities:** hiking, cycling/mountain biking, horse riding, cross country skiing, kite skiing, snow-shoeing, snowmobiling, sledging

**Attractions:** Bazumi Ridge, Javakheti Ridge, St. Trdat church (1894 AD) (Musayelyan), medieval graveyard (Musayelyan), Kurgans-Bronze Age burial mounds (Hartashen), rows of megaliths (Hartashen), Lusaghbyur sacred site (Hartashen/Musayelyan), remains of an old church and a graveyard (Zuygaghbyur)

### Trails:

- Walking tour from Musayelyan to Zuygaghbyur / cultural sightseeing
- Javaqh Ridge-Mt. Achkasar (3,196 m) and Mt. Gayinsar (3,125 m)
- Bazumi Ridge-hike from Musayelyan to Dorashen (18 km); various short hikes
- Mountain bike ride to Tashir (35 km)- possible only from May to October



### Useful Contacts:

#### Musayelyan Municipality

Contact: Karen Vardanyan, Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 93 60 29 77  
E-mail: musayelyan77@mail.ru

#### Ashotsk Cheese Factory

Contact: Georgy K. Baghdasaryan, Director  
Address: Musayelyan village, Ashotsk Region, Shirak Province, Armenia  
Phone: (+374) 243 606 16, (+374) 312 6 16 16  
(+374) 91 42 39 20, (+374) 93 32 16 44,  
(+374) 77 72 72 78



- **Dzorashen** village is probably the most picturesque village in Shirak. Situated close to the border with Lori, it offers beautiful natural landscapes with numerous hiking possibilities. The unique peculiarity of the village is a nearby hill, which is believed to be the epicenter of the Spitak earthquake. During the quake the hill was completely reshaped swallowing the local shepherd and his flock of 400 sheep, who may be considered as the first victims of this natural disaster. There are no established B&Bs in the village, but the village mayor can find homestay accommodations for tourists interested in visiting the area.

**Attractions:** Trchkhan Waterfall, epicenter hill, Bazumi Ridge, Chichkhan river gorge, Chichkhan Reservoir, the ruins of St. Stepanos Monastery (12th-13th c.), the remains of a medieval fort (10th c.), Dzorashen Church (1863 AD), St.Karmravor Church (7th c.) (Kakavasar village), remains of a Cyclopean fort (Kakavasar village), Chichkhanavanq Monastery (7thc.) (Shirakamut)

**Activities:** hiking, mountain biking, fishing, horse riding (there are 7 horses in the village), camping, 4 wheel off road driving, picking medicinal herbs, agritourism (making milk products in a traditional way, rose hip juice making / tasting)

#### **Trails:**

- Chichkhan Reservoir, Trchkhan Waterfall and Chichkhan River gorge to Shirakamut (Lori) (14 km)*
- Bazumi Ridge-hike from Dzorashen to Musayelyan (18km); various short hikes*
- Saralanj (Lori) (7 km)*
- Dzorashen-Kakavasar (7 km)*



#### **Useful contacts:**

##### **Dzorashen Municipality**

Contact: Garnik Sahakyan, Head of Community

Phone: (+374) 94 84 02 25

- **Karmrakar** is a tiny rural community situated 10 km north of Gyumri, at 1,800 meters above sea level. With only 52 residents, this 5,000 year-old hamlet is rapidly emptying out. Karmrakar has two ruined churches and a pre-Christian fort remains nearby. Beside the road entering the village is a 2nd-4th c. graveyard. Two kilometers to the south are located the Tsak Kar pagan shrine, the Seven Brother's Saints Chapel and a picnic area frequented by local people. Among village products is supreme quality honey which reflects the local climate.

**Activities:** cultural heritage sightseeing, walking, cycling, beekeeping

#### **Useful Contacts:**

##### **Karmrakar Municipality**

Contact: Gagghik Vahradyan, Head of Community and honey producer

Address: house n. 6, 1/1 Str., Karmrakar village, Akhuryan Region, Shirak Province

Phone: (+374) 312 6 71 97, (+374) 91 32 64 81

- Village of **Karnut** lies 11 km east of Gyumri. It's a small farming community in the foothill of the St. Minas peak suitable for short excursions and half day hikes. A partially preserved basilica (4th-5th c.), erected on the foundations of a pagan temple, is located in the NE part of the village next to an ancient graveyard. Its southern chapel has a small recessed apse in its western wall, a unique case in Armenia which orients altars to the East. It is believed that this remote church either participated in or tolerated Pre-Christian rites. Possessing a dense concentration of Early Bronze Age materials, Karnut has been the focus of intensive archaeological excavations. There is a pilgrimage site on the St. Minas peak which was the place of worship from pre-Christian times. Take a hike to the top of the hill to watch the sunset or make longer hikes up into the surrounding hills. A nearby reservoir, which captures the mountain waters flowing to the Jrarat River, is a nice fishing and picnic spot with great photo opportunities of Mt. Aragats.

**Attractions:** Karnut Reservoir, St. Minas peak, Early Bronze Age ruins (2900-2500 BC), a ruined basilica (4th-5thc. / rebuilt in 10thc.), remains of a dam (8th-7th c. BC)

**Activities:** cultural sightseeing, hiking, fishing, agritourism

#### **Useful contacts:**

Karnut hiking and dining excursion can be booked at "Travel Gyumri" (contact details provided in Travel Agencies & Guides section).



- **Lernakert** is a picturesque hamlet with cobble stone streets and old, though ruined, traditional stone houses. In the center of the village, stands a simple 4th century basilica devoted to St. Hovhanes Mkrtych (St. John the Baptist). Don't leave before paying a visit to Artem Mkrtychyan, a khachkar maker, who made all the stone crosses in the village and surroundings.

#### Useful Contacts:

##### Khachkar Workshop

Contact: Artem Mkrtychyan, Craftsman

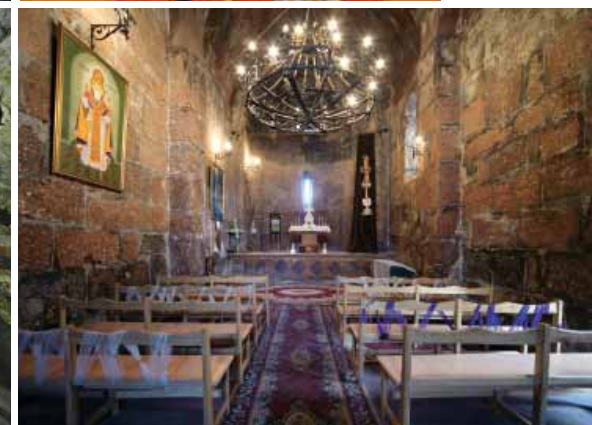
Phone: (+374) 77 62 98 64

- Last but not least, the village of **Sarnaghbyur** with its one hundred and two registered cultural assets, is a must see destination! The highlight of the place is a cave church with a sacred spring dedicated to St. Gregory the Illuminator. Sarnaghbyur, which means “the cold spring”, really justifies its name. The cold water from the spring has healing properties and it is believed that women who cannot conceive should take a bath with this water to cure infertility. The cave is reached by proceeding through the village (note the ornate carved fireplace in ruined house on left) to the main village square, before which you would turn left, then the first paved right turn. Among other important attractions are the ruins of St. Hakob and Karapet churches, once connected by stone corridors, and the 19th century St. Tadevos church. Sarnaghbyur is a good place to search for khachkars, which dot the landscape, some dating as far back as the 5th century. You can see the creation of these authentic Armenian symbols and pieces of art in Sarnaghbyur at the workshop of one of the few remaining masters. The village is also famous for manufacturing “tonirs,” the clay ovens used to bake lavash and other Armenian specialties. The best time to visit the village is during the Vardavar festival, when many people from the region come here to join the celebration. Vardavar is a national holiday, but it has been celebrated more vigorously in villages where the merry songs, dances, various games and jokes are essential characteristics of the holiday. On that day, starting early in the morning, everyone comes outside and soaks each other with water. The neighboring villages also treasure many important cultural monuments, so don't leave without checking at least one of the suggested trails. You will not be disappointed!

**Attractions:** Hoge Hank Monastery, Shrine of St. Gregory the Illuminator, St. Hakob (5th-6th c.) and Karapet (1205 AD), St. Tadevos Church (1883 AD), khachkars, WWII Monument, Sarnaghbyur Reservoir and three Iron Age Cyclopean forts in the vicinity.

#### Trails:

- The ruins of St. Ghazar Church (5th -6thc.) (6 km)
- Surb Astvatsatsin Church (5thc.) and Surb Amenaprkich Church (5thc.) with ruins of a medieval village via the village of Zovasar (10 km)
- 7th c. Church in Garnahovit (5.5 km)
- Makaravank Church (10th-13th c.) in Lernakert (5.5 km)
- Surb Astvatsatsin Church (5th c.) and Surb Amenaprkich Church (5th c.) with ruins of a medieval village via Tsaghkasar (9 km)
- Bronze Age Cyclopean fort and graveyard in Lanjik (6 km)
- Hoge Hank Monastery (11th c.) via the hill on the western side of the Sarnaghbyur Reservoir (4 km)



#### Useful contacts:

##### Sarnaghbyur Municipality

Contact: Sevak Madatyan, Head of Community

Phone: (+374) 94 37 39 39



## SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

Regardless of the amount of days you have to travel, the following itineraries provide a starting point for a memorable trip around Shirak. To get a taste of the province, less than 3 days will not be sufficient. One day in and around Gyumri, the region's most attractive city, is the obvious starting point. Take day trips to Marmashen Monastery, Ani viewpoint, Yereruyk Basilica and Harichavank Monastery with the nearby town of Artik. Then head up to the north for two or three days of hiking, horseback riding, or bird-watching in Arpi Lake National Park. Save some time for the amazing Trchkan Waterfall, Dzorashen village and the city of Spitak.

### *Itinerary 1- The Northern Circular Tour*

As a travel destination, the north of Shirak is a special place for people who enjoy the outdoors and adventure. The highlight of the tour is Arpi Lake National Park with its rich wildlife and authentic, tranquil villages. During this tour you will have the opportunity to meet locals who will graciously invite you into their homes. You can enjoy nature and physical activity with bird watching, hiking, cycling, fishing, horse riding, kayaking, cross country skiing, and snow-shoeing. Besides that, the drive along the M-1 highway (from Gyumri towards the Georgian border) and the road via Amasia offer many interesting stops worth visiting.

**Duration:** 1-5 days (depends on the number of stops along the way and the number of chosen activities)

**Attractions:** 7th c. church in Mayisyan village, Lernantsk pass, Manush Nersisyan's collection of hand-knitted garments, Sisak, Misak, Apetnak, and Shoghakat graves in Tsoghamarg village, Seven Brothers Springs near Vardaghybur village, Ashotsk Cheese Factory, Lusaghbyur sacred natural site, meghalits near Hartashen, Sepasar Fortress, Akhurian Sanctuary, Arpi Lake National Park Visitor Center, Ardenis Lake, the hamlet of Darik, and Hoghmik archaeological site.

**Accommodation:** "SkyMik", "Shakro's Paradise", Irina Tatevosyan's B&B (Besides providing accommodation, each of these places organizes interesting tours and offers guiding services. A detailed description is given in the Accommodation section)

**Restaurants:** "Simonyan's Palace" restaurant in Vardaghybur and "Ashotsk" restaurant/motel in Jradzor village

Best time to visit: From May to October. February generally has the best snow conditions for skiing. Roads from Amasia and Ghazanchi to Arpi Lake might be closed during the winter.

### *Description of tourist attractions that have not already been mentioned:*

- Surb Astvatsatsin Church (Holy Mother of God Church) from 7th century and adjacent ancient cemetery in Mayisyan village are located only 8 km from the center of Gyumri. The recently renovated church is made of red and black tuff and has a small garden with a fountain.
- Lernantsk pass, between villages Pokrashen and Torosgyugh, offers beautiful vistas of the wide Shirak plateau with Gyumri on one side and picturesque mountain valleys on the other. The landscape and climate evidently change from this point, which is a great place for a short rest and a view.
- At Torosgyugh/Goghovit crossroad there is a simple restaurant and the "Manushak" children summer camp (jambar in Armenian) which, when working, will be glad to put up tourists in available rooms.
- Manush is a skillful knitter from the village of Goghovit (4 km west of Torosgyugh and M1 highway) who has a nice collection of hand-knitted garments (sweaters, gloves, socks, caps and shawls) for sale. Decorated with themes like Mt. Ararat, the Armenian alphabet, and carpet patterns, these items make memorable and authentic gifts.
- Tsogamargh treasures an 18th-19th century church, sitting above the village at the end of the right fork in the highway. This partially ruined black and red tufa triple-nave basilica still preserves an original wooden beam ceiling with an earthen roof. Its massive wooden support columns have carved capitals. The basilica is an excellent example of how 16th to 19th century churches were roofed, and how closely church design resembled domestic house construction. Approximately 100 meters uphill from the church is a tiny matur (chapel), a sacred place worshipped by the villagers throughout the centuries. The chapel shelters four tick stone slabs which cover the graves from the early Bronze/Iron Age. Villagers call the site the graves for three brothers and a sister named Sisak, Misak, Abednak & Shoghakat. No one knows who they really were but the holiness of the place has been handed down from generation to generation throughout collective memory. According to the villagers, the graves reward people who give them offerings with good luck.
- Seven Brothers Springs are seven unmarked mineral springs north of Vardaghybur village with strong medicinal properties. Hidden in the tall grass they are not easy to find, but the stories about miraculous healings combined with the site of seven small craters filled with water rising from the depths of a large underground lake make the experience unique. Locals believe that a bath should be taken every day in a different spring for one week in order to heal illness.
- "Sepasar" Fortress (4th-3rd mil. BC) represents the Bronze Age Cyclopic castle's ruins at the top of the Sepasar hill. The site is under active archaeological excavations. A small medieval chapel with a sacred gravestone (possibly a fallen dragon stone) is located next to it. Detailed information about the site can be obtained



from Larisa Yeganyan, a chief archaeologist of the Shirak Regional Museum who supervised the digs (contact details provided in the Museums, Galleries & Theaters chapter).

- Akhuryan Sanctuary offers a great hiking tour through the upper part of the Akhurian River gorge. The total length of the trail, from Pokr Sepasar village to Amasia, is 13 kilometers. Akhurian Sanctuary is an ideal place to observe different species of birds, butterflies and plants. The trail is not marked and a local guide might be needed. A beautiful stone bridge built by Tsar Nicholas I is located at the beginning of the trail, approx. 1.4 kilometers from Pokr Sepasar.
- A visitor center in Ghazanchi village has a permanent exhibition of endangered species and organizes field trips on foot and by horse, along with bird watching and cross-country skiing. There is no standard souvenir shop, but some medicinal herbs and locally produced honey can be purchased at the center. The recently established visitor center has a few issues: there are no English speaking guides or brochures in English yet, and the interactive info point with information about Arpi Lake NP and other national parks in Armenia doesn't work due to unresolved electrical problems. While in Ghazanchi, it is worth visiting its two old settlement sites, Urmi gerezmanner and Karvasara, with the remains of a 10th-11th c. church and one beautifully carved khoyakar (ancient ram shaped tombstone) at the north edge of a local cemetery.
- Ardenis Lake, a unique example of a high-mountain natural reservoir, is a site of global importance from the viewpoint of environmental protection. It presents a rare natural ecosystem with a wide variety of crop species, algae and other plants specific for high mountainous humid areas. The rare water lily Candok (*Nuphar lutea*), which was considered extinct until 2001, is conserved here. The lake serves as a habitat for a number of waterfowl. The Red-necked grebe (*Podiceps griseigena*) survives only here in Armenia. The uniqueness of the lake with adjacent wetlands and meadows is also demonstrated by other rare species like the Corncrake (*Crex crex*) and the Common Crane (*Grus grus*), one of the rarest birds in Armenia.

Ardenis village spreads east of the lake and preserves the remains of several historical monuments. An ancient graveyard with khachkars and a khoyakar, an old oil press and remnants of the cyclopean walls can be seen at the opposite side of the village. Shakro Ghazaryan, a local ranger, guide and wild life specialist, runs his B&B in this village.

- Hoghnik archaeological site is situated between the villages of Jradzor and Hoghnik, on a plateau on the north bank of the Chaiyir River. This Bronze to Iron Age settlement is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in Shirak. Almost 2000 years ago there was a 6-km-long complex of temples along with buildings, fields, and villages where the slaves of the temples lived. It is suggested that three main temples dedicated to three gods functioned as the center of the complex. After adopting Christianity in the 4th century, the entrances were closed. Archaeological excavations discovered ceramics, statuettes, and altars among other artifacts. The site is largely covered with grass and is not visible from a distance.



#### Useful contacts:

##### Arpi Lake National Park Visitor Center

Contact: Qajik Tovmasyan, Director  
Address: Ghazanchi village,  
Ashotsk Region, Shirak Province  
Phone: (+374) 93 94 95 92

##### WWF Armenia

Contact: Karen Karapetyan,  
Project Coordinator  
Address: 11, Proshyan Str., 0019  
Yerevan, Armenia  
Phone: (+374) 10 54 61 56 (ext. 14)  
Fax: (+374) 10 58 89 83  
Email: kkarapetyan@wwfcaucasus.org  
Web Site: [www.panda.org/armenia](http://www.panda.org/armenia)

##### AUA Acopian Center for the Environment

Contact: Karen Aghababian,  
Chief Scientist and Head of  
Environmental Lab  
Address: 40, Baghramyan Ave.,  
0019 Yerevan  
Phone: (+374) 10 51 25 18  
E-mail: [karen@aua.am](mailto:karen@aua.am)

##### Manush Nersisyan

Address: 14thhouse, 3rd Str.,  
Goghovit village,  
Ashotsk Region, Shirak Province  
Phone: (+374) 93 86 33 81



## Itinerary 2- Road of Glory

**Duration:** 1 day

**Attractions:** Gusanagyugh village, Ani viewpoint, Horomos monastery viewpoint, Yereruyk Basilica, Jrapı caravansaray, Bardzrashen Village (optional)

### Description of tourist attractions that have not already been mentioned:

- First stop on this one day tour is **Gusanagyugh village**, 18 kilometers south-west of Gyumri. Most of the village dwellers' ancestors migrated here from Western Armenia in 1830. In 1977 the village was renamed after the famous bard ("gusan" in Armenian) Nakhshikar Sargis who was born here. Culturally, Gusanagyugh has a very rich heritage going as far back as the Bronze Age. Its 19th century St. Astvatsatsin Church (Holy Mother of God, 1888-1912) was destroyed in the 1926 earthquake. The best known monument is a partially preserved medieval fortress (12th-13th c.) made of black tuff, but we should also mention a 17th-18th century oil press and the ruins of Arkaiyablur and Berdi Yal fortresses (2nd-1st millennium BC). According to the prominent Armenian architect Toros Toramanyan, an ancient village used to exist here, confirmed by the mortar-less cyclopic stone work preserved on Shah Tapa hill.

For art lovers, there is a unique opportunity to get acquainted with the works of visual artist Hakob Hovhanisyan, whose studio is located in the village. For more information about the artist contact Shirak Tours in Gyumri.

- The best view of Ani is from the Russian military base of Kharkov, located a few kilometers to the west of the village Aniyavan. To enter the border zone, permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is necessary or you risk being turned away. An easier but less impressive option is a viewpoint in the nearby village of Haykadzor, where visitors have open access. From that spot, Ani and Taylar churches (10th c.) can be observed only with binoculars, while the Akhurian gorge is not visible. Entering the border near Haykadzor village is the only way to visit the St. Grigor Lusavorich (Illuminator) Church, built in 985. But the true gem of this village is a viewpoint of the Horomos Monastery (10th c.), which lies within the border zone as well, with numerous caves used for human habitation throughout the millennia. The only way to see this incredible site is to contact the local mayor who can help in obtaining permission and provide an official escort.
- Yereruyk basilica is located in the ancient village of Yereruyk, the present day village of Anipemza. The village gets its name from the pumice and tuff mines nearby, which bury the town in a fine dust. Besides the three nave basilica, the archaeological complex comprises the remains of the Yereruyk medieval village, cave dwelling complex, remains of an early medieval dam, a small ruined chapel, and an early Iron Age cemetery.

- A famous 11th century caravansarai and a 19th century church were relocated to a hill overlooking Jrapı village during the construction of the Akhurian Reservoir, creating an attractive place with stunning views of "Turki Litdj" and the ancient Tignis Monastery over the border. The place is easy to find (only 100 meters from the road) and can be really magical at sunset.
- If time permits, the last stop of the "Road of Glory" itinerary should be the Bardzrashen village, famous for the deepest wells in Armenia, the half-ruined 7th century Holy Mother of God church, and the nearby Poghos-Petros hermitage. From the highest point of the village, the entire panorama of the Shirak province can be viewed. Ask for granny Nunush, a true legend of the village. Visit her 100 year old house and hear the interesting stories and legends. Although sick and tied to bed, this 90 year old woman still holds a spark in her eyes. Her genuine hospitality will undoubtedly leave a deep impression.



### Useful contacts:

#### Aniavan Municipality

Contact: Miroyan Martiros,  
Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 93 40 18 76

#### Haykadzor Municipality

Contact: Gevorg Sargsyan,  
Head of Community  
Phone: (+374) 93 12 06 03



### Itinerary 3- Track the Stars Trekking Tour

*This itinerary is designed as an alternative trekking tour for mountaineers and nature lovers who already plan to climb the highest peak of Armenia- Mt. Aragats.*

**Duration:** 10 days.

**General Itinerary:** Mt. Aragats, Mantash Reservoir, Harich village, Gyumri, Chichkhan River gorge, Bazumi ridge, Javakhq ridge, Arpi Lake National Park and Akhurian gorge.

**Cultural Attractions:** Agarak Bronze Age settlement, Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory, Amberd Fort, Cosmic Ray Division, Harichavank, Horom citadel, Gyumri, Minas Avetisyan Museum in Jajur (optional), Marmashen Monastery Complex.

**Accommodation:** tent camp sites, “Berlin Art Hotel” in Gyumri, “SkyMik” pension.

**Recommended time:** High season (July and August are the only snow-free months for hiking in the high mountains).

#### Day by Day Itinerary:

**Day One:** Yerevan--Early Bronze Age settlement in Agarak--Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory--Vahramashen Church and Amberd Fort-Lake Kari (camp site). Dinner in the restaurant on the bank of the lake, famous for its excellent khash.

**Day Two:** Lake Kari –Cosmic Ray Division –the North Summit of Mt. Aragats–Aragats crater or a valley on the other side of the North peak (camp site)

Aragats, the highest mountain in today’s Armenia, is an extinct volcano with a 400 m deep crater that has become an ice basin. The volcano has formed 4 peaks: the northern peak is 4090 m above sea level; the western, eastern and southern peaks are 4080 m, 3916 m and 3879 m high respectively. An evening spent in the crater of Aragats is a perfect time to tell legends and myths related to Mt. Aragats. These tales have been passed down since ancient times from generation to generation.

Legend 1: Once upon a time Mt. Aragats and Mt. Ararat were lovely sisters. Once they argued about who is higher and more beautiful. The sisters quarreled for a long time and eventually damned each other. Ararat cursed Aragats so that all year round grief remained in her heart and tears stayed in her eyes. Aragats, on the other side, cursed Ararat so that nobody in the world would ascend the peak of Ararat to make sacrifices to God. Since then, no animal has been sacrificed on Ararat and a lake of tears appeared on top of Aragats, which she sheds all year long.

Legend 2: Queen Semiramis of Assyria declared war on Armenia and ordered her troops to capture King Ara the Beautiful alive. During the battle, Ara fell, wounded

in the chest with a poisoned arrow. The subjects of the Armenian king decided that under no circumstances should the enemy get the throne, which was a symbol of strength and the continuity of Armenian kings. They chose to hide it on the snowy peak standing across from Mount Ararat. It is to that throne that the highest mountain peak in Armenia owes its name – Aragats.

Legend 3: Maybe the most beautiful legend is about St. Grigor Lusavorich (the Illuminator) who climbed to the top of Aragats to pray. At that time a lantern from Heaven appeared above him. The legend claims that this lantern still appears until today, but that only chosen people can see it.

**Day Three:** Aragats crater-- Mantash Reservoir – Yezidi’s summer camp (camp site)

Descent to Mantash Reservoir (2600 meters) (15 kilometers approx.) and set up camp in the nearby Yezidi’s summer camp. During the summer, the slopes of Mt. Aragats are dotted with many “yaylas” (shepherd’s summer settlements). The majority of them belong to the Yezidi people, members of an ancient and secretive, pre-Islamic sect, whose unusual traditions have led them to be labeled as devil-worshippers. Leading semi-nomadic lives, they spend winters in their villages and, in April, move to Alpine pastures high in the mountains. The Yezidi summer settlements are the highest in Armenia – up to 3,000 meters above sea level. Famous for their excellent dairy products, they specialize in making chechir panir (string cheese). If you decide to visit their camps, be careful of the unleashed shepherd dogs!

**Day Four:** Hike to Harichavank Monastery (7th c.) (10 km approx.). Transfer to Gyumri with a stop at the Horom Citadel. Gyumri “Walking and Wine Tasting” tour. Overnight in Gyumri.

**Day Five:** Gyumri – Jajur (Minas Avetisyan Museum) -- Shirakamut Village in Lori Marz (Chichkhanavanq Monastery (7th century)) - hike or four wheel drive to Trchkan Waterfall (9 kilometers). Overnight in a camp near the waterfall.

**Day Six:** In the morning hike to Bazumi ridge (8 kilometers one way) (optional). In the afternoon hike or four wheel drive to Chichkhan Reservoir and Dzorashen village (7 kilometers). Overnight in Dzorashen.

**Day Seven:** Hike over Bazumi ridge from Dzorashen to Musayelyan village (16 km). Visit the Ashotsk Cheese Factory. Excursion to Hartashen village (Lusaghbyur sacred natural site and a field of megaliths) (3 km). Overnight at “SkyMik” pension.

**Days Eight and Nine:** Various possibilities within the Arpi Lake National Park: bird watching, mountain bike tour around Arpi Lake (25 km), hike through the



Akhurian gorge (from Pokr Sepasar to Amasia) (13 km), hiking in Javakhq ridge. Overnight at “SkyMik” pension.

**Day Ten:** Transfer from Amasia to Marmashen Monastery Complex (10 c.). A short hike to Tirashen Lake (5 km) combined with cultural sightseeing. Transfer to Yerevan.



### Itinerary 4- Pilgrimage Tour

*This tour is suitable for visitors who are interested in sacred sites and cultural monuments.*

**Duration:** 1-2 days (depends on the number of stops along the way)

**Attractions:** Horom Citadel, Artik, Harichavank, Mantash Reservoir (optional), Pempashen, Lernakert, Sarnaghbyur, Hogeavank Monastery, “Turtle Stone” near Dzorakap, Benjamin archaeological site

**Accommodation:** “Rublevka” (available for smaller groups only)

**Restaurants:** “Tur”

*Description of tourist attractions that have not already been mentioned:*

- In the middle of Pempashen village is a 7th-century church adjacent to the foundations of a 5th-century basilica. Just west of the village, off the main road leading from Pempashen to Artik, is Arakelots Vank (11th century). Along the road south to Lernakert is Makaravank (10th -13th centuries), with the church of Surb Sion (1001 AD). In the gorge below is a small church (18th century) built on earlier foundations, with a hermit’s cell cut into the cliff face behind.

### Itinerary 5

*This itinerary is tailored for tourists who have already visited the main highlights of the province and would like to relax while exploring some small villages and trails off the beaten path. Obviously not the first choice itinerary, but can be quite refreshing and memorable for experienced travelers.*

**Duration:** Half day

**Itinerary:** Tsak Kar and Seven Brothers Saints’ Chapel near Hatsik Village – Karmrakar Village –Jajur Village (via Lernut) –Minas Avetisyan Museum –A peak above Krashen Village with a small chapel on the top. This is a perfect spot to watch the magnificent view of the sun setting over the Shirak Plateau and surrounding mountains in the dusk.

### Marmashen Trail

Marmashen Trail is a cultural trail along the left bank of the Akhurian River, starting from the Marmashen Monastic Complex and finishing at Tirashen Lake. A knowledgeable guide who can easily locate the listed attractions is a necessity. Lunch at the nearby tourist complex “Rancho” can be a pleasant end to the walk.

**Duration:** Half day

**Attractions:** Marmashen Monastic Complex (10th century), medieval cemetery to the east and south of the complex, Karmrashen or Verin (Upper) Vank, Akhurian River gorge, remains of a bridge (11th-12th century), Nadia’s Lake, Urartu King Argishti I inscription (786-784 BC), Tirashen Lake with the remains of a medieval village, 11th century khachkars, a ruined church (11th c.) and an Urartian/Bronze Age cyclopean city.

**Total length:** 5 kilometers













