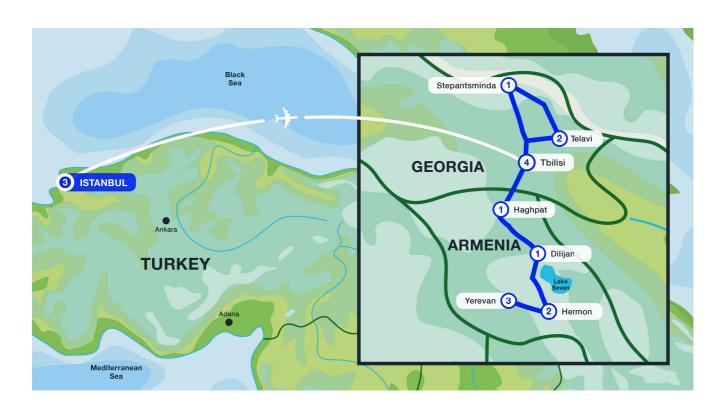




Flavours of Istanbul and the Caucasus

Days	Eastbound	Countries	Distance	Activity level
18	Istanbul to Yerevan	Turkey + Georgia + Armenia		••••



Emphasising premium food and wine, the journey will take in the world's oldest winemaking regions of the Caucasus Mountains and Armenian Plateau. Meet the winemakers, the chefs and local families who will share their passion for their craft with opportunities to get 'hands on' preparing the 'dish of the day'.

We commence the tour in Istanbul where Europe meets Asia on the Bosphorus to experience its diverse culture and cuisines and end in Yerevan, the 'Pink City' using local stone of this hue, older than Rome and renowned for its beautiful buildings, public spaces and promenades.

Itinerary

Day 1: Istanbul

For those already in Istanbul, we offer an optional Thrace Region Winery Tour, a delightful escape into the heart of Turkey's wine country. The tour takes you through the picturesque Thrace region, known for its rich winemaking heritage and beautiful landscapes. Visit local wineries, where you'll learn about traditional and modern wine production techniques, and enjoy tastings of exceptional wines. Discover the region's wine-growing heritage and the Thracian people who first planted vines here in the 2nd century AD.

Savour signature wines at four wineries and enjoy lunch at a boutique winery on the ancient Thracian wine route and sample varieties including its prized Sauvignon Cris, a creamy clone of Sauvignon Blanc

Upon returning to Istanbul, enjoy a Welcome Dinner at Galeyan Restaurant, a renowned spot offering a sophisticated introduction to Turkish cuisine. The restaurant's warm atmosphere is the perfect setting to immerse yourself in the flavors of the region. During the dinner, meet your Tour Leader for an engaging Welcome Meeting, where Simon will introduce you to Turkey's fascinating history, cultural influences, and the unique regional specialties that define Turkish cuisine.

This evening promises to be a memorable start to your adventure, where you'll not only indulge in delicious food but also gain a deeper understanding of the country's culinary traditions and provide an excellent introduction to the journey ahead.

Regional specialty: Flavours of Anatolia

Sightseeing - Excursion to Thrace

Meals - Dinner

Accommodation - Sura Hagia Sophia Hotel



Day 2: Istanbul

We start today with a full-day guided excursion, exploring Istanbul's iconic landmarks. Begin at the magnificent Hagia Sophia, a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture, where you'll learn about its rich history as both a church and mosque. From there, walk to the Blue Mosque, famous for its stunning blue tiles and grand design. Next, dive underground to the Basilica Cistern, an ancient water reservoir with atmospheric columns and arches. Discover the sights and sounds of the Grand Bazaar; a labyrinth of opportunity.

After your cultural exploration, enjoy a delicious lunch at Sultanahmet Koftecisi, a historic restaurant renowned for its Turkish meatballs, offering a taste of local culinary traditions.

In the afternoon, embark on a Culinary Walking and Tasting Tour, where your expert guide will lead you through the vibrant streets of Istanbul, offering insights into the city's diverse food culture. Along the way, sample various local delicacies, from sweet treats to savory snacks.

The tour concludes at Hamdi Restaurant PERA, where you'll enjoy a delightful dinner with views of the Golden Horn, savoring a selection of traditional Turkish dishes.

Regional specialty: Midye Dolma

Sightseeing - Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Basilica Cistern and Grand Bazaar

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Sura Hagia Sophia Hotel



Day 3: Istanbul

Today's adventure begins with a guided excursion to Yildiz Palace, a hidden gem nestled in the heart of Istanbul. This former Ottoman imperial palace offers a glimpse into the opulent lifestyle of the sultans. Your knowledgeable guide will take you through the palace's stunning rooms, lush gardens, and ornate pavilions, sharing stories of its fascinating history. The palace's rich architecture and serene atmosphere make it a must-see for history enthusiasts.

After the tour, you'll have free time for lunch at your own leisure. Explore the local eateries nearby or choose to indulge in your favorite meal while taking in the vibrant sights of the city.

In the afternoon, enjoy some leisure time to relax. This is the perfect opportunity to unwind and experience a traditional Turkish bath (hammam), a rejuvenating ritual known for its relaxing and detoxifying benefits.

The day concludes with a hands-on Cooking Class at Cooking Alaturka, where you'll learn the art of Turkish cooking from expert chefs. Create classic dishes using fresh, local ingredients and immerse yourself in the flavors of Turkey. At the end of the class, share the delicious dishes you've prepared with your fellow travellers for a memorable dinner experience.

Regional specialty: Your own creations

Sightseeing - Yildiz Palace

Meals - Breakfast and Dinner

Accommodation - Sura Hagia Sophia Hotel



Day 4: Istanbul to Tbilisi

After a morning at leisure, this afternoon we take a flight from Istanbul to Tbilisi.

After checking in and settling in, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant, where you'll be introduced to the vibrant flavors of Georgian cuisine. A highlight of the evening will be the regional specialty: Shkmeruli. This traditional dish features tender chicken cooked in a rich garlic and milk sauce, creating a mouthwatering combination of flavors that will transport you straight into the heart of Georgian culinary traditions.

Relax and enjoy the warm hospitality as you begin your journey through Georgia the start of your exciting exploration of this beautiful country.

Regional specialty: Shkmeruli

Meals - Breakfast and Dinner

Accommodation - Qarvasla Hotel



Day 5: Tbilisi

Today's exciting city tour of Tbilisi begins with a visit to the Metekhi Cathedral, a historic church perched on a cliff offering stunning views of the city. Learn about its rich history and importance in Georgian culture. From here, take a scenic cable car ride to Narikala Fortress, which offers breathtaking panoramas of Tbilisi and the surrounding landscapes. Explore the fortress and the ancient walls, immersing yourself in the city's past.

Next, we'll stroll through the Old Town Centre, where narrow, cobblestone streets reveal charming buildings, ancient churches, and vibrant local life. Your guide will provide insightful commentary on the city's history and architecture, making this an unforgettable journey through Tbilisi.

For lunch, enjoy a special meal at a local restaurant, where you'll try Lobio, a flavorful bean dish served in a traditional clay pot, and Lobiani, a delicious Georgian pastry filled with beans. These dishes are a staple of Georgian cuisine and will give you an authentic taste of the region.

In the afternoon, head to a wine bar for a wine tasting experience, where you'll sample renowned Georgian wines. The day ends with a delightful dinner, featuring local specialties, rounding out a full day of Georgian culture, history, and cuisine.

Regional specialty: Lobio (beans in clay pot)

Sightseeing - City Tour including Metekhi Cathedral, Cable car to Narikala Fortress and Old town centre

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Qarvasla Hotel



Day 6: Tbilisi to Telavi via Sighnaghi

Today, we embark on a scenic excursion to Sighnaghi, a charming hilltop town known for its cobbled streets, colorful houses, and sweeping views of the Alazani River Valley. Explore this picturesque town at your own pace, taking in its stunning vistas and the well-preserved city walls that once protected it from invaders.

For lunch, we'll be welcomed into a local family's home where you'll enjoy a traditional Georgian meal. While savoring the delicious food, learn the art of making Churchkhela, a popular Georgian sweet made from walnuts and grape juice. Afterward, be treated to a performance by polyphonic singers, showcasing Georgia's rich musical heritage.

In the afternoon, we head to Kondoli, where we'll visit a traditional Georgian wine cellar. Here, you'll taste wines crafted from the rare and high-quality Kakhetian grapes, a true representation of Georgia's ancient winemaking traditions.

Next, we'll visit Vardisubani Village, known for its ancient winemaking method using qvevri, large clay vessels buried underground. This time-honored process imparts unique flavors to the wine, making it a truly unforgettable experience.

You'll have the evening free to enjoy dinner at your own leisure.

Regional specialty: Chakhokhbili (Chicken stew)

Sightseeing - Sighnaghi, Kondoli and visit to a traditional Georgian wine cellar, Vardisubani Village to observe the ancient wine making method of using qvevri

Meals - Breakfast and Lunch

Accommodation - Holiday Inn



Day 7: Telavi - Naphareuli and Kvareli

We begin the day with a visit to a local farmers market, where you'll experience the vibrant atmosphere and see a variety of fresh, seasonal produce. Afterward, head to Naphareuli Village to explore the Wine Museum, where you'll discover the history and techniques behind Georgia's centuries-old winemaking tradition.

Next, we drive to Kvareli to visit the renowned Kindzmarauli Winery. Here, you'll have the opportunity to taste exquisite Georgian wines paired with local cheeses, learning about the unique flavors that come from the region's distinctive grape varieties.

For lunch, enjoy a traditional Georgian meal with locals, sampling freshly harvested produce directly from the host's garden. As part of the experience, you'll participate in baking Georgian bread, a cherished tradition in every Georgian home. The delicious cuisine and homemade wine will provide you with a true taste of Georgian hospitality.

In the afternoon, we drive to Tsinandali to visit the estate of Duke Alexander Chavchavadze, a place that served as a gathering spot for poets and artists in the 19th century. Explore the elegant house and garden, which date back to the era of Georgian nobility.

Returning to Telavi, you'll have free time for dinner at your leisure, allowing you to explore the local dining options.

Regional specialty: Kindzmarauli (red, semi sweet wine)

Sightseeing - Naphareuli wine museum, Duke Alexander Chavchavadze's estate

Meals - Breakfast and Lunch

Accommodation - Holiday Inn



Day 8: To Stepantsminda via Tianeti

Today, we begin our journey with a scenic transfer from Telavi to Kazbegi (Stepantsminda), passing through the picturesque landscapes of the Georgian countryside. Along the way, we make a photo stop at the Ananuri Architectural Complex, a stunning fortress overlooking the Aragvi River, offering breathtaking views and a glimpse into Georgia's rich history.

Upon arrival in Stepantsminda, we'll enjoy a warm lunch with a local family, where you'll have the chance to learn the art of making Khinkali, traditional Georgian dumplings. This hands-on experience lets you roll, shape, and fill your own dumplings, which will be cooked fresh for you to enjoy alongside the local wine and other specialties.

After lunch, we head to the iconic Gergeti Trinity Church, perched high on the slopes of Mount Kazbek. The church is one of the most recognizable landmarks in Georgia, offering stunning panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. To reach the church, we'll take a thrilling 4WD transport ride, which allows us to navigate the rugged terrain and reach this spiritual and cultural treasure.

The day concludes with a return to your accommodation, filled with memories of the beautiful landscapes and authentic experiences.

Regional specialty: Khinkali

Sightseeing - Ananuri Architectural Complex, Gergeti Trinity Church

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Intourist Hotel



Day 9: To Tbilisi via Mtskheta

Start your day with a scenic transfer from Stepantsminda to Chardakhi, where you will visit lago's Wine Cellar. Here, you'll taste unique BIO wine made using traditional Georgian methods in qvevri—large clay vessels buried underground. This ancient winemaking technique is so significant that it has been inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List.

Next, we head to Chateau Mukhrani, a historical winery dating back to the 16th century. Explore the impressive duke's palace and venture into the old wine cellars, which hold up to 60,000 barrels of wine. The visit includes a fascinating sightseeing tour, accompanied by a lunch and wine tasting, allowing you to savor exquisite Georgian wines in a majestic setting.

In the afternoon, we proceed to Mtskheta, one of Georgia's oldest cities, for a cultural exploration. We begin with a visit to Jvari Church, perched on a hill with panoramic views of the confluence of the Aragvi and Mtkvari rivers. Next, explore the magnificent Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, an important spiritual site and UNESCO World Heritage landmark.

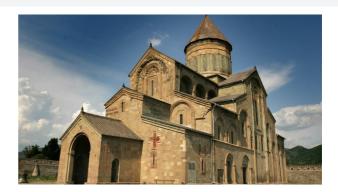
Your day ends with a delightful dinner at a local restaurant in Tbilisi, where you can reflect on your experiences and savour more of Georgia's delicious cuisine.

Regional specialty: Pkhali (Georgian appetizers of eggplants, spinach and beetroot with walnuts)

Sightseeing - Wine tastings, Jvari Church, Svetitskhoveli Cathedral

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Qarvasla Hotel



Day 10: Tbilisi

Start your day with an early excursion to a local farmers market, accompanied by your host, Teona. Together, you'll explore the vibrant market, selecting the finest ingredients for the day's cooking class. Teona will share her insights into the local produce and guide you in picking authentic items for your meal.

Next, head to Teona's house for a hands-on cooking experience where you'll learn to prepare classic Georgian dishes, using the fresh ingredients you've just gathered. You'll work alongside Teona, learning traditional techniques and recipes passed down through generations.

The highlight of the day will be enjoying a delicious lunch you've cooked together, including the regional specialty: Khachapuri, a savory Georgian cheese-filled bread that is a beloved staple of the cuisine.

After lunch, the afternoon is free for leisure time, allowing you to relax and explore at your own pace. This day offers an authentic, immersive culinary experience, connecting you with Georgia's rich food traditions.

Regional specialty: Khachapuri

Sightseeing - Market, cooking class

Meals - Breakfast and Lunch

Accommodation - Qarvasla Hotel



Day 11: Across the border to Yerevan

Our final day in Georgia takes us to the Armenian border. After completing the border formalities, we will continue our drive towards Haghpat, a charming town nestled in the mountains.

Your first stop is the Akhtala Monastery, an important religious site known for its stunning frescoes and peaceful atmosphere. After exploring the monastery, enjoy a light lunch, where you can sample traditional Armenian dishes.

In the afternoon we visit Haghpat Monastery, a UNESCOprotected monument that dates back to the 10th to 13th centuries. This masterpiece of medieval religious architecture offers breathtaking views and an incredible sense of history, making it one of Armenia's most significant cultural landmarks.

You will be accompanied by a local guide throughout the day, offering fascinating insights into Armenia's rich history and religious traditions.

To end the day, enjoy a delicious dinner, featuring BBQ pork, a variety of Armenian cheeses, and other local delicacies. Complement your meal with some of Armenia's best wines, making for a truly authentic culinary experience to round off your day.

Regional specialty: Barbeque pork with white sauce

Sightseeing - Akhtala Monastery, Haghpat Monastery

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Hotel Qefilyan



Day 12: To Dilijan via Ijevan

Begin your day with a visit to Fialetovo, a village in Armenia known for its Molokan community, which has preserved its unique traditions and way of life. Explore the picturesque village and interact with the locals to experience their rich culture and lifestyle. During your visit, you'll stop at a villager's house for an authentic experience, sipping forest tea and enjoying a tasting of homemade cakes, providing a true taste of Armenian hospitality.

Next, head to the Wine-Brandy Factory of Ijevan, where you'll explore the production facilities and learn about the region's winemaking and brandy distilling processes. After the tour, enjoy a tasting session of exquisite wines and brandy, offering an authentic taste of Armenia's rich liquor heritage.

For lunch, enjoy a meal with the local community, sampling a variety of homemade dishes, including the famous Armenian gata, a sweet pastry filled with sugar and nuts.

In the afternoon, visit the stunning Goshavank Monastery, an ancient Armenian religious site with remarkable architecture.

The day concludes with a folk theatre performance, "Tonatsuyts," featuring ethnographic songs, traditional dances, and a presentation of Armenian rites, providing an unforgettable cultural immersion.

Regional specialty: Gata cookie

Sightseeing - Wine-Brandy factory of Ijevan, Goshavank Monastery, theatre performance

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Tufenkian Old Dilijan Complex



Day 13: To Hermon

Today, we embark on a scenic excursion to Lake Sevan, located 1,900 meters above sea level, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and clear blue waters. Our first stop is the Sevanavank Monastery, perched on a hill with panoramic views of the lake, followed by a visit to the St. Astvatsatzin Church, a beautiful example of medieval Armenian architecture.

For lunch, we enjoy a meal at a typical Armenian restaurant, where we can savor Sevan trout, an endemic fish species of the lake. Accompanied by white wine, the meal is the perfect way to appreciate the flavors of the region while soaking in the stunning views of Lake Sevan.

After lunch, we continue our transfer to Hermon, with an interesting excursion enroute to the Noratus medieval khachkar field, home to over 900 ancient carved stone crosses, offering a glimpse into Armenia's rich cultural heritage.

Further along, we stop at the Selim Caravanserai, a historic roadside inn built in 1332 by Prince Chesar Orbelian, showcasing the region's historical significance along the Silk Road.

In the evening, we reach our hotel in Hermon and enjoy a dinner featuring more regional specialties. Tonight, relish a cozy meal and reflect on the day's journey.

Regional specialty: Sevan trout

Sightseeing - Lake Sevan, Sevanavank Monastery, St Astvatsatzin Church, Noratus medieval khachkar field, Selim caravanserai

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Hotel Lucy



Day 14: Goris and Tatev Ropeway

Today, we begin with a visit to the ancient Karahunge Observatory, often referred to as the "Armenian Stonehenge." This mysterious site, dating back over 6,000 years, consists of massive stones arranged in a circular formation, believed to have been used for astronomical purposes. Explore the fascinating history and theories behind this early astronomical observatory while taking in the stunning panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

Next, we travel to the breathtaking Tatev Monastery, a stunning medieval complex perched on a cliffside. This UNESCO-protected site is a true gem of Armenian architecture and history. Weather permitting, we'll take the Wings of Tatev ropeway, one of the longest cable cars in the world, offering spectacular views as we glide over the Vorotan River Gorge.

For lunch, we'll enjoy a delightful meal at a villager's house in Halidzor, where you'll have the chance to experience authentic Armenian hospitality. Savour homemade dishes prepared with fresh, locally sourced ingredients while learning about the traditions and way of life of this charming rural community.

Regional specialty: Indigenous grapes such as Areni Noir, nicknamed the "Armenian Pinot Noir"

Sightseeing - Karahunge Observatory, Tatev Monastery and Wings of Tatev (ropeway - weather permitting)

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Hotel Lucy



Day 15: To Yerevan

Today we journey to Yerevan, enjoying the scenic Armenian countryside. Our first stop is the Noravank Monastery, an impressive 13th-century complex nestled deep in the Noravank Canyon. This monastery once served as the spiritual center of the Syunik region, and its stunning location offers a striking contrast against the surrounding red cliffs.

Continue to the Vayots Dzor region, where we visit the village of Areni, home to the world's oldest winery, discovered in a local cave and dating back over 6,000 years.

Next, head to Areni wine factory in the village of Areni, where you'll enjoy a tasting of Areni wines, produced exclusively from the local Areni grape variety. The winery offers a tasting of several wines and fruit vodkas making it a perfect place to experience the unique flavors of Armenia.

For lunch, enjoy a warm, authentic experience in the village of Areni, where you'll sample authentic dishes and wine.

After lunch, take a photo stop at Khor Virap Monastery, offering magnificent views of Mount Ararat. The day concludes with a dinner at Kharpert Restaurant, located in the Tufenkian Hotel, where you can savor traditional Armenian cuisine.

Regional specialty: Areni wines

Sightseeing - Noravank Monastery, Zorah Winery, Khor Virap Monastery (photo stop with Mt Ararat)

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Tufenkian Historic



Day 16: Yerevan

Today, enjoy a city tour of Yerevan, the vibrant capital of Armenia. Begin with a visit to the Opera House, an iconic symbol of the city, followed by a stroll through the Cascade, a giant staircase that offers stunning views of the city and Mount Ararat. From there, head to Freedom Square, the heart of Yerevan, surrounded by beautiful architecture and cultural landmarks.

Next, travel to Echmiadzin, the spiritual center of Armenia and home to the Echmiadzin Cathedral, the oldest state-built church in Christianity, dating back to the early 4th century. It remains a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is considered a cornerstone of Armenian religious history.

For lunch, we'll dine at a local restaurant in Echmiadzin that was once the refectory of the abbey, offering a unique opportunity to savor traditional Armenian dishes in a historically significant setting.

After lunch, visit two more significant churches: St. Hripsime Church, built in 618 AD, and St. Gayane Church, constructed in 630 AD. Both are exquisite examples of early Christian architecture and hold deep cultural and religious significance.

The day concludes as we return to Yerevan, reflecting on the rich history and beauty of Armenia's religious landmarks.

Regional specialty: Cognac

Sightseeing - City Tour including Opera House, Cascade, Freedom Square and the oldest church in Christianity, Echmiadzin Cathedral, Church of St Hripsime, Church of St Gayane

Meals - Breakfast and Lunch

Accommodation - Tufenkian Historic



Day 17: Yerevan

Today, begin with a visit to Matenadaran, one of the world's richest repositories of ancient manuscripts and documents, showcasing Armenia's rich literary and intellectual heritage. This fascinating museum holds priceless artifacts, including medieval Armenian texts, and offers a glimpse into the country's historical and cultural legacy.

Next, we head to the Kotayk region, where we visit the Geghard Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its rock-hewn churches and stunning architecture.

Afterward, explore the Garni Pagan Temple, an ancient Greekstyle temple that once served as a religious site dedicated to the sun god, Mithras.

As a unique experience, enjoy a spiritual concert by the Luys Quintet in the temple of Garni, where the acoustics of this historic site perfectly complement the serene music.

For lunch, we visit a local villager's house, where we'll partake in preparing Armenian lavash bread and enjoy tandoor-cooked vegetables and meat, paired with local wine and apricot vodka.

In the afternoon, we return to Yerevan to visit the local market, where you can browse fresh fruits, vegetables, and spices. Later, enjoy a tasting of Armenian brandy at the Ararat Brandy Factory, with a small sample pack to take home. The day concludes with a dinner at Yerevan Pandok Restaurant, renowned for its authentic Armenian village cuisine.

Regional specialty: Apricot vodka

Sightseeing - Matenadaran, Geghard Monastery, Garni Pagan Temple, Ararat Brandy Factory

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Accommodation - Tufenkian Historic

Day 18: Yerevan - Tour concludes

The Flavours of Istanbul and the Caucasus Tour concludes after 18 unforgettable days exploring the rich history, culture, and cuisine of Turkey, Georgia, and Armenia. From the vibrant streets of Istanbul to the ancient monasteries of Armenia, and the breathtaking landscapes of Georgia, this journey has offered a truly immersive experience. Along the way, you've tasted authentic dishes, participated in hands-on cooking classes, and discovered the unique traditions that shape this fascinating region. As the tour ends, you'll leave with cherished memories, new friendships, and a deeper appreciation for the flavors and heritage of the Caucasus.

Meals - Breakfast

Journey Summary		
Day 1	Istanbul - journey begins	
Day 2	Istanbul	
Day 3	Istanbul	
Day 4	To Tbilisi	
Day 5	Tbilisi	
Day 6	To Telavi via Sighnaghi	
Day 7	Telavi - visit Naphareuli and Kvareli	
Day 8	To Stepantsminda via Tianeti	
Day 9	To Tbilisi via Mtskheta	
Day 10	Tbilisi	
Day 11	Tbilisi to Haghpat, Armenia	
Day 12	To Dilijan via ljevan	
Day 13	Dilijan to Hermon	
Day 14	Excursion to Goris and Tatev Ropeway	
Day 15	Hermon to Yerevan	
Day 16	Yerevan	
Day 17	Yerevan	
Day 18	Yerevan - journey concludes	

What's included





Group size

10 plus your Host and Tour Leader



Meals

17 breakfasts14 lunches13 dinners



Transfers

All transfers including to and from the airport.



Accommodation

17 Hotel/Guesthouse (twin share)

Optional single supplement available on this journey - prices available on request.



Sightseeing

Comprehensive schedule of sightseeing with certified Local Guides. You'll have a generous sprinkling of free time to relax or explore on your own.



Expertise

An experienced Tour Leader accompanies the whole journey to keep your adventure on track. Local Guides are native to each destination and as certified professionals will share their immense knowledge with you. 24/7 support is available in the office and on the ground.

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