



This is Armenia

Lake Arpi is situated in the north-west of Armenia, in Amasia region. Shirak tours offers a flower and bird-watching tour guided by a local hunter, where tourists can spot the water lily, and other flowers and Dalmatian Pelican, Armenian Gull, and the Black Stork which is unique to that region.

Trchkan waterfall, situated in the Gokk reservoir near the border of Shirak and Lori regions, is only 33 km from Gyumri. Here there are also many different unique plants and birds. The place to start is Trchkan, and the road up to the falls passes through the Kakavas village, famous for its remains of a chapel and Karmravor church dating to the 7th century. Shirak Tours offers a day tour to the area, including lunch and an exploration of the cave behind the waterfall.

PHOTOS BY SHIRAK TOURS

Thanks to the Armenian Monuments Awareness Project, a preservation and education initiative sponsored by USAID, Vivacell, and the Honorary Consulate of Italy, hikers can enjoy spectacular views of Ararat and rare endemic flowers on a self-guided 3.3 km hike through this wildflower reserve, starting at Amberd castle and winding down a trail that follows the ancient passage into the Ararat Valley (to the edge of Byurakan). A sign on the way to the castle and one on the castle grounds identify rare flowers, history and other points of interest in five languages.

PHOTO BY AMAP

Mount Aragats is a dormant volcano, one of the largest craters in the world formed as a result of an eruption caused by a great explosion 12 million years ago. Four summits surround the crater like mighty guards – the highest is the Northern Summit (4,095 meters). The crater, as well as the whole volcanic highland of Mount Aragats, are of great interest to geologists. The frozen lava layers, the preserved ice-age formations in the crater, and the composition of emissions have created a geological open-air museum.

The abundance of water contributed to the emergence of rich vegetation with a great number of endemic species. The vividly expressed irregular landscape, the wide range of relative altitudes and the mountainous climate zone enable tourists to see nature in bloom in early spring, and summer on Mount Aragats in the same day. Over 200 species of birds can be seen here and bird-watching is good from March until the mountain is covered with a thick layer of snow in October. Contact the AUA Acopian Center for the Environment (51.25.18) for specialized bird-watching tours with ornithologists. The other tour companies listed (right) can also organize a tour to the crater.

PHOTOS BY AVARAYR TOURS

The Armash fish farm is in the Ararat Valley, at the foot of Mount Ararat, and is a system of ponds walled by reeds. It's also an excellent place to watch migrating birds. The abundance of food, the many places suitable for laying eggs, the open reservoirs and the marshy segments attract a great number of water and other birds that prefer to settle next to ponds. During seasonal migration many species of birds pass by here.

Bird watchers can spot the flamingo, the black stork, the pelican, the cormorant, the grey albatross, and the crane, among others. Contact the AUA Acopian Center for the Environment (51.25.18) for a guided tour with an ornithologist.

PHOTOS BY AUA ACOPIAN CENTER

Hiking and bicycling tours are offered in the Semyonovka Mountain Pass northwest of Sevan in the Tavush region. Also in the area the Dilijan Reserve offers flora and fauna representative of all the Transcaucasus region.

PHOTOS BY AVARAYR TOURS

A beautiful view opens to the gem of the Armenian Highland – Lake Sevan – from Selim mountain pass. Being of unique volcanic origin, Lake Sevan is fed from 28 mountain rivers, flowing on the slopes of the surrounding mountain ranges. Lake Sevan is one of the key factors affecting the Armenian highland climate, contributing to many unique species of flora and fauna here. Particularly, the lake is home for the trout and the brook trout, the Baltic whitefish from the salmon family, the minnow, the carp, and the crucian carp from the minnow family. An endemic species of gull – the Armenian Gull that cannot be seen anywhere else in the world also lives in Lake Sevan. It is of special interest to visit the Gull Island which is the spot where the Armenian Gull lays eggs. Contact the AUA Acopian Center for the Environment (51.25.18) to arrange tours with an ornithologist. Biking, hiking, and overnight camping tours are offered by the tour companies listed at right.

It is also interesting to visit Lake Gill which is now a drained marsh and a resting station for migrating birds. The Geghama and Vardenis mountain ranges can truly be called a volcanic world with their more than 600 large and small craters that are located in this expansive highland. There are extraordinarily beautiful lakes in many craters. Contact the AUA Acopian Center for the Environment (51.25.18) to arrange tours with an ornithologist.

PHOTO BY AVARAYR TOURS

The spot where the Vardenis and Geghama mountain ranges meet overlooks a unique diversity of alpine vegetation and flowers. Here, plant lovers can find a variety of flora and fauna. Spring here comes in June, when it is already hot summer in the lowlands. A hike in the cool and fresh mountainous zones are a relief from the lowland heat. All companies (right) offer hiking, biking or camping tours.

PHOTOS BY AVARAYR TOURS

Metaphorically, Syunik could be considered the lungs of Armenia, as it contains the largest forests producing oxygen. Forest hikes, accompanied by the songs of birds and the flutter of butterflies, overnight stays in tents and hiking tours make this region one of the most attractive areas for ecotourism in the country. All companies (right) offer hiking, biking or camping tours.

PHOTOS BY AVARAYR TOURS

LEGEND

Mountain tour	Walking tour
Bird watching tour	Fish farming tour
Botanical tour	Animal watching tour
Horse riding tour	Lake Sevan Yacht tour
Bicycle tour	Communities
Start/End of tours	



Some Eco-Tour Company suggestions

The following companies offer a range of activity tours to all regions

Avarayr Tours
 Street address: Byuzandi 1, Yerevan, 0070, Armenia
 Tel: (374 10 52 40 42)
 e-mail: avarayr@aminco.com
 Contact person: Arkadi Sahakyan
www.avarayr.am

Erkir Nairi Travel Company
 Street address: 1 Tamanyan, 0009, Yerevan, Armenia
 Tel: (+374 10) 58 23 39
 Fax: (+374 10) 58 61 18
 e-mail: info@erkirnairi.am; www.erkirnairi.am
 Contact person: Ashot Levonyan

Set Tourism Agency
 Street address: 5 Aygestan Street, Fizkulturmikneri 48
 Tel: (+374 10) 55 21 81
 e-mail: info@set.am; www.set.am
 Contact person: Satenik Sargsyan

This company specializes in Shirak region tours

Shirak Tours
 Street address: 25 HaghTanaki Blvd., 3104 Gyumri, Armenia
 Tel: (374 312) 5 76 59
 Fax: (374 312) 5 03 86
 e-mail: terminasyan@berlinhotel-gyumri.am
 Contact person: Alexan Ter-Minasyan

This organization offers bird-watching tours guided by professional ornithologists

**American University of Armenia
 Acopian Center For The Environment**
 Street address: AUA, 40 Baghramian Ave, Yerevan, 0019, Armenia
 Tel: (374 10) 51.25.18
 e-mail: karen@aua.am; www.aua.am/ace
 Contact person: Karen Aghababayan

*map created by
 Petya and Vahan
 at Light Design/Am*

TIPS ON FINDING A LEGITIMATE ECO-TOUR COMPANY

The list of eco-tour operators on Page 5 is not exhaustive - there are many other eco-tour companies in Armenia. But buyer beware: Not all companies offer eco-tours that are sensitive both to local culture and the environment. Use the following criteria to evaluate whether your chosen company is doing more good, or more harm.

Does your tour:

- ✓ Minimize impact of visitors to an environmentally sensitive location?
- ✓ Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect?
- ✓ Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts?
- ✓ Provide direct financial benefits for conservation?
- ✓ Offer financial investment into the local economy; e.g. Does the company employ locals in their business? Do locals benefit from the tour? How much money goes into the local economy where the tours are being conducted?
- ✓ Raise sensitivity to the host country's political, environmental, and social climate?

Standards from the International Ecotourism Society, at www.ecotourism.org