



Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan
Cuisine, Culture & Contemporary Affairs
of the South Caucasus

May 8-18, 2016

Study Leader: Paul Stronski

Paul Stronski is a senior associate in Carnegie's Russia and Eurasia Program, where his research focuses on the relationship between Russia and neighboring countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.



Until January 2015, Stronski served as a senior analyst for Russian domestic politics in the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Prior to this he served as the director for Russia and Central Asia on the U.S. National Security Council Staff, and also worked as a State Department analyst on Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Stronski has taught history and post-Soviet affairs at Stanford, George Mason, and George Washington universities. Prior to his government service, he worked on a USAID-sponsored technical assistance project for the healthcare sector in Central Asia.

Program Highlights

- Visit the new State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpets and Applied Folk Art, and enjoy a specially arranged tour with one of the museum's senior specialists.
- Take part in a comparative wine tasting of delightful natural Georgian wines at Tbilisi's up and coming Vino Underground.
- Experience a traditional "Georgian Table" and enjoy the incredible diversity of Georgian cuisine along with a performance of polyphonic singing, a uniquely Georgian choral tradition.
- Visit Armenia's most important and impressive monasteries, their churchyards studded with carved stone *khachkar* crosses.
- Attend a private concert of Armenian songs performed *a cappella* singing performed by an Armenian women's group.



Day by Day

Days 1-2, May 8-9

Depart the USA on flights bound for Baku, Azerbaijan, and arrive next evening. *Hotel Park Inn (Meals inflight)*

Depart USA • Arrive Baku Azerbaijan

Days 3-4, May 10-11

Begin in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. The Old Town is a beautifully preserved medieval UNESCO Site, and, in a nod to Azerbaijan's Zoroastrian history, the three modern Flame Towers overlooking Baku Bay come alive nightly with gigantic flickering flames.

Baku

Take a walk through Baku's Old City, or *Icheri Shere*, completely encircled by the old city walls with their medieval gates. Enjoy a specially arranged tour of the State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpets and Applied Folk Art, with one of the museum's senior specialists. Visit Gobustan, a UNESCO-listed site of ancient petroglyphs, and hear a mesmerizing performance of *mugham* music, a fusion of Persian and Turkic traditions noted on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Hotel Park Inn (2B, 2L, 2D)*

Days 5-6, May 12-13

The narrow streets of Old Tbilisi wind by domed sulfur baths, balconied houses, and outdoor cafés where locals sip wine and nosh on slices of the gooey cheese bread called *khachapouri*. Enjoy dinner and a wine tasting at Vino Underground, an up-and-coming wine bar and café. An exploration of Tbilisi includes the 6th century Anchiskhati Basilica, the oldest church in Tbilisi; a visit to a historic Tbilisi bakery to discover how the traditional Georgian bread is baked; a stop at the National History Museum with the Museum of Soviet Occupation; and a visit to the house museum of acclaimed Georgian painter Elene Akhvlediani for champagne and a short concert.

Tbilisi, Georgia

Embark on a day trip along the Georgian Military Highway, including UNESCO-listed Mtskheta, with Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, its interior decorated in murals, and Jvari, one of the first Christian churches in Georgia. Taste the prize-winning wines of Mukhrani Chateau vineyards, the former palatial estate of the royal family of Georgia. *Marriott Courtyard Hotel (2B, 2L, 2D)*

Day 7, May 14

Depart for the Khaketi region, Georgia's wine country, visiting the vineyards of Pheasant's Tears Winery, which produces organic wines from varietal grapes. Enjoy a picnic lunch and a wine-tasting here. Wander the narrow streets of Signagi, admiring the richly carved balconies and the green valley below, and visit a dance class for a performance by a traditional Georgian dance troupe. Return to Pheasant's Tears for a Georgian Table feast, an experience that can last several hours, with dozens of dishes and countless toasts. Over dinner enjoy a moving performance of traditional Georgian polyphonic singing. *Kadadoni Hotel (1B, 1L, 1D)*

Signagi



Itinerary

Days 8-11, May 15-18

Yerevan, Armenia, with day trips

Travel overland across the Armenian countryside, stopping at the UNESCO World Heritage site of 10th century Haghbat Monastery before arriving in the capital, Yerevan. The city is designed around Republic Square, where the main boulevards converge, and nightly extravaganzas of music, lights and “dancing fountains” create a holiday atmosphere and foster café culture.

Visit the Monastery of Khor Virap, with fantastic views of Mt. Ararat; the pagan Temple of Garni, where an Armenian women’s ensemble sings *a capella*; and UNESCO-listed Geghard Monastery, carved into the side of a mountain. This stunning structure includes monastic cells, churches, tombs and *khachkar* crosses, all hewn from solid rock. The country is famous for its intricately carved stone *khachkar*, a uniquely Armenian art form. Discover UNESCO-listed Echmiadzin, the spiritual center of Armenia, and meet with a priest to discuss the role of religion here.

Back in Yerevan, visit the underground Genocide Museum to learn more about this harrowing period of Armenian history. Then take in the art at the Cascade Complex. Located within the steps of the city-center Cascade, the exciting Cafesjian Museum of Modern Art focuses on sculpture, glass and paintings from contemporary artists. Celebrate the journey with a festive farewell dinner. *Hotel Hyatt Place or similar (4B, 3L, 2D)*



Land Program Rate: \$6,195
(per person based on double occupancy)

Single Supplement: \$1,095



Included: All accommodation, hotel taxes • Meals per itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner) • Arrival/departure transfers for passengers arriving/departing on scheduled start/end days • All land transportation per itinerary including private motor coach throughout the itinerary • Internal airfare between Baku and Tbilisi • Study leader and pre-departure education materials • Special cultural events and extensive sightseeing, including entrance fees • Welcome and farewell dinners • Services of a tour manager throughout the land program • Gratuities to tour manager, guides and drivers • Comprehensive pre-departure packet

Not Included: Travel insurance • Round trip airfare between Baku/Yerevan and USA. Our tour operator MIR Corporation can assist with reservations. • Passport and visa fees • Meals not specified as included in the itinerary • Personal items such as telephone calls, alcohol, laundry, excess baggage fees

Air Arrangements: Program rates do not include international airfare from/to USA. Because there are a number of flight options available, there is no group flight for this program. Information on a recommended flight itinerary will be sent by our tour operator upon confirmation.

What to Expect: This trip is moderately active due to the substantial distances covered and the extensive walking and stair climbing required; parts of the tour will not always be wheelchair accessible. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day (with or without the assistance of a cane) and stand for an extended period of time during walking tours and museum visits. Flexibility and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are highly recommended as delays or changes in the itinerary are likely.

Reservations and Payments: Please mail the completed registration form with check (payable to MIR Corporation-Trust) or credit card information to your sponsoring organization to the address on the reservation form and mail panel. Balance of payment for all land and air costs is due by February 8, 2016, 90 days prior to departure. Payment of balance due by check only.

Cancellations and Refunds: All cancellations must be made in writing to MIR Corporation and the following cancellation charges will apply: Cancellations received 91 or more days before departure, deposits paid or due in full of \$500 per person; those received 61 days to 90 days before departure, 50% of land tour cost per person; those received 60 days or less before departure, no refund. Refunds cannot be made to passengers who do not complete the full tour for any reason at all. The Commonwealth Club and our tour operator MIR Corporation reserve the right, without penalty, to withdraw the tour announced (i.e., cancel a tour). Our tour operator MIR Corporation reserves the right to decline to accept any person as a participant in a tour, or to require any participant to withdraw from a tour at any time at his/her own expense, when such action is determined by tour staff to be in the best interest of the health, safety, or general welfare of the tour group or of the individual participant, and subject only to the requirement that the recoverable cost of unused services and accommodations be refunded, if any.

Note: Neither The Commonwealth Club nor our tour operator MIR Corporation accepts liability for any airline cancellation penalty incurred by the purchase of a non-refundable ticket in connection with this tour. It is recommended that you not purchase international flights until instructed by the tour operator.

Single Travelers: We make every effort to match single travelers who request a roommate. However, shared accommodations cannot be guaranteed and a single supplement rate will apply.

Insurance: Trip cancellation/interruption insurance is available. Insurance information will be sent to you by The Commonwealth Club on receipt of your registration.

Responsibility: A detailed statement of limitations and exclusions of liability of The Commonwealth Club and the Tour Operator for loss of property, injury, illness or death will be provided to passengers upon enrollment and is available to prospective travelers upon request. A signed release of liability/assumption of risk agreement is required for trip participation.

Please mail the completed registration form with check (payable to MIR Corporation-Trust) or credit card information to The Commonwealth Club of California, 555 Post St, San Francisco, CA 94102. Balance of payment for all land and air costs is due by February 8, 2016, 90 days prior to departure. Payment of balance due by check only. Space is limited. Reservations will be processed in order of receipt, subject to availability.

The enclosed non-refundable deposit of \$ _____ (\$500 per person) to hold _____ place(s).

Enclosed check, payable to MIR Corporation-Trust Visa Mastercard American Express Discover

Credit card number _____ Exp date _____ CVC _____

Signature of cardholder _____

Credit Card Billing Address (if different from Mailing Address) _____

Full name #1 (as listed in passport) _____ Date of birth _____

Full name #2 (as listed in passport) _____ Date of birth _____

Mailing address (no PO boxes please) _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (Home) _____ (Work) _____ Email _____

Please note preferences:

I am traveling alone and prefer a single room wherever available at the single supplement rate (\$1,095).

I will share accommodations with _____

I would like to share with a Non-smoker Smoker (shares are not guaranteed)

International and U.S. domestic airfare is not included in the tour price. Roundtrip economy class airfare including taxes from _____

San Francisco, CA is approximately \$1,500 as of August 2015. Prices are subject to change without notice.

Please send me a recommended air itinerary and fare estimate between _____ and Baku/Yerevan in:

Business class Economy class

For more information, contact The Commonwealth Club by phone at (415) 597-6720 or by email at travel@commonwealthclub.org



The Commonwealth Club of California
555 Post St
San Francisco, CA 94102