

HAYTOUG

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HIDDEN TREASURES OF THE
HOMELAND

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DISCOVERING OURSELVES, DISCOVERING ARMENIA

EDITORIAL

For young Armenians today, our homeland can be seen in many different ways.

It is seen by some, as a destination visited on a family vacation, or with a graduating class. Comparable to a coming-of-age Euro trip, these visits, despite being limited in scope and depth, can spark an initial connection to a far-away land.

To others, Armenia evokes romantic sentiments of a hallowed land, almost too pristine to be real. Captivated by flawless mental imagery, they may be too apprehensive to see it, lest they leave disappointed by reality.

To others, it is a foreign place on a map, or a country that exists—by default—on a list of places to be visited “when we get the chance.”

To still others Armenia is a fledgling nation with an ancient history, a country of treasures both hidden and in plain sight; treasures from the past and treasures that are just materializing.

Regardless of background or starting point, discovering Armenia is meaningful because it brings to reality the rich history and culture of our people. It takes our history out of books and places it in a tangible context that is ours to experience. The firsthand adventure of bringing to life the stories of our childhood has more value today than ever before, both in terms of feasibility and necessity. It gives us a glimpse into understanding why we struggle and what it is we are struggling for.

We struggle today because we want a better future for our homeland—the land we want to make our homes in. We struggle in solidarity with those who struggle within our nation’s borders. We struggle to give our next generations an understanding of the previous chapters of our story. We struggle because the beauties of our land are worth the struggle.

We struggle for our country because it is the unifier of our people and is the link between our past and future.

The journey of discovering Armenia is one that starts with the curiosity and drive of the individual. Curiosity to learn, curiosity to visit. Having the audacity to ask the not-so-simple questions, “Why am I here?” Wanting to know, “Where am I from? Where do I belong? Where do I want to make my life?”

The answers to these questions are provoking and are different from person to person, but they are found during the course of a journey. That journey will lead to discoveries that will give you pride, purpose and determination.

That journey is a fun one. It’s an eye-opening one. It’s a frustrating one. It’s a personal one. It’s an empowering one. It’s a challenging one. It’s a rewarding one.

That journey is a life changing one.



ՇՈՒՇԻՆ ՄԵՐ ՀԱՂԹԱՆԱԿԻ ԼՈՒՍԱՊՍԱԿՆ Է

Զրույցը` Հերմինե Ավագյանի

1988-ի Արցախյան շարժումը ժողովրդիս միասնական կամքի դրսևորումն էր, երբ 70 երկար տարիներ ադրբեջանական կապանքներում հեծող Արցախը ազատություն էր տենչում: Շուշի բերդաքաղաքի ազատագրումն Արցախյան պայքարում բեկումնային էր. Մի իրադարձություն, որի մասին բազմիցս խոսվել ու դեռ շատ երկար կխոսվի՝ որպես հայոց պատմության փառավոր մի էջ՝ կտակված սերունդներին, հավերժությանը: Շուշիի ազատագրումը գերնպատակ էր, հանուն որի միավորվել էր զինված հայությունը:

1992-ին արցախյան քաղաքական հակամարտությունը արդեն վերածվել էր զինված ընդհարումների: ԽՍՀՄ-ի փլուզումից հետո իրավիճակը թեժ էր, իսկ անկախություն հռչակած լեռնային Ղարաբաղին Ադրբեջանը հրետանու ուժով փորձում էր ճնշել: Շուշին թշնամու համար վերածվել էր հենակետի, որտեղից նա կրակի տարափի տակ էր առնում մայրաքաղաք Ստեփանակերտը: Ելքը մեկն էր՝ Շուշին պետք է ազատագրվի, պետք էր դիմել հակահարձակման: Կարագյալ գյուղից մինչև Քիրս՝ մոտ 40 կիլմետր ձգվող ռազմաճակատի գծով նախատեսվում էր հարձակման 4 ուղղություն: Առաջինը Հյուսիսային ուղղությունն էր, հրամանատար՝ Վալերի Զիթչյան, երկրորդը՝ Շոշի Արկադի Կարապետյանի հրամանատարությամբ, երրորդը Սամվել Բաբայանի հրամանատարությամբ Հարավային ուղղությունն էր, իսկ չորրորդը Ջանհասան-Քյոսալարինը՝ հրամանատար Սեյրան Օհանյան: Ռազմական գործողությունների ղեկավար էր նշանակվել ինքնապաշտպանական ուժերի հրամանատար Արկադի Տեր-Թադևոսյանը, որին կոչում էին «կոմատոս», ով դեռևս մայիսի 4ին էր ստորագրել հարձակման հրամանը, սակայն հարձակումը հետաձգվել էր ինչ-ինչ պատճառներով: Շուշիի ազատագրման ծրագիրը կրում էր «Հարսանիք լեռներում» ծածկանունը, որը սկսվեց մայիսի 8-ին: Հայ զինվորները մայիսի 9-ի լուսաբացին հաղթանակած մտան Շուշի բերդաքաղաք եւ թշնամու ձեռքերով ավերված սուրբ Ամենափրկիչ եկեղեցու գմբեթին կարոտով ու հպարտությամբ շողաց Հայոց եռագույնը:

Ռազմական գործողությունը բացառիկ էր ու հաջողված, նրա հաղթապատկը բարձրացրեց հայ զինվորի մարտական ոգին ու մղեց նրան նորանոր հաղթանակներին՝ վախ ու խուճապ առաջացնելու հակառակորդի շարքերում...

Շուշին դարձաւ մեր հերոսական ազատամարտի հաղթական ավարտի հաղթական մեկնարկը: Ժողովրդի մեջ իշխող «Մենք պարտադրված ենք հաղթել» հաստատամտությամբ: Շուշիի ազատագրումով մենք առաջին քայլը կատարեցինք պատմական արդարության վերականգնման ճանապարհին:

Շուշիի ազատագրումը պատասխան էր 1920թ. Մարտի հայկական կոտորածներին:

Փողկարվելով որպես համամիութենական առողջարանային քաղաք՝ խորհրդային իշխանության տարիներին Շուշին կորցրել էր իր ազգային դիմագիծը: Ամեն ինչ արվում էր Շուշին «ադրբեջանական տնտեսական, մշակութային և հոգեւոր վերածնունդը անշրջելի ընթացք ստացված Ս. Ամենափրկիչ եկեղեցու ազատագրմամբ:

Այսօր 19 երկար տարիներ են անցել Շուշիի ազատագրման փառավոր օրից. 19 տարիներ որոնց ընթացքում քաղաքը հասցրել է բուժել իր վերքերի մի մասը եւ առ օրս շարունակում է զարգանալ ի հեճուկս թշնամու եւ բոլոր չար ուժերի:

Շուշիի ազատագրման մասին զրուցենք Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցու Արցախի թեմի առաջնորդ Պարգեւ արքեպիսկոպոս Մարտիրոսյանի հետ:

1. Շուշիի ազատագրման խորհուրդը. Նրա պատմական եւ քաղաքական նշանակությունը արցախահայության եւ ընդհանրապես հայ ժողովրդի համար:

-Նախ սկսենք Շուշիի հնագույն պատմությունից: Քաղաքի մասին առաջին գրավոր տեղեկություններն ունենք արաբական աղբյուրներից: Երբ որ 7-րդ

դարում սկսվեց արաբական արշավանքները դեպի հարավային Կովկաս, արաբները հայտնվեցին նաեւ Հայաստանում: Նրանք իրենց աղբյուրներում վկայում են Շուշիի ամրոցի մասին: Այդ ժամանակ Շուշիում կար բերդ՝ որին նրանք կոչում էն Քարքարաբերդ, այսինքն «քարքարոտ բերդ»: Երեւի բերդն այդ ժամանակներում հայտնի է եղել, թէ չէ արաբներն այդքան չէին տպավորվի... Պատմական ընթացքում Շուշին հետզհետե մեծ համբավ է ձեռք բերել, վերածվել է հզոր հոգեւոր, մշակութային ու կրթական կետրոնի: Հայկական աղբյուրներից տեղեկանում ենք, որ 19-20-րդ դարերում այն ունեցել է մեծագույն համբավ: Շուշիում մենք ունեցել ենք 21 օրաթերթ, 2 տպարան, թատրոն, ծխական դպրոց, կանանց գիմնազիա, ռելսկան ուսումնարան: Շուշին ծնունդ է տվել մի շարք նշանավոր հայերի՝ Լեո, Մուրացան, Պողոս նուբար փաշա եւ շատ-շատ ուրիշներ, ովքեր փառք են բերել մեր ազգին:

1920 թվականի մարտ ամսին Ստալինի դրդմամբ ազերիների բանակը մտավ Շուշի եւ երեք օրվա ընթացքում 30,000 հայերի կոտորեց, հետո սկսեց աստիճանաբար ադրեջանացնել քաղաքը: Ժամանակին հայաբնակ քաղաքում 1988-ին հայերի թիվն ընդամենը 1920 էր դարձել, իսկ ազերիներինը՝ 10.000:

Շարժման ընթացքում Շուշին ռազմական հենակետ էր դարձել թշնամու համար, որտեղից հակառակորդը սպառնում էր կործանել Ստեփանակերտը: Կրակակետը պետք էր չեզոքացնել: Ռազմական գործընթացքը Աստծո կամոք պսակվեց հաջողությամբ, որի ընթացքում փալատական հայկական ռազմական միտքն ու ոգին: Անառիկ բերդն ազատագրվեց եւ այն դարձավ մեր հենարանը դեպի Մայր Հայաստան: Դրանից 9 օր հետո մենք միացանք Հայաստանին շարունակելով մեր միասնական հաղթարշավը:

Շուշիի ազատագրումը մեծ խորհուրդ ունեցավ. Նախ վերադարձրինք մեր պատմական քաղաքը, երկրորդ՝ այս ռազմական հաղթանակը բեկում մտցրեց պատերազմի ընթացքին, մեզ համար դա հաստատումն եղավ այն իրողության, որ մենք աներեւակայելի պայմաններում կարող ենք հրաշքի նման հաղթանակ ունենալ եւ դա ինչու՞ չէ կարողացավ նաեւ կոտրել Ադրբեջանի բանակի ոգին:

2. Կարելի է ասել, որ Շուշիի նման անառիկ բերդը անհնարին էր թվում մեկ երկու օրում ազատագրելը. ըստ ձեզ ինչպե՞ս դա կատարվեց:

-Կա մի քանի կարեւոր հանգամանք. առաջինը՝ բոլորը հավատում էին հաղթանակին, քանզի մենք այդ հաղթանակը կրում էինք մեր հոգիներում եւ երկրորդ՝ խիստ անհարժեշտություն էր այն որ բոլորս հասկանում էինք նրա նշանակությունը: Մենք

միաբան էինք: Ի՞նչն է հետաքրքիր. մի քանի անգամ գործողությունների սկիզբը հետաձգվել էր եւ դա զարմանալիորեն կատարվեց խաչի երեւման օրերին: Հայտնի է, որ 357 թվականի մայիսի 7-9ը Երուսաղեմում խաչը երեք օր ու գիշեր երեւացել էր երկնակամարին ու Աստծո միաջամտության՝ մը չէ արդյոք, որ հենց այդ օրերին կատարվեց Շուշիի ազատագրման գործողությունը: Աստված ինքն էր մեզ առաջնորդում դեպի հաղթանակ: Ռազմական գործողությունից առաջ մենք բոլոր զինվորներին խաչեր բաժանեցինք, նույնիսկ զրահատեխնիկայի վրա էին զինվորները խաչեր նկարում: Նրանք հավատով էին գնում մարտի: Ու Տիրոջ կամոք մենք նվազագույն կորուստներով հասանք հաղթանակի: Դա հրաշագործություն էր:՝

3. Այսօր հայությունը տոնում է Արցախի անկախության 20-ամյակը: Տոնը դեռ չի ավարտվել, առջեւում Դեկտեմբեր 10-ն է, երբ արցախահայությունը միահամուռ հանրաքվելով արտահայտեց իր անկախ լինելու կամքը: Այս կապակցությամբ կուզե՞ինք լսել ձեր խոսքը ուղված աշխարհի հայությանը:

-Կարծում եմ՝ դա ազգիս վերջին 600 տարվա մեծագույն նվաճումներից էր: Նախ՝ մենք ունեցանք երկու անկախ հանրապետություններ, որը մեծ երեւոյթ էր: Անկախ պետություն ունենալը ցանկացած ազգի համար մեծ երազանք է, ինչը մենք ձեռք բերեցինք պատերազմի ու արյան գնով: Ուստի՝ մեզանից յուրաքանչյուրը պարտավոր է աչքի լույսի պես պահել ու պահպանել այն, ինչին հասել ենք: Բարեբախտաբար, շնորհիվ մեր ազգի, մեր բանակի, մենք կարողանում ենք օրեցօր շենացնել Արցախը եւ կարծում եմ՝ միասնականությամբ, ձեռք ձեռքի կկարողանանք նոր առաջընթաց արձանագրել: Դա մեր ապագա նվաճումների գրավականը կլինի:



I Was Told There'd be π

The way I remember it, the first time I went to Karahunj there wasn't even a road. It was my very first time in Armenia, everything was brand new, and the constant overload of sensory experience for three months renders my memory suspect when it tells me that we veered off the main highway into a field and all we had to guide us was our driver's infallible sense of direction (and really, when it's your first time in Armenia and you're the only kid who doesn't speak the language, you want to find the guy with the infallible sense of direction). I was tagging along with a couple of friends on their AYF excursion, knew nothing about Armenia, and I think when I heard someone mention "Stonehenge," I rolled my eyes.

By now, you may have heard of Karahunj (or Zorats Karer). After being featured in a History Channel documentary as well as a segment on CNN (videos that were subsequently shared on many an Armenian Facebook wall), you may recognize it as Armenian Stonehenge. The more than 200 stones in the layout have been standing sentinels at the edge of Sisian in the Syunik province for around 7500 years, making it 4500 years older than Stonehenge in the UK.

we came from. There's also the ominous thought that our ancestors were trying to leave a message, warning us of cataclysmic dangers that can be read in the stars. There's even a theory that the first inhabitants of Great Britain were Armenians, meaning they brought their knowledge of astronomy and the concept of a Stonehenge and the tradition of khachkars to Europe. Supporting this theory is the fact that "kar" means stone in Armenian,

myself, and started searching for rocks in the shape of a pi sign. My eyes identified a seemingly random collection of rocks that slowly revealed a pattern, snaking into the distance and towards a central point. I remember the first stone I saw with a hole and feeling my heart thud.

In the distance, one of the stones broke itself in half and walked towards us; it took me a minute to realize it was a man who had been sitting out there all alone and reading a book. He approached our group and greeted us. My host sister, Rosa, whispered a translation and it turned out the young man was from Yerevan and was studying archeology. Because there were no signs or guides to explain the stones and their mysteries, he spent his summers sitting there waiting. "For what?" I asked. Rosa relayed my question, and the young man's eyes lit up. He answered, Rosa smiled, and she grinned and turned to me. "For you, of course!" He proceeded to walk us through and explain the theories, placing his hands on the stones with respect and affection. He spent his summers out there in hopes that someone, or some group, would make the trip so that he could share his knowledge and revel in the enigmas of Karahunj.

Nowadays, UNESCO signs and a tourism kiosk give visitors a basic idea of what they're seeing. But when I think of Karahunj, I always think of that solitary man in a nondescript field surrounded by the wisdom of our ancestors, patiently waiting for someone to join him: to stare at our past in wonder, to share the secrets of the ancients, to speculate, and to remember that life is mostly a mystery.

By Ani Sarkisian



Some of the stones weigh more than 50 tons, and 85 of them have man-made holes that form calculated angles when connected, drawing the eye to certain points in the sky. International teams of archeologists, astronomers, and historians have competing theories to account for what it could exactly signify. It could be the world's oldest observatory and calendar. Another theory, taking changes in the tilt of the Earth's axis into account, is that the stones appear to line up with the constellation Cygnus (a swan or a vulture, depending on where you're from), which symbolized an entry into the stars above; the idea is that our ancestors were possibly trying to tell us where

and "hunge" translates to something like "bunch," but the word "henge" has no origins in the English language, making its existence in the name Stonehenge all but arbitrary without the Armenian link.

Of course, I had no idea about any of this on my first trip to Karahunj. Our motley crew also included my host sister and a hitchhiking soldier on his way home, and we were all too worn out and too busy chattering to each other to ask too many questions about what we were about to see. I remember staggering out into the approaching twilight and fog, unsure of what I was looking for. "Stonehenge," I thought to



Yerevan.



A few months ago when I was in Yerevan, a friend and I found ourselves leisurely strolling down Abovyan Street whilst talking about our immediate experiences of the last few weeks. She turned around to me and said, “This city is kind of like a never-ending carousel, you get on at one place and you get off at another but during the whole time you are just going around and around the city.” Yerevan was a carousel and we were traversing its circuitous path as it presented us our life’s surroundings by what history had built.

Every city is mirror for and reflection of society. The city creates a backdrop to a theatrical performance, which is the life of the people interacting in it. We build the city to reflect what we would like to have as the backdrop to the story of our lives, and after the city ages she reminds us of our thoughts at the time and what scenes from our life’s play we were performing then. Even if we might forget the details, the city—in all that it is and isn’t in that moment—will forever remind us. Through its buildings, parks, streets, and movements, the city becomes the physical execution of all of our intellectual and physical expressions, as we build our ideals into our cities. We build our dreams into our city, we build our souls into the city, and then the city reflects back to us the spirit with which we created all that we did during that particular moment in time.

When we look at some of the streets and buildings in Yerevan they take us back to the 1940’s era of Yerevan and we start imagining how people lived then, and what clothing they wore and what books they read, how they greeted each other. When we look at the taller buildings built around the 60’s - 70’s we think about why the shift took place, we notice the change in the building design. If we look carefully enough, we can see the details in the quality of construction, we can understand why a shift happened in the material quality, why buildings went from 4 stories to 16. We start to think about why these changes took place, if the quality of construction went up that means the city was prospering if it went down, then the economy was not doing well, or maybe there was corruption, or a shift in construction material, or ideology. The city starts becoming a record of the people that built her and why they



The Carousel City.

built her the way they did, as the backdrop to the theatrical performance of their lives at the time.

Then the fun begins because you are the main actor of a theatrical performance of your life story, and the backdrop is Yerevan. The year is 2012 for example. The season, summer. The scene starts with you waking up and walking down the street. Where do you get a cup of coffee? At a café in the corner of a small street? At a café that surrounds Opera that is covering what used to be a large park? Or at a friend’s house? The decision you make in the theatrical performance of your life will, over time, mirror in the urban landscape of Yerevan, because if you want that park to reappear from below that café, then you should have your coffee on the corner of a street or at a friend’s house and not deprive nature of her natural greenery by increasing the need for more cafés. Then the question becomes, do we favor Cafés over Parks, do we favor street vendors over Super Markets, do we favor public transportation or the dream of each having a Range Rover? What do we want the backdrop of life to look like? The city will reflect in physical form, each and every choice we make in how we choose to live. When we choose the Range Rover, the streets will get wider over time and the public transportation suffers as congestion increases. By choosing to shop at commercialized supermarkets, street vending will become obsolete, barring access to more natural, non-synthetic food, and yet goods will be conveniently and easily accessible in wholesale at these markets, ready to be purchased and placed inside those very Range Rovers we drive.

We are the architects of our surroundings. Architecture is a democratic process that we all engage in everyday. If we want to live in a pedestrian-friendly Yerevan then we have to incorporate walking into our everyday lives. If we want to have street vendors, then we need to support them with that extra effort of walking to where they are. Walking twenty more minutes to get our groceries would in turn be great exercise as well.

Next time you wake up in Yerevan think to yourself, “I am in a unique city with a great backdrop that was

created by a very unique people over the last hundreds of years as the backdrop for the theatrical performance of my life that is going to take place today. What is my performance going to be as an actor walking through that set and how might my actions and decisions impact the city?” Imagine yourself as an actor putting on a performance as you walk through this great city, read her history with your senses, and write her present and future with your actions.

From Los Angeles with love,
Vrej Haroutounian

Asbarez|mobile



It's here.



Jerusalem:

A Souvenir from the Armenian Quarter

In Memoriam: Vabik Aroustamian, Beloved Uncle (1955-2007)

By Gayane Khechoomian

Last summer I woke up on the rooftop of a hostel in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Before the sun had a chance to let me know I had been sleeping outside, the Islamic 'call to prayer' sounding from the mosque speakers reminded me that even at 5 a.m., God is Great ("Allahu Akbar" in Arabic). Three hours later, the church bells commanded my attention. I was wide-awake, living a dream.

This ancient part of the world, where the four corners of the earth meet, is the sight holiest to the three Abrahamic religions. The Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Armenian Quarters make up this 0.35 square mile fortress-like city. Here, the cobblestones of narrow streets are a time machine to a time long ago and every road has its own idea of the elevation and direction

that humans should walk. The day-time bazaar is like a scene out of Disney's Aladdin where everybody is "my friend" and everybody has something pretty to sell to a pretty girl.

The smell of herbs and pastries fill the Muslim Quarter, where a

non-Muslim cannot venture too far without being stopped and told to return. The sounds of people gathering at the Western Wall on Shabbat (the Seventh Day of rest in Judaism) fill the Jewish Quarter every Friday. The sight of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Christian Quarter, which was once that of Jesus' crucifixion, is headquarters



Children having a water fight in the Armenian Quarter during Vartivar

to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem.

The story of how I ended up in the Old City doesn't go back quite as far as the presence of Armenians in Jerusalem, which predates Christianity. It was five years ago in my Armenian history class at UCLA that Professor Richard Hovannisian described the age-old tradition of Armenian pilgrims in the Armenian Quarter. It was then I started dreaming about the day I would embark on a solitary journey to the historical city.

Out of the four quarters, the Armenian is the smallest and the most walled off. Home to roughly 500 Armenians, it makes up one-sixth of the city. Armenian cafes, taverns, restaurants and souvenir shops selling famous ceramics are found on streets with Armenian names written in Arabic and Hebrew scripts.

For hundreds of years, Christian pilgrims have made journeys to the Holy Land, taking with them one souvenir:

"What kind of tattoo do you want?" Wassim Razzouk, my Harley-riding tattoo-artist asked.

"Give me what you give Armenian pilgrims," I said hoping he'd know what I was talking about.

Turns out he knew exactly what I was talking about. The year before, he had tattooed seven Armenians from New York, all around my age. In fact, one of the first tattoos done by Wassim's ancestors was one of Armenian letters dating back to 1749. That was around the time his Coptic Christian family moved from Egypt to Jerusalem, where they have tattooed Christian pilgrims for the past 250 years.

My uncle hoped to be one of those pilgrims. As the ink settled into my arm, I thought about how he dreamed to one day be at the very spot I was. And it dawned on me that it had been exactly four years to the day since his passing. But if there were ever a time and place where surrealism reigns, it would be the Old City. Because here, there is no sense of time, no separation of modern and ancient. The religious air has pervaded throughout the centuries and permeates every corner of the old town.

I escaped into the Armenian Quarter where the St. James monastery has stood since the 14th century. The church that provided refuge to Armenians during the Genocide,

"Give me what you give Armenian pilgrims," I said hoping he'd know what I was talking about.

now provided refuge to me from a world where the struggle for cultural survival follows each generation. The familiarity of the Priest's voice echoing within the church walls resonated with my soul. I walked out of the ornate room and rounded the corner to a courtyard surrounded by Armenian dwellings. That's where I saw the majestic cross-stone statue standing in front of me like an epiphany.

"I have no idea what it is like to be an Armenian," William Saroyan wrote in his short story Seventy Thousand Assyrians. "I have a faint idea of what it is like to be alive."

And looking down on the ink on my right forearm, I smiled to myself.



WELCOME TO JAVAKHK

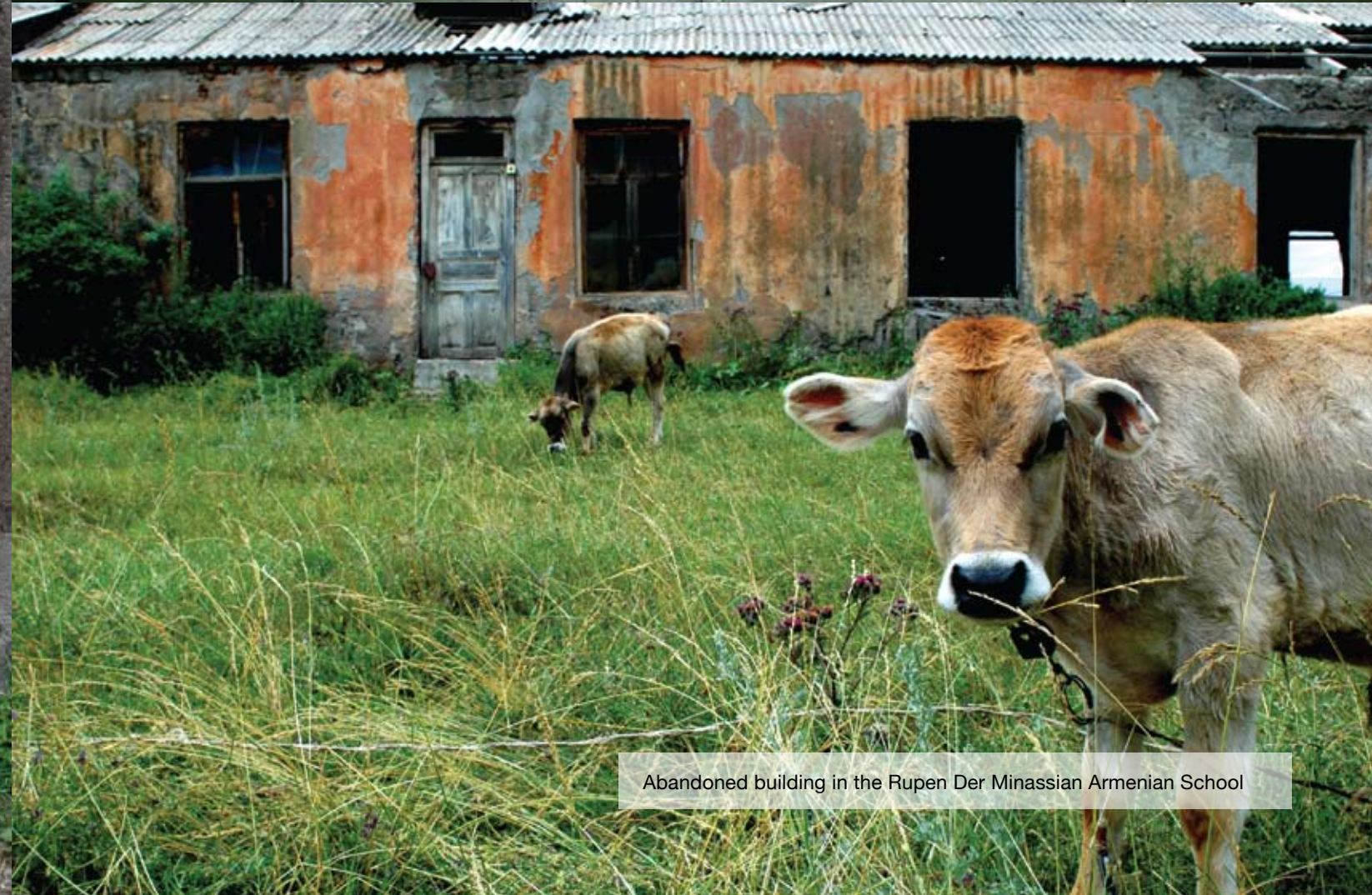
PHOTOS BY TAMAR BABOUJIAN



Armenian woman standing at the locked door of church ruins, where locals light candles and place them at the doorstep - Deeleeef Village, Javakhk.



Classroom being used at Rupen Der Minassian Armenian School



Abandoned building in the Rupen Der Minassian Armenian School



Young Armenian standing in the fields of Madatapa Lake facing Armenia, illegally raising the Armenian flag.



Armenian farmers with sickles, outskirts of Akhltskha, Javakhk.



OPEN LETTER TO THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA:

We are representatives of various environmental groups, writing this message to Spyurq, Armenia..

The People of Armenia desperately need the voice and actions of Spyurq. The people of Armenia have lived in fear and slavery for far too long and many have lost faith and aspiration for any betterment.

Our small group is trying to smash these stereotypes that do not allow us to breath freely, create and develop without damaging our environment.

Today, in the name of development, massive mountains are being destroyed in order to mine gold, uranium, molybdenum, copper, iron, silver and other metals— all aimed at making profit. For the sake of so-called “development” and “creating employment”, Armenians are cutting down their virgin forests and turning our country into a barren, deserted, unpopulated piece of land. The effects of mining

can already be felt today and their impact will be multiplied for coming generations: birth defects, physical and mental disabilities, forced abortions and infertility.

Once a land for creativity, Armenia is now turning into a sterile and poisonous place, which is dangerous for humans and other species.

Together we cannot allow this to continue. We are disturbing the balance of the Earth and killing ourselves— doing violence towards our own lives and that of our future generations. Presently, environmentalists are considered to be “anti-governmental” forces. Our sole purpose is to live in harmony with the rules of nature, be full-fledged citizens, and be creative and non-violent. Many artists and intellectuals maintain silence on these issues because they do not want to appear to be in conflict with government authorities—this is unforgivable.

We hope there are people in Spyurq who are ready to fight with us to bring about change.

Please, AWAKEN the Armenian society, government, Diaspora with your inspiring voices and words. Raise these issues with articles, discussions, and direct actions.

Help the Armenian people stop cutting the branch on which we are all sitting.

Collect armies of thousands and wake those who are asleep. For the sake of Life, Nature and Being.

AMEN



www.BikePlus.nor.am

Bike+ is an initiative started in 2006 by young environmental activists in Armenia. They aim to educate the public about environmental and ecological issues through weekly bike rallies and rides.



UGHYASAR

Maro Siranosian

The petroglyphs, or rock engravings, of Ughtasar can be found all over Yerevan; they are inscribed onto silver jewelry, painted onto coffee cups, traced into hand-made pottery, and they adorn the walls of cafes. Reaching the actual petroglyphs of Ughtasar (“ught” meaning camel and “sar” meaning mountain, due to the resemblance of its peaks to the humps of a camel) can be a bit of a challenge, and as with most of Armenia’s noteworthy sites this provides half of the trip’s excitement and intrigue.



Located in the Syunik mountain range about 20 miles from Sisian in southern Armenia, the petroglyphs can only be accessed by an uphill climb in a Soviet-era UAZ. UAZ stands for Ulyanovsky Avtomobilny Zavod, or the Ulyanovsk Automobile Plant where the sturdy Russian 4x4 is manufactured. The trek up the mountain is much like riding Disneyland’s beloved Indiana Jones Adventure 200 times without stopping. Your slight, unassuming Armenian driver will be transformed into a superb navigator at the helm, maneuvering through ditches and over large boulders with ease as you bounce around the back of the UAZ desperately trying to absorb some of the pristine scenery without knocking your head against the window too many times. At some point after the first hour of driving you have no choice but to get out of the vehicle and continue on foot, as the road becomes too steep for even the tank-like UAZ to scale it with so many passengers. This is the part of the trip when some members of your party, possibly your father or mother, will start cursing the moment they agreed to come here with you in the first place; this was, after all, supposed to be a vacation.

After you pass the worst of it and can climb back into the car, it’s only a short drive to the lake and the petroglyphs at the top of the mountain. The first glimpse of the small, crystalline glacial lake makes the drive worth it, no matter how much you may have been knocked around: it is glass-like and still, providing a perfect mirror of the sky and the surrounding peaks, and over 2,000 decorated rock fragments extend to the foot of the mountain. If the sun is shining, the rocks glisten with a greenish iridescence. The petroglyphs, some believed to date back to the Paleolithic Era (12,000 BCE), are carved onto dark brownish-black volcanic stones left behind by an extinct volcano. Although the site was discovered in the early 20th cen-

tury, it was not really studied until the 1920s and again in the late 1960s; it is still not fully understood today.



The carvings on the rock fragments depict hunting scenes, a wide array of animals, spirals, circles and geometric shapes, and even zodiac signs. Research suggests that the area served as a temporary dwelling for nomadic cattle-herding tribes, and studies of the rock carvings indicate that they were in use for hundreds of years, with peoples of later eras adding their own engravings to the stones. According to the research of Hamlet Martirosyan, the pictograms of Ughtasar represent a writing system called “goat writing”. Many scholars believe that this was due to the large number of goats drawn on the stones, but according to Martirosyan it is because in the ancient Armenian language, the words “goat” and “writing” were homonyms (words of differing meaning that sound the same). They would use these homonyms to express concepts through pictures, thus the abstract concept of “writing” (which in ancient Armenian can be expressed with words like “shar” - arrange, “sarel” - compile, “tsir” - a line) found its reflection in the representation of a goat (“zar”), because the words for “writing” and “goat” sounded the same. As English speakers, we can think of it as representing the pronoun “you” with a picture of a ewe (a female sheep). Goats are a prevalent theme on the

stones, possibly because the word “dig” in ancient Armenian meant goat and was close enough to “diq,” the ancient word for gods. By combining abstract signs with the images of animals and people in horizontal or vertical rows, prehistoric engravers were able to convey specific messages.

The true beauty of Ughtasar lies in its seemingly untouched nature. You won’t find traces of khorovadz (barbecue) fires next to the lake or trash sprinkled among the rocks; there isn’t a visitor center selling mugs and postcards; there are no tour guides hounding you to listen to the history of the petroglyphs. You are free to roam the mountainside and sit among the prehistoric graphic expressions, pondering what might have caused ancient Armenians to scale the uninviting peaks and leave their mark. At about 10,500 feet above sea level, the air is some of the cleanest you’ll breathe in Armenia outside of a climb to the top of Mount Aragats, Armenia’s highest point. Due to its elevation the climate is always crisp and patches of snow speckle the mountain year-round.

Today, the mountain perch hosts annual spiritual gatherings and retreats. Surrounded by the marks of peoples past, modern visitors partake in the same natural beauty, serenity, and mystery that the lake has provided for thousands of years.

When you finally reach Sisian again after practically tumbling down the mountainside, you feel like you’ve just returned from a trip to the moon or some equally far-flung and unreachable place. You feel as if you’re waking from a dream, a dream whose constant jerking scenery caused you to fall from your bed, hitting your head a few times along the way. You are left with some amazing bruises to help you recall it instantly for days to come.


Get Directions

My Places

A

YEREVAN REPUBLIC SQUARE


While Armenia was tearing away from the Soviet Union in 1991, thousands of elated Armenians poured out into the streets and tore down an enormous statue of Lenin which towered in the center of Yerevan. The square was renamed Republic Square and is where ceremonies and demonstrations alike have been held ever since. In the center of Republic Square is an enormous fountain that puts Bellagio to shame, and a stone pattern which is designed to look like an Armenian rug from above. It is flanked by government buildings and the National Gallery.



B

MATENADARAN MUSEUM OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS


Home to some of Armenia's oldest literary relics with handwritten manuscripts dating all the way back to the 5th century, the Matenadaran's collection holds over 17,000 ancient Armenian manuscripts and 30,000 documents in fields from philosophy to medicine. Recognized by UNESCO's Memory of the World Program, the institute is also home to over 2,000 non-Armenian documents in Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, and Persian.



C

ALEXANDER SPENDARYAN STATE ACADEMY OPERA & BALLET THEATER


Over an 80 year time span, this architecturally stunning building has entertained in its halls the sights and sounds of opera masterpieces such as Tachikovsky's Swan Lake, and Aram Khachaturian's Gayane. In fact Gayane was first developed and promoted through the Opera before becoming a worldwide success. Freedom Square is the largest public space in the city center and home to countless cafes.



D

CASCADE

Cascade, the brainchild of architect Alexander Tamanyan, was conceived to connect Yerevan's northern and central parts. This labyrinth of escalators, stairways, courtyards and outdoor gardens has about 572 steps on its exterior staircase and houses the Cafesjian Center for the Arts.



E

ST GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR CATHEDRAL CHURCH


The largest Armenian church in the world, completed in 2001 upon the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's state conversion to Christianity, has been visited by Pope John Paul II and bears the holy remains of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who was a played a monumental role in Armenia's adption of Christianity.



F

MOTHER ARMENIA MONUMENT & VICTORY PARK


Built upon the ruins of an enormous statue of Stalin in 1962, the Mother Armenia statue proudly faces Yerevan from Victory Park and symbolically stands as the guardian of the city. Victory Park itself is the World War II memorial which commemorates Soviet Armenia's participation in the war and pays tribute to all of Armenia's casualties.



G

VERNISSAGE OUTDOOR MARKET


Armenian contemporary art and culture finds life in the outdoor markets of Vernissage. Here, modern Armenian artists sell their works of art directly to the people in an open market among seeming endless rows of carpets, jewelry, woodwork, canvases, paintings and more.



H

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE MEMORIAL & MUSEUM


Dzidzernagapert, or the Swallow's Fortress, is a towering monument that pays homage to the victims of Armenian Genocide who never received a proper burial. An eternal flame, first lit in 1968 when the monument was erected, burns encircled by 12 stone slabs, each representing a province curently occupied by Turkey. The pointed spear, which faces Mt. Ararat, represents the rebirth of the Armenian people.



I

SERGEI PARAJANOV MUSEUM


Sergei Parajanov Museum honors the famed director of the film, "The Color of Pomegranates." The museum opened in 1991, one year after Parajanov's death. One of the city's most popular destinations, the museum showcases hundreds of pieces of artwork and screenplays by the avant-garde director.

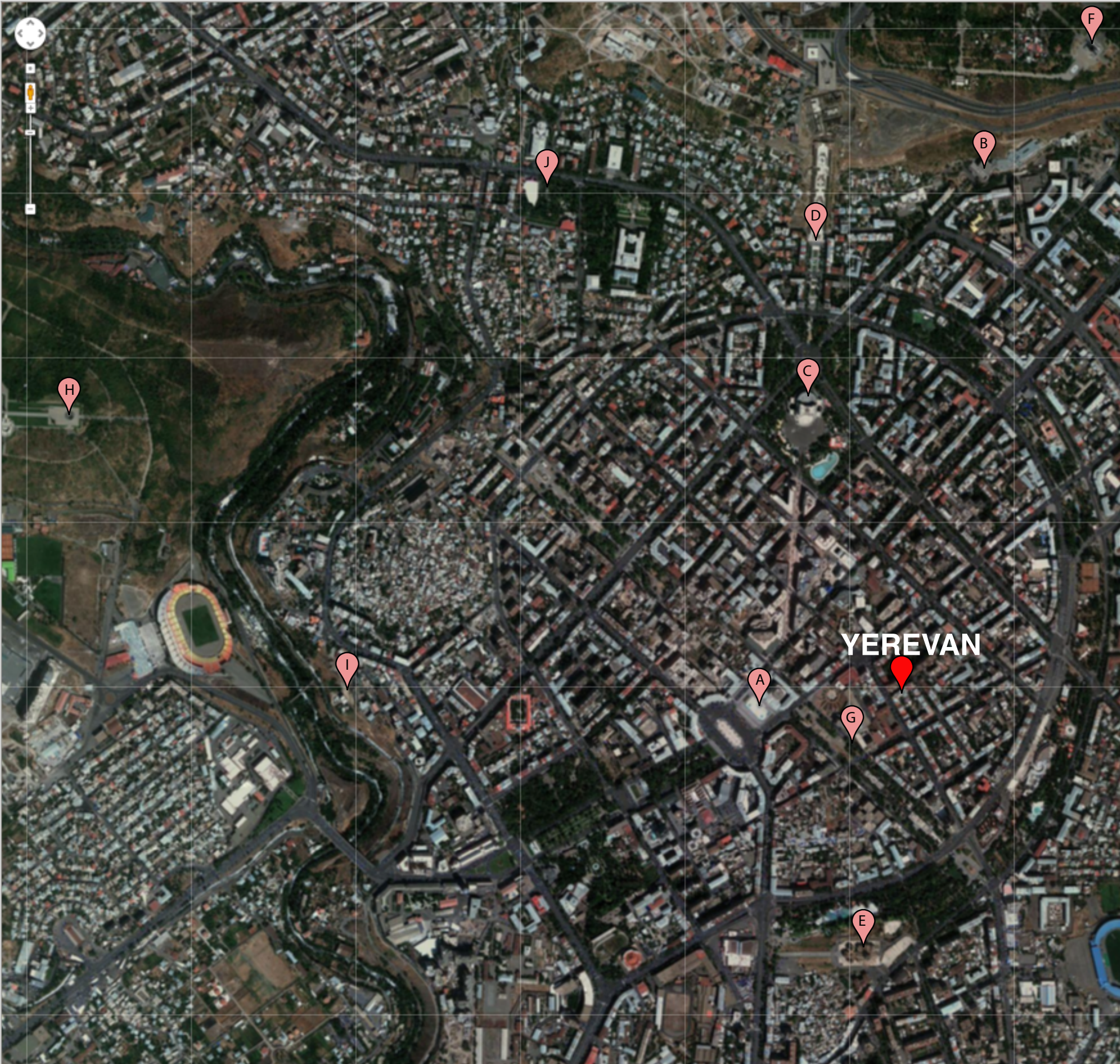


J

LOVER'S PARK

Rarely referred to by its official name (Boghosian Gardens), the park on Baghramian Ave. is nestled adjacent to the National Assembly and Presidential Residence. Renovations to the 1.6-hectare area began in 2005 under the auspices of the All-Armenia Fund and have resulted in a beautiful green space perfect for a stroll or picnic.





ARMENIA

THE HISTORICAL, NOTABLE AND NOT-SO-TRADITIONAL SITES OF OUR HOMELAND

Ani and Maro are two friends who met in Armenia and proceeded to have wild adventures together. At times they have dared called themselves archeologists, sociologists, modern-day explorers, gastro-bloggers and socialites. Today they merely call themselves freelancers (read: uninsured). These are a few of their favorite things:

Y E R E V A N

Soviet choo choo Head South down Mesrop Mashtots Ave and turn right after you pass Arami St. After a stroll through the old park with its defunct concrete fountains, a long graffiti-covered tunnel will lead you to Hrazdan Gorge. Head left as you exit the tunnel, travel past old carousels and walk down some stairs on the right and, as if from a dream, a Soviet-era children's choo choo train will reveal itself in the distance. Hang out along the river here and watch underwear-clad local elderly gents as they swim in the river. That mysterious coke bottle they offer you is probably filled with homemade vodka, so beware.

Opera Square Have a cup of the cheapest (and best) Armenian coffee in town at Cafe Meghedi, or sample the Beef Stroganoff (not the best...in fact, avoid it). Oftentimes there are concerts and events held in Opera Square, and it is also a favorite gathering spot for opposition protesters.

Attend a Soccer Game Now that Armenia has a winning team (Ireland, we'll get you next time), come out and show your support. You won't see these boys taking cigarette breaks at halftime and you'll be amazed to see them actually pass the ball. The excitement in the stadium is infectious and you will learn what hoop tur really means.

Roof and Cafe of the National Gallery After a quick stop to see the world's oldest shoe, head upstairs to the National Picture Gallery and check out works by Hovhannes Aivasovsky, Vardges Surenyants and Gevorg Bashinjaghyan. Then walk out onto the roof on the ninth floor and enjoy a unique view of Yerevan from above. The cafe there is usually empty and is a quiet place, sit and have coffee, and be ignored by the staff.

Vernissage and Cafeteria Vernissage is an open-air bazaar where you can find anything from puppies to fine china. We personally enjoy Vernissage when it's cold out and the sidewalks are covered in a thick layer of black ice, but to each her own. Don't miss the cheapest meal you can probably find anywhere in the world at the Vernissage cafeteria. It's an unmarked, unnamed spot just off the bazaar on Aram St., and to the best of our knowledge the vendors also store paintings there. Half the fun is in finding the place, follow the scent of vodka and dolma or ask a ruddy art vendor for directions. The proprietress will offer you The Greasiest Comfort Food Ever.

Markets beneath Barekamutyun Metro and in the alley on Tigran Metz Ave on the left after the man who makes hats Ani's favorite gift for Maro has always been oversized underwear printed with glittery poetry and there are only a few spots to find just the right ones. At either of these markets you'll be able to pick up a kebab and have your watch fixed all while selecting non-stick cookware and an Adibas sports-bag.

Juice Stand in Sakharov Square Fresh juices in Armenia are simply called "fresh". This spot is usually only open in the summer and serves the best fresh this side of Vernissage. Watch out for inferior, flashier imitations.

Parpetsi Enjoy the night life on Ghazar Parpetsi St. Start off with a coffee and a crepe at Gemini, then continue on to check out the atmospheres at various local bars including 26, D.I.Y, Metro Music and Rock Bar. Take a break for a burger at newly opened Factory and stop in to hear a jam at Syncopat on Pushkin where you can join in if you're feeling brave. Continue down Pushkin to check out the vibe at Calumet and Beatles, and finish on Saryan at Tro's Pub with a game of foosball.

Stop Club The best place to hear rock music in Yerevan.

Sasuntsi Davit train station Make use of new digital screens to catch a train to Gyumri, Lake Sevan, Tbilisi or other places from this beautiful Soviet-era train station. On longer train rides, please note hidden charges like pillow cases and be prepared for a stern knock on your door at 4am for passport control.

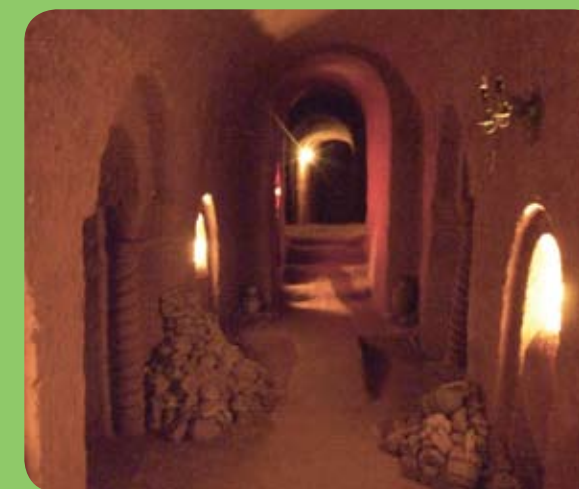
Old Houses in Yerevan Search for Yerevan's past in the areas near Northern Avenue and off Amiryan St. between Abovyan St. and Mashtots Ave. These homes are quickly disappearing and they are definitely worth a visit.

Luna Park A psychedelic Soviet-era amusement park where you can lose your life on a roller coaster while watching a Rabiz singer and eating popcorn. If you want to take your beer on the Ferris wheel they won't check your bag. Don't miss the Haunted House where your only fear is that you may trip because there is not a stitch of light in the place.

Pak Shuka (Covered Market) and Blue Mosque Head to the back of the covered market to meet the tuti oghi vendor who will have you sample his wares in a back room with basterma hanging from the ceiling. Please be aware that you will be in close proximity of the spice lady who will insist on you taking one or several of her favorite mixes. Exit the market and cross the street to visit the beautiful 18th century Blue Mosque.

Is it edible? While traveling through Armenia we suggest that you expand your culinary horizons. Visit different restaurants, don't be afraid to point to and order random things off the menu. Go ahead, dip some dried lavash into a steaming bowl of khash (cow knuckle soup) and chase it down with a shot of vodka, your life will never be the same.

When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when you're feeling sad...go do something crazy with your friends in Armenia. Stop by Cafe Meghedi for a coffee, maybe you'll run into Ani and Maro and they can tell you about the time they ate questionable kebab and got sick in Abovyan. But trust us on the Beef Stroganoff.



Master Levon's Cave Only in Armenia can a request from your wife to dig a potato pit result in a twenty-year quest to dig a cave by hand. The resulting wonder is 21 meters deep and spans 300 meters, a glorious cavern that is testament to one man's vision. Located in Arinj Village.



MORE TO SEE OUTSIDE OF YEREVAN



Dilijan & Parz Lich Located in Northern Armenia, Dilijan is like the Armenian Alps. Check out the beautiful old wooden homes in Old Dilijan or take a hike around the crystalline Parz Lich.

Aragatz Get caught in a lightning storm and be pelted with hail on the peaks of Armenia's highest mountain. Slide down through the snow and tap dance on flat stones that sound like xylophones. Make sure you have your transportation to get down the mountain worked out before hand or discover yourself with the surliest group of friends you've ever had. Also make sure to admire the nomadic Yezidi settlements on the way up the mountain.

Other Shores of Lake Sevan Noraduz & Shorzha Buy fish from local fisherman who hold up their hands as an indication of the size of their fish, and not the size of the equipment that caught it. Check out Noraduz Cemetery with its medieval khachkars and head around the lake to Shorzha to feel like you're the only person in the world.

Karahunj and Ughtasar You might see people with stethoscopes trying to pick up vibrations in the rocks. If you're truly adventurous, take a Soviet jeep up a nearby mountain to get to Ughtasar, where you'll find the mountainside scattered with petroglyphs.

Geghard & Garni Geghard is a beautiful monastery partly carved out of a mountain. Just nearby, Garni is the site of Armenia's last standing Pagan temple. Don't miss the opportunity to visit the local lavash factory and lunch with local gangsters. Just don't get into their large black SUV, even if they offer you land and livestock. Food for thought.

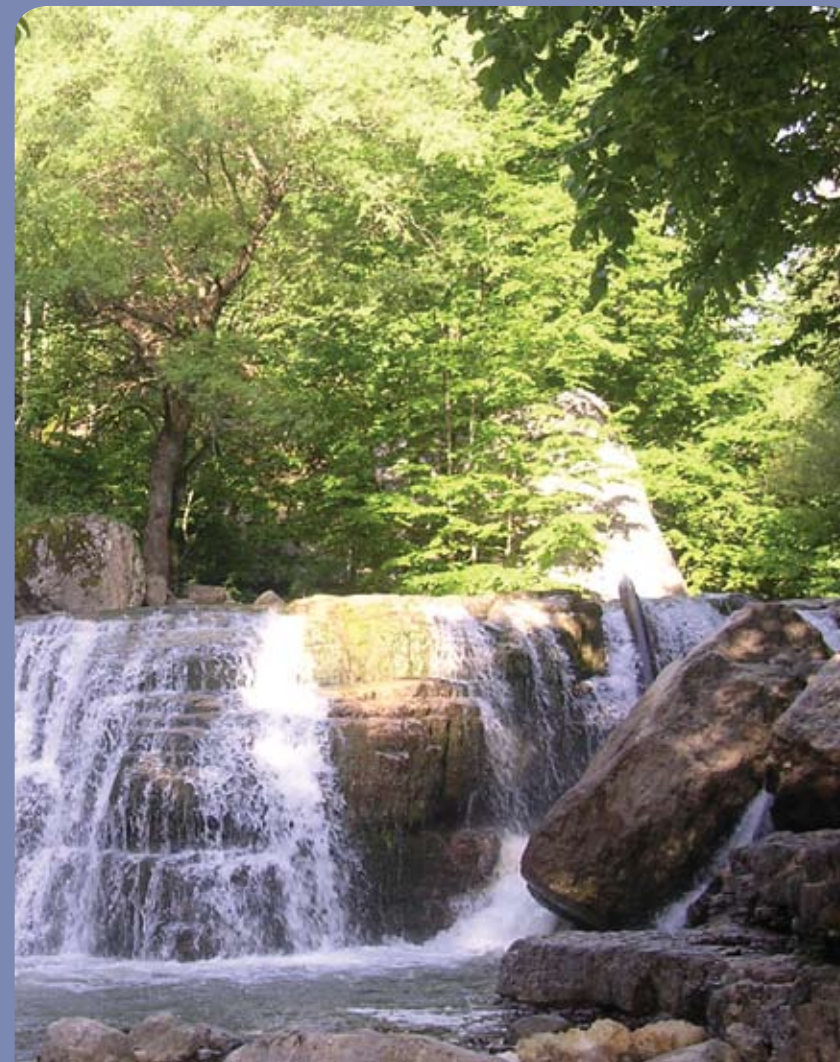
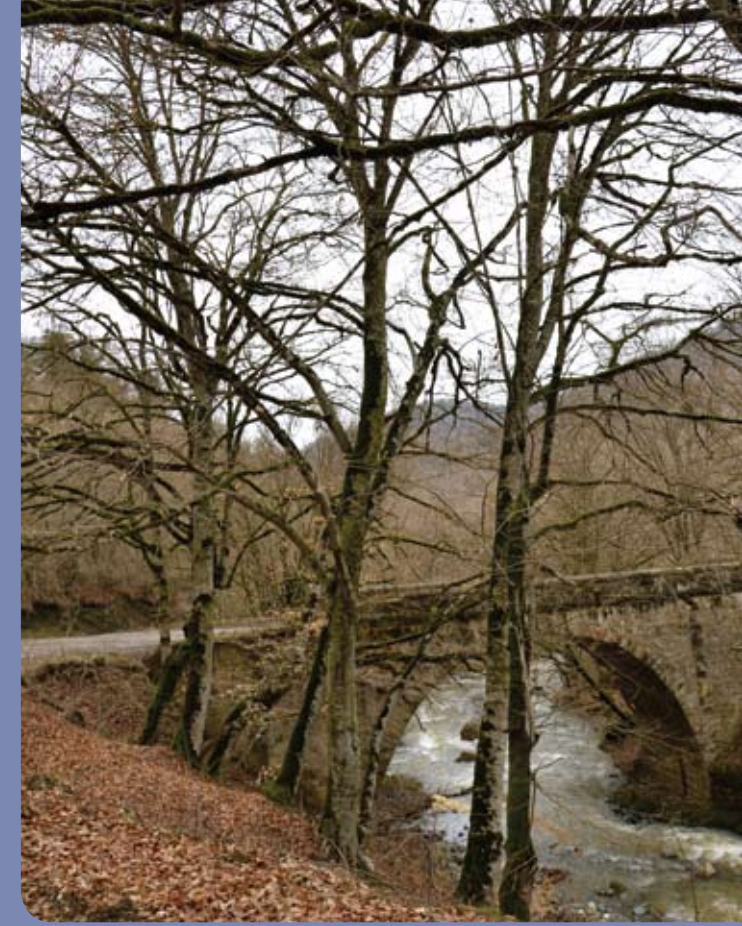
Goris & Khndzoresk The last time Ani visited this place, she acted like a sullen teenager and refused to take in the breathtaking views. Don't do that when you go. Do feel free to crawl into ancient caves where our ancestors used to live. Don't lean against the car glaring at your parents, even if they started it. Because they did.

Tatev & Devil's Bridge The beautiful monastery of Tatev can only be reached by hiring a driver named Tarzan and his orange marshrutka (minibus). Well, no, that's not really true, but it should be. Tatev can also be reached by the world's longest teleferic (aerial tramway). Before you head up to the monastery make sure to check out Devil's Bridge, a natural bridge above the Vorotan river. You can climb down the edge of the bridge to bathe in mineral pools and explore the taverns below with their impressive stalagmites and stalactites.

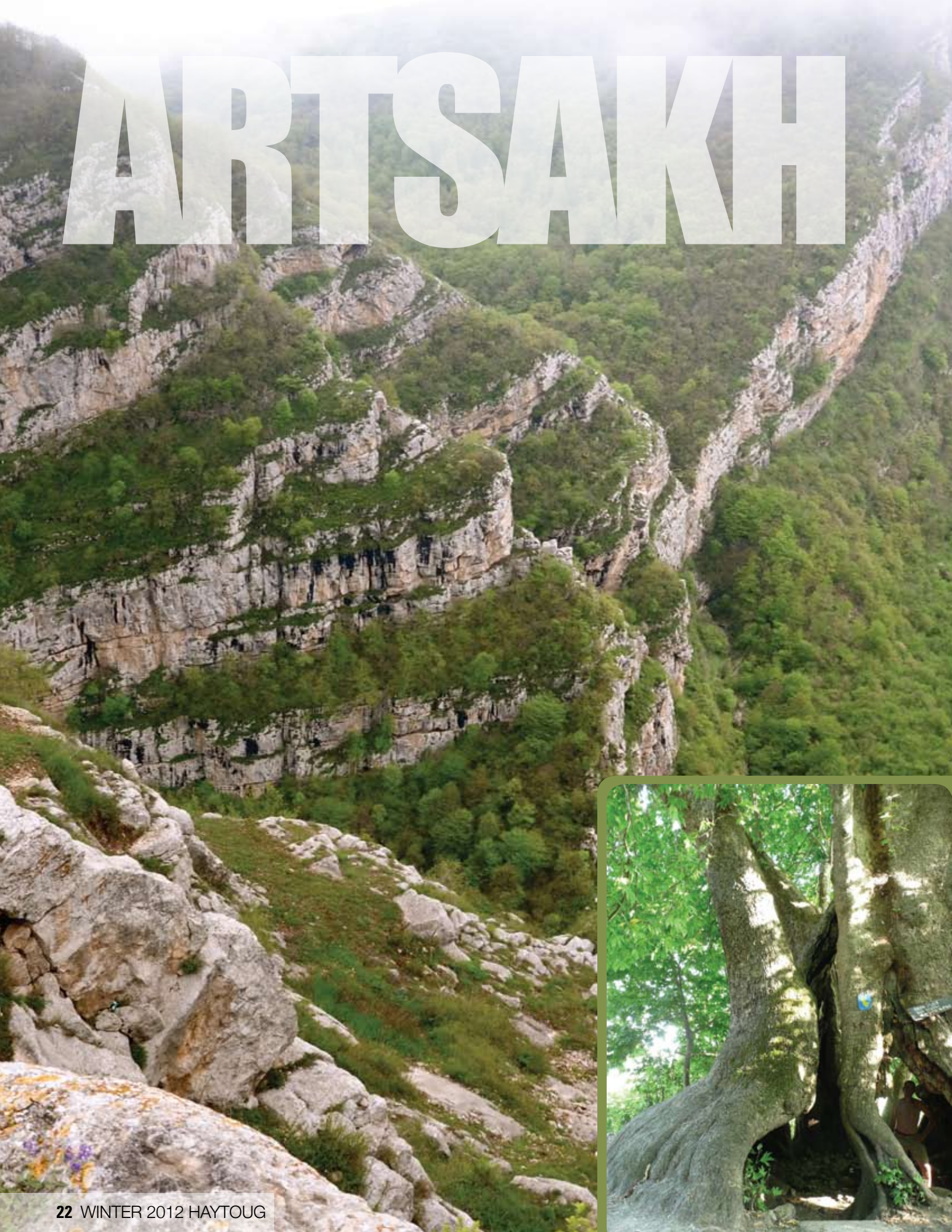
Lastiver Climb through caves with carvings pre-dating Christianity and chip a front tooth while jumping off a large waterfall. Lastiver is one of our favorite adventure spots. If you like nature and hiking and benches made of tree trunks, this spot is a must. Go ahead and build a fire, City Kid. Builds character.

Ani (from Armenia) The only site on our list that might frustrate you, the medieval city of Ani can only be seen from Armenia and not actually visited. But if you can't make it to Turkey to visit Ani properly, the trip to the border is definitely worth it. Ani headed straight to the border, charging through the weeds until they reached her hips, and only turned back when the soldiers at the Turkish base on the other side of the border spilled out in alarm. True story.

Haghpat, Sanahin & Berd Berd was a once thriving city and served as a hub when the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan was still open. The townspeople now find themselves on the frontline and remember the days when the villages on the other side of the border contained neighbors and friends. They have a unique perspective regarding the Kharabagh conflict, and are remarkably forgiving considering they were nearly bombed to proverbial smithereens. The monasteries at Haghpat and Sanahin were chosen as UNESCO sites, need we say more?



ARTSAKH



Jtrdooz (Shushi Gorge), Artsakh- The story is that in May of '92, over three nights (sleeping in caves during the day) something like 30 Armenian soldiers scaled the cliff to liberate Shushi. In the meantime, other forces came in from multiple directions. The result was that the Azeri forces thought they were surrounded by much larger forces than they actually were, and they retreated. The view from the cliff is extraordinary, and there's a waterfall. Everyone loves waterfalls.

Ganzasar Monestary

Artsakh- The legend is that the priest in Ganzasar held off the Azeri forces with two other priests for hours using the shotguns they keep under their vestments. We don't know if that's true, but when Ani went there for the first time, she felt the energy of the head priest before she saw him. To this day she maintains she felt some sort of force pass by her, and when she turned to look he was walking away, robes flapping in the wind, radiating some sort of awesome (in the true sense of the word. not as in, "nachos! awesome!"). Ganzasar takes an hour or so to get to from Stepanakert, but the ride is incredible and the setting is breathtaking. Keep a lookout for the mortar embedded in the side of the outer walls. And don't anger the priest; Lord knows what he's capable of.

The Shkhtorashen Tree

The 2000 year-old tree: by now, this tree must hate us. Beautiful, majestic, breathtaking, and "big enough to hold a party inside." (snap goes the camera) "Guys! Guys it says here this tree is big enough to have a party inside!" (snap) "Can you imagine having a party in a tree? Ha ha!" (snap snap) "Ohmigod guys you totally COULD have a party in here, will you take my picture with the tree?" (snap) This tree has probably MET Ghenkis Khan (who knows, maybe he said to his friend "Dude, sketch me in front of this tree!") and all people can talk about is whether or not they could fit a turntable in there. But guys, seriously, it's massive, and you could totally have a tea party inside if everyone stands up so they don't get muddy. Snap.





One of the most famous and intricate khatchcars in the world called, “Aseghnagorts” (“Needlework”) located at Goshavank in the province of Tavush in Armenia. Carved by khatchkar master Boghos in 1291.

KHATCHKARS

By Nareg Gourdkian

Erected adjacent to the entrance of newly established cities and churches, or to commemorate military victories, khatchkars (cross-stones) have traditionally signified genesis. Their detailed handwork characterizes many aspects of the establishment they represent. Though the contemporary use of khatchkars as gravestones have strayed from their original purpose, khatchkars have been an exclusive aspect of Armenian culture since the 9th century. The carvings reached their peak between the 12th and 14th centuries and have remained cultural icons since. Most notably located in the historic region Nakhichevan (currently occupied by Azerbaijan), khatchkars are common throughout the Armenian Nation.

Home to the world’s largest khatchkar cemetery, the city of Old Jugha in Nakhichevan, was the nerve center of khatchkar production and distribution. Since being arbitrarily placed under Azeri control, during the Soviet-era, the area’s native Armenians have been depopulated, leaving behind precious artifacts of what the city once was. In an effort to erase all traces of Armenian-ness, the Azeri government has implemented a campaign to destroy, remove, and pave over culturally significant sites. The destruction of khatchkars has brought condemnation from the European Union, UNESCO, as well as several other international organizations and diplomats. However, the occupation and demolition continues.

Upper Part

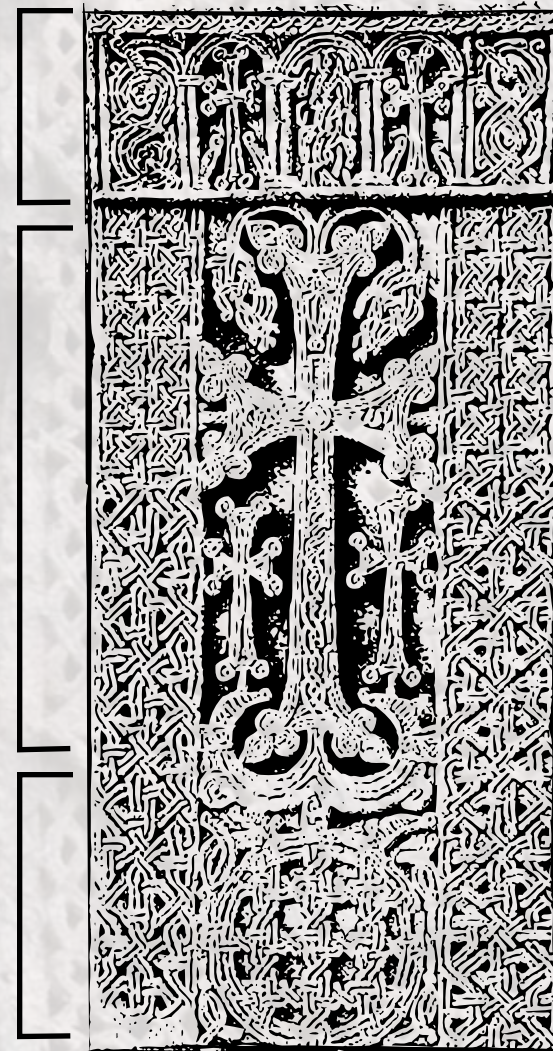
Heavenly figures are commonplace along the top portion of traditional khatchkars. This horizontal strip signifies paradise or the house of God where individuals attain salvation. Depictions of birds, angels, saints and Christ himself are prevalent along the commonly protruding heading of the khatchkar.

Center Part

No khatchkar is complete without a cross. Universally found in the center of the stone, the cross itself represents Jesus Christ, arms spread, crucified. This shows Christianity’s role as the holy mediator between the heavens above and the earth below. Therefore, the formation and alignment of the khatchkar as a whole suggests that Jesus is the link between eternal life and humanity.

Lower Part

Earthly decorations are customary alongside the large spherical (or triangular) emblem that is universal among khatchkars. This represents earth, the mortal home of mankind. Natural figures such as leaves are customary near the edge of the stone. These leaves symbolize the link the khatchkar as a whole shares with the natural world. It is said that the stone receives nutrients from the soil that it is erected upon because it is a part of the earth.



‘I want for Armenians what I want for Kurds’: An interview with Mayor Abdullah Demirbas

By Khatchig Mouradian

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey (A.W.)—Abdullah Demirbas is a man on a mission. The mayor of Diyarbakir’s central district strives to restore some of the city’s multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character through a series of initiatives to renovate places of worship, adopt multi-lingualism, and encourage those with roots in the city to return.

I sat down with Demirbas in his office in Diyarbakir on Oct. 23.

“For decades, we were told, ‘People [of different cultures] can’t live together, so we won’t tolerate difference, we will make them all the same,’” Demirbas laments. “Ours is an effort to restore what was lost during the state’s campaign to erase different identities, faiths, and cultures in the city.”

From the moment a visitor enters the city, signs of this multi-cultural approach manifest themselves, literally. Diyarbakir is the first city in Turkey to welcome its visitors with signs in Armenian.

“We could have done it in Turkish and Kurdish only. But these lands do not belong to the Turks and Kurds alone. They are also the lands of Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans,” the Kurdish mayor explains.

These signs are not just for visitors, but constitute an effort to change mindsets. “We want the people living in the city to realize that historically, Diyarbakir has always been a multi-cultural city,” he notes.

More than 100,000 Armenians lived in the Diyarbakir province in 1914. Although mostly peasants living in villages like Palu and Lice, the majority of the tradesmen in the province were also Armenian. In turn, Armenian craftsmen and artisans constituted a significant presence in the province.

The Armenian Genocide shattered this vibrant community. Diyarbakir witnessed one of the most violent and comprehensive campaigns of massacre in the Ottoman Empire, with most Armenians being killed outside the city walls. The Armenian wealth was confiscated by the authorities and local elites and, within a few years, the centuries-old Armenian presence in the province was erased.

Demirbas does not mince his words when talking about the Armenian Genocide. “Our grandparents, incited by others, committed wrongs. But we, their grandchildren, will not repeat them. Not only that, but we will also not allow others to repeat them,” he says. “We learned from the past. Those lessons inform our actions in the present, and will continue informing them in the future.”

The mayor insists that he does not believe in “dry apologies,” but actions that demonstrate genuineness and sincerity. He sees the renovation of Surp Giragos as one manifestation of this approach. “Today, we are not simple asking for forgiveness in a dry fashion,” he notes. “I am a Kurd. And I want for Armenians what I want for the Kurds.”



“What is your message to the Armenians who were uprooted from their ancestral lands?” I ask him. He changes his posture, looks at me straight in the eyes, and says, “Return! At least come and find your homes and your lands. If you can find your old houses, renovate them! Have a home here too. This is your motherland. Other lands cannot and will not be your motherland. Come to your lands. We want to correct the past wrong. This is our message!”

Demirbas has suffered dearly for his initiatives and for being an outspoken critic of the Turkish state. Twenty-three lawsuits have been filed against him, he says, asking for 232 years of imprisonment. “I am the only mayor in Turkey who was forced out of his post.

I was imprisoned for two years for my opinions and policies, but when I returned, I was re-elected with an even bigger margin,” he points out.

Diyarbakir, a predominantly Kurdish region, promises to become an oasis of multi-culturalism in a desert of denial and oppressive policies. The strategy of embracing all cultures—as opposed to struggling solely for Kurdish autonomy and rights—could serve as an example for other Kurdish-dominated municipalities in the southeast.

Demirbas’s efforts are not lost on the international community. The European Union and the U.S. have encouraged Diyarbakir’s initiatives and restoration efforts. The EU provided a grant to highlight the city’s historic and cultural heritage. The U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, U.S. consuls in Istanbul and Adana, and embassy staff attended the Oct. 23 mass in Surp Giragos. The consuls also attended the consecration of the church the day before. “Our multi-cultural approach is in line with theirs,” the mayor notes.

The Turkish state, on the other hand, is far behind, argues Demirbas. “There was no representative from the state today [in Surp Giragos]. But they will come. They will have to. And it all depends on our struggle,” he says. “I was thrown in prison, my 16-year-old son has joined the PKK and is on the mountains, and [the state] will harass me again, they will imprison me again, even something worse might happen to me, but I act based on my convictions. And one day they, too, will come.”

The preceding article originally appeared in The Armenian Weekly on November 05, 2011.

Visit www.ArmenianWeekly.com for further coverage of Khatchig Mouradian’s visit to Western Armenia.



Can Armenia's Economy Thrive on Services?

Rouben Krikourian

There is no shortage of recent success stories about national economies skipping the development of a large manufacturing sector and instead building a prosperous economy on a robust services industry alone. Countries like Ireland, Norway, and India have largely forgone manufacturing and instead focused their economies on services, the sector of the economy that includes things like finance, software development, design, IT, media, customer support, and other services that are increasingly becoming easier to trade in thanks to technology. The traditional view of an economy's services sector is a negative one; it is frequently accused of being unproductive and not valuable to an economy's international competitiveness. This may have been true in the recent past; services have traditionally been immobile and involved only in the domestic economy, contributing little to a country's exports. However, with the emergence of better communications technology the traditional barriers to exporting services have waned. India and Ireland have been able to capitalize on this opportunity and have built successful export economies based largely on services, attracting massive foreign investment and trade.

The traditional meat and potatoes of an economy has always been thought to be the manufacturing sector. Development economists still preach the tried-and-true methods of moving labor from agriculture to high-productivity manufacturing jobs. This is, undoubtedly,

how economies have developed in the past; see South Korea, Taiwan or China as recent examples.

But the outlook on manufacturing is not as rosy for Armenia. Sure, Armenia was a manufacturing powerhouse in the Soviet Union, but without the protection of the centrally planned economy, Armenia is in a whole new ball game. In the new economic climate that Armenia finds itself in - with no sea ports of its own, eastern and western blockades, and an underdeveloped infrastructure - the manufacturing industry faces many obstacles. Meanwhile, a potentially strong services sector has many opportunities to look toward, providing new hope, at least for the near future.

Since independence, Armenia's services sector has overtaken its manufacturing. And in the 2000's, the services sector has been the clear driving force behind Armenia's high economic growth rates. As a portion of GDP, Armenia's services sector holds 46 percent, while it employs 36 percent of the labor force. One needs only to cruise down an avenue in Yerevan (driving carefully of course) to see evidence of this: advertisements for VivaCell-MTS, Ameriabank, and other such service corporations litter the city.

There are a number of reasons why a services-oriented economy offers better prospects for Armenia. For one, services - which are largely based on telecommunications and which lack the need for physical transportation of goods - can bypass Armenia's troubles with infra-

structure and its lack of sufficiently accessible trade and transportation routes.

A services industry also circumvents the need for a low-wage, exploitable labor force that is necessary in most newly industrializing economies. Armenia does not possess, nor should it want such a labor force. Services jobs provide far better working conditions. The services industry is also a boon when it comes to opportunities for women. Services jobs are equally accessible, if not more accessible, to women as they are to men. Increased opportunities for women means not only greater social equality, but also increased incomes for households.

Lastly, services have far less impact on the environment. This is a very attractive offer to Armenia, which suffers its fair share of environmental degradation and problems arising from it.

Service-based is the industry that the global economy is shifting towards, with more room to grow than other industries and a plethora of new opportunities that well-prepared countries can seize. Considering that most of Armenia's current manufacturing sector consists of raw commodities exports and not much high-value production, equipping itself to reap the benefits of favorable services opportunities is the most sensible thing Armenia can do.

If Armenia were to embrace services it would have no lack of useful resources. Armenia has an enthusiastic diaspora, who are educated and possess skills and knowledge about the services industry that they can introduce to Armenia, not to mention the capital with which to start such business ventures. Armenia also has a capable workforce for the services, with decent education, good technical knowledge,

and plenty of artistic skills. The only thing missing from the Armenian labor force is an English-speaking workforce, a vital component to any service economy.

Of course, it might be grossly overoptimistic to hope that Armenia, with its scores of growth-inhibiting problems such as corruption and an oligopolistic economy, is actually prepared to take on this challenge. But there are a number of things the Armenian government can do to create a more competitive services sector. The most important task would be to invest more in education, especially in technical skills. An ideal decision also would be to replace Russian language learning courses in school with English.

The Armenian government should also invest in services infrastructure, further improving and upgrading telecommunications lines for example, encouraging more widespread Internet access and establishing helpful regulatory and oversight agencies.

Many of these needed investments into education and infrastructure have been undertaken by the private sector as business investments, as in the case of the massive telecom infrastructure overhaul that has been carried out recently almost exclusively by private companies. But the Armenian government should not rely on the benevolence of the private sector or non-governmental organizations; it should resolve to carry out these tasks on its own if it expects to guarantee its goals.

The most important thing that the Armenian government needs

to do, however, is to overcome its crippling system of oligopolies and to encourage vigorous competition. To stay competitive internationally, the government must allow the services market to operate freely, intervening not to provide favors for government-connected pals, but to encourage more competitiveness and to protect nascent enterprises. On the same token, the government must allow the services industry to compete with foreign firms and do business with them; only in this way can Armenia bolster the quality of its services exports. With help from government, an Armenian architecture firm or web develop-



Serj Tankian at the Tumo Center opening

ment company has the potential to be as large a company as some of its best-known European counterparts.

The recent opening of the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies in Yerevan provides hands on education in to youth in a state-of-the-art facility. This type of instruction in the fields of animation, gaming, web development and video will lead to a broadening of career opportunities for our new generation. The AYF, with its work in the Youth Corps program and through its donations of computers and books, among other efforts, can help towards this goal as well, supplementing the work needed to prepare for the future of Armenia's services industry.

BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE HOMELAND



AYFYOUTHCORPS.ORG

2012 YOUTH CORPS APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE



AYF Youth Corps is a six week summer program combining volunteer work with exciting sightseeing for a truly unforgettable experience. ALL Armenian youth 18-26 are encouraged to apply.