



TATON

TALES FROM THE BLACK SEA SILK ROAD

Spring-Summer 2015

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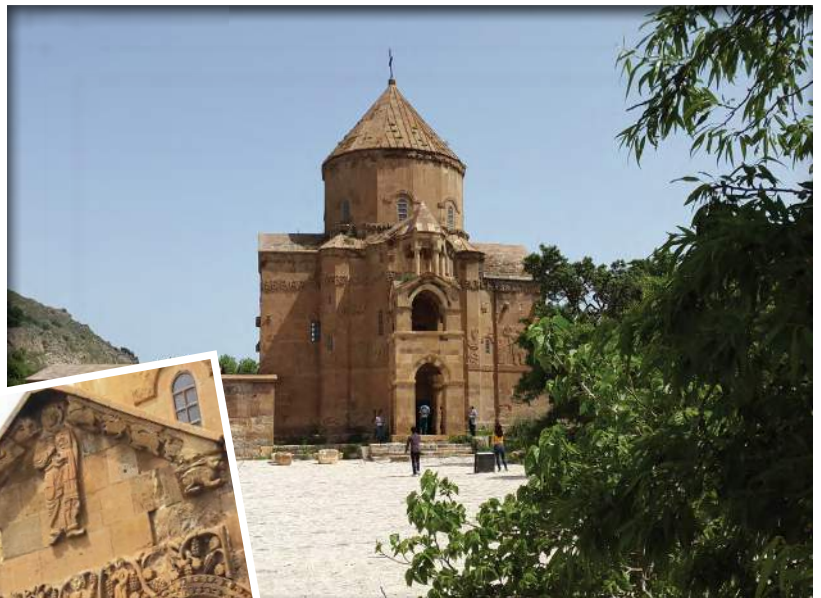
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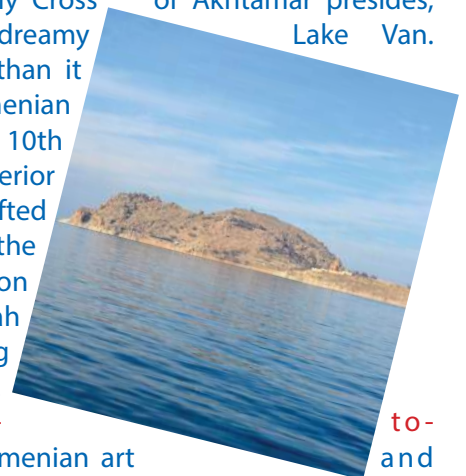
USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

TATON is supported by the United States Agency for International Development (**USAID**) - funded **BRIDGES** project. It is created to enhance cross border economic development through tourism.



AKHTAMAR

The Church of the Holy Cross of Akhtamar presides, solitary, on an islet of dreamy Lake Van. Small—in fact, taller than it is wide, like all Armenian churches—it was built in the 10th century by King Gagik I, its exterior walls ringed by cunningly-crafted reliefs depicting scenes from the Bible: Abraham strapping his son Isaac to the sacrificial altar, Jonah and the whale, Goliath, looking more like a gingerbread man than a giant. The not-be-missed crown jewel of Armenian art architecture, evoking the genius and faith of people who once worshipped there.



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AMAP
www.amap.am / www.amapngo.us

EKONOMİSTLER
P L A T F O R M U

From the Desks of the Partners...



Spring stayed late this year. The mountain mists continue to roll into the valleys and meadows, laden with thick patches of grass and carpets of wildflowers. Fruit trees everywhere are bursting with blooms, dropping their petals slowly, rather than rushing to the fecundity we normally find each year. The joke here is that spring is short, beginning on Monday at 14:30, and lasting until noon on Friday. Then, hot, summer, southern Asiatic winds blast us and the natural palette of emerald green fades into hues of amber, reds and browns. This whole region is a quilt of colors; not just of its flora and fauna, ripe for photo safaris and exhilarating treks into stunning natural landscapes. Did you know that this cross-border region hosts more than half of the bird species in the Anatolia & Caucasus regions, and a third of its fauna? Here, we boast of a patchwork of cultures, of once teeming tribes forged into nations that still overlap with their peoples. If home is where the heart is, then my heart is pumping wildly for the extraordinary cross-border region we feature in

the Bridges project. Enjoy the articles, interesting facts and destinations in these pages, and if you haven't already, contact one of our **TATON** members for a weekend getaway, a week's worth of thrills, or a little more in-depth exploration. We offer the flavor of adventure!

Richard Ney
President and Chief of Party
AMAP Human Development NGO



Why do we all like summer? We can list our many reasons, some will be similar, some different. I think one reason we all love summer is that many of us begin making plans for a much-deserved vacation after a tough and busy year of hard work. Based on our statistics, most holiday planners prefer going seaside, swimming, tanning and enjoying great weather. This year, I want to add something to this plan. Why not go someplace where we can enjoy culture, history, food & wine, as well as the sun & the sea? Oh sorry, that was a mistake. I should have phrased my question like this: Why not visit & enjoy three countries, during the same vacation, while also enjoying culture, history, the sun & the sea? I can already hear your question: Is there a region where this is possible? The answer is Yes! Yes, there is a

region where you can visit three countries, even if your time is limited. Yes, you can enjoy the sun & the sea in the same region. Yes, you can enjoy great food as well as thousands years of culture & history. Now you're probably wondering how and where to do this. All you need to do is contact a **TATON** member and ask them to arrange a tour for you covering Armenia, Georgia & Turkey. Don't worry that I noted 3 countries. They are close, complementary and awesome. By the way, if you take my advice, don't forget – you owe me one! The payback is really easy: Let us know what you felt and experienced during your trip. All in all, a great deal for a great holiday.

Oğuz Demir
Chairman
Ekonomistler Platformu

Discovering Anatolia

Between May 22—31, AMAP's Bridges team members journeyed from Yerevan, Armenia, through Georgia, and throughout parts of eastern Anatolia engaging in an experience of true treasure hunting... Some of the treasures we discovered are focused in our Highlights sections on pages 4-7.

The journey, which at some places left us feeling like we were in a wonderland and which was full of memorable and emotional moments, was a wonderful opportunity to see what this



amazing region has to offer to a traveler. The adventure started right

from crossing the borders and continued with every new site we visited, every new person we met, every new thing we tried and every new dish we

tasted. A trip to Akhtamar monastery by ferry, meeting Mehmet Kusman one of 32 people in the whole world reading Urartian cuneiforms, talking to the ruins of the lost city of Ani, once known as the "One thousand and one churches" were only a few of the experiences we had on the route. When



starting the trip we had an aim to experience as much as we can and by the end of the trip we were sorry we could not continue. Later this summer, our team will visit Cappadocia, Gaziantep, Urfa, Mardin and other exciting sites in Turkey which we will feature in our next newsletter.



TATON: Turkish & Armenian Tour Operators Network

Imagine! Joining forces to create cross-border tour products for international & local tourists. That's what Armenian & Turkish **TATON** members are doing to increase cross-border tourist packages for Armenia, Georgia & eastern Turkey. When you see this logo, know that the tour operator displaying it will provide you a unique, multi-cultural, & unforgettable cross-border travel experience!



Membership & Communication

TATON's 40+ members are ready to make your travel experience a once-in-a-lifetime experience. If you are interested in joining **TATON** or further information, email taton.travel@gmail.com. For travel information, contact **TATON** members here.

Benefits

- * Free Membership
- * Meet new partners
- * Experiential Tourism Products
- * Online Meeting Space
- * Meetings with partners
- * Workshops & seminars
- * Targeted Social Media Advertising
- * Web Magazine
- * Familiarization (Fam.) & Discovery Tours
- * Special Events, & more

WELCOME SUSAN SPANO!

Please join us in welcoming Susan Spano to our Bridges team!

As the original, intrepid Frugal Traveler for the New York Times and a popular columnist for the Los Angeles Times, travel writer Susan Spano has entertained millions of readers with tales of her escapades around the world. She currently lives in Ashtarak, Armenia, where she serves with the U.S. Peace Corps as a middle school English teacher. During the school's summer vacation, Susan will be volunteering with Bridges, sharing her expertise & experience as we document for & share with you many of the exciting treasures in this region.



Exploring the Region in Spring

Springtime in Istanbul

In April, AMAP President Richard Ney traveled to Istanbul to meet with AMAP partner Ekonomistler Platformu (EkP), and key people in Turkey's tourism industry. During the successful visit, Ney met with tour operators in the Bridges project region, including Geographic Travel, one of the first tour operators to take adventure tourists up Mt. Ararat. They immediately joined TATON & offered to help promote the network.

Ney and the General Secretary of TURSAB (Association of Turkish Travel Agents), with a 5,000+ membership, discussed strategic cross-border benefits in developing closer ties between tour operators, & promised to strengthen contacts as they continue parallel efforts to promote the region. to the TURSAB president) the largest tour operators news. They spearheaded the new, online platform for local agents worldwide to book by browsing the platform & This is not news to tourists websites. But for travel agents, have always been done. With directly book guaranteed For TATON, this is great news. Armenian tour operators to tours. To promote online & around the world is promising regional tourism. AMAP to present the platform & providers wishing to take tool.

The Turkish-Armenian Council, promoting between Armenia & Turkey, the project & promised to & EkP discussed ways to

Bridges, & create a strong TATON, an ultimate goal of the project. Meetings with agents, promoters and officials showed that cross-border tourism cooperation is a priority for all.



Eurasia Travel (also adviser and MediTravel, two of in Turkey, shared exciting development of an entirely travel operators, allowing ready-made tours, simply clicking on desired packages. browsing some travel this shakes up the way things this new platform, agents can tours online & immediately. MediTravel is actively seeking join the platform & offer group receive bookings from agents for the development of invited MediTravel to Armenia connect with Armenian tour advantage of this innovative

Business Development economic development resoundingly supported promote the project. Ney strengthen cooperation in

Springtime in Syunik

MAP-Bridges took its first Experiential Tourism Field Trip in Armenia, May 5-8, exploring the sweetness of Syunik, that magnificent stretch of southern Armenia. For authentic experiences, it is hard to beat those offered in this mountainous region with towering rock precipices erupting from placid green valleys and stunning nature preserves. Many visitors miss this area, and so, they miss a piece of Armenian heaven. There are too many experiences to list all in this short article. But, consider these:

Make Armenian, fruit-based moonshine & taste 50-65%- proof spirits made from figs, mulberries, quince & more in Meghri. Do designate a driver.



Visit Armenia's only standing aqueduct dating from Roman times. You just might find an ancient pagan shrine.

- * Go horseback riding & hiking in the Shikahogh Forest with its 1,500-year-old plane trees towering over your trail, shading you from the hot Syunik sun.
- * Spin wool into yarn. Dye it naturally for your own knitting.
- * Get your hands dirty as you throw clay & create ceramics.
- * Learn traditional Armenian cooking, dancing, singing & playing music.
- * Hand-churn milk into butter for your own dinner table.
- * Taste decadent cheeses from a master village cheese-maker.
- * Hand-pick asparagus & mushrooms from roadside stands manned by colorful farmers, then prepare a sumptuous feast of natural foods.

And, if all that is not enough, simply wander & explore the roads & trails of this glorious paradise.

ARMENIA: HIGHLIGHTS

Armenia's ancient culture has so many secrets to share. There is something for everyone to discover and enjoy here: music & dance...ancient churches & museums...cafés & festivals...birds & wildlife...camping & hiking...and much more!

Zorats Karer (Karahundj)



Karahundj (also spelled "Carahunge", and also known as Zorats Karer or Zorats Kar) is a megalithic composition of Bronze Age tombs (cists, dolmens or tumuli) and over 220 standing stones (menhirs). The two intertwined features (cist graves and standing stones) are the focus of debate in Armenia. Archeologists and astronomers do not agree on the dating or purpose of the standing stones, but do note their similarity to menhirs and stone circles found in other parts of Eurasia; in Iceland, Ireland, Scotland (Callinish), France's Languedoc region (Carnac) to the eastern Mediterranean, and, perhaps most famous, the stone circles found at Avesbury, England (Stonehenge).

Vardenyats (Selim) Caravanserai

If you drive south along Lake Sevan and over the Selim Pass (now unpopularly known as Vardenyats Mountain Pass), the first site you will come upon is the early 14th c Selim Caravanserai. The winding mountain road and hairpin turns provide breathtaking views of the surrounding steep rocky hill sides and lead to the highland steppe just beyond the pass.

This is the best preserved caravanserai in Armenia and a great example of secular Armenian architecture during the Middle Ages. Constructed of basalt blocks, a central hall with narrow side aisles housed animals while traders slept in a separate room on one side of the caravanserai.



Shikahogh Preserve



This preserve is located in the north-east of the Armenian highland, occupying the south-eastern edge of the Lesser Caucasus. The network of mountain ranges and spurs creates vast diversity of natural conditions, each gorge remarkable for its own microclimate.

Overall, Shikahogh is notable for its warm and mild climate. The high Zangezur mountain range traps humid air stream generated by the Caspian Sea, while Meghri mountain range, along with some others, blocks hot air masses from Iranian deserts.

TURKEY: HIGHLIGHTS

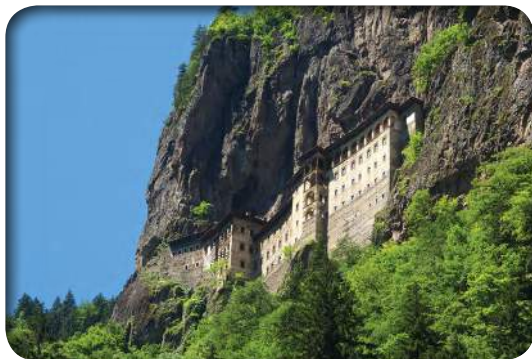
Turkey welcomes millions of visitors annually, making it a top tourist destination in the world. However, not many visit Eastern Anatolia, making it one of the world's hidden treasures. Come, discover its ancient monuments & churches, experience the diverse culture, history & more.

The Old City of ANI

Some 40 kilometers east of the town of Kars, the ruins of old Ani dominate a deep gorge along the Araks River, with turf-covered hills as far as the eye can see, ice-capped peaks on the horizon and Armenia just across the border. It's a magical spot for lovers of things past, in this case a fabled city ruled in the early Middle Ages by the Bagratuni, one of the last great Armenian dynasties. At a time when the Norman French were just thinking about invading England, Ani had a population of almost 100,000, as well as some of the most sophisticated art and architecture in the world. Now its largely unexcavated ruins offer travelers who love to wander way off the beaten track enchantment and mystification in equal measure.



Sumela Monastery



Situated almost above the clouds, Sumela monastery is magnificently mysterious. With its alpine setting, surrounded by evergreen forests filled with natural music of mountain streams, Sumela is definitely a place to dream of. The monastery was built on the western slope of Altindere Valley of Trabzon, Turkey in the 4th century A.D at a height of 1300 meters. Sumela, dedicated to Virgin Mary, was very influential in the spread of Christianity around the region and is told to take its name from the word "Melá" meaning "black".

Going to Istanbul?

Wondering what to do in Istanbul? Take a boat tour of the Bosphorus...Climb the Galata Tower...Walk up & down Istikal Caddesi & discover an amazing mix of the old & the modern...Explore Topkapi Palace...Wander through the cobble-stoned streets of Sultanahmet (Istanbul's Old Town quarter)...Bargain for beautiful treasures in the Grand Bazaar...Shop at the Spice Bazaar in anticipation of your next homemade meal...Visit Hagia Sophia & the Blue Mosque...Enjoy afternoon tea at the Pera Palace Hotel, made famous as the hotel where travelers on the Orient Express stayed...After a long day of exploring, be adventurous and treat yourself to a traditional Turkish bath...



Crossing Borders: What to Expect ?

Flying is a quick & easy way to travel, but you miss so much. Consider driving between Armenia, Georgia & Turkey, for an experience you will never forget. But, what about crossing borders? What do you need to know? Here are a few of our tips for travelers.

VISAS: Plan ahead to ensure you have time to prepare all documents & visas required. You may require a visa to enter Armenia, Georgia or Turkey. While Consular offices still issue visas, online visas are simpler & faster to obtain, and may be obtained for most travelers to Armenia, Georgia & Turkey. Consider a multi-entry visa if you travel frequently. Costs will vary depending on your citizenship & visa type. Once payment is made, & visa is issued, print & place in your passport. Visas for Armenia & Georgia, (but not Turkey) may be obtained at land border crossings. This will require extra time and will probably cost more than an online visa. Be sure to have the correct amount of local currency on hand or you will be denied a visa.

WHERE: Armenia-Georgia cross-

ings are at: Bavra (Armenia)-Ninotsminda (Georgia), and Sadakhlo (Georgia)-Bagratashen (Armenia). Georgia-Turkey crossings are at: Sarpi (Georgia)-Sarp (Turkey), and Vale (Georgia)-Türkgözü (Posof, Turkey).

WHEN TO CROSS: Armenia-Georgia borders are open daily for 24 hours & Georgia-Turkey border are open daily: Sarpi-Sarp: 24 hours, Vale-Posof: 9am-8pm. Long lines do form, so be prepared for a wait that might last several hours. Bring along music or books to keep you occupied. Not all border crossings have food & beverages available. Restrooms are available (some free, some for-pay.)

AT THE BORDER: When you reach the border crossing, border

control guards will approach your vehicle. Present the passports, with visas, of all passengers. You may be asked to step out of the vehicle while guards check for contraband & prohibited items.

NOTE:

At print-time, vehicles with Armenian license plates are prohibited from entering Kars, Turkey. If traveling from Armenia, it is advised to hire a Georgian or Turkish driver. Contact a **TATON** member

Afternoon Flights Between Yerevan & Istanbul

Wednesdays & Sundays:
Istanbul-Yerevan 10:45
Yerevan-Istanbul: 15:10

In Yerevan, contact Bagrat Tour: (+374 10 52 03 03 / bagratour1@hotmail.com / www.bagratour.am

Or, contact a **TATON** member for more information.



Free & Fun BSSRC APP

Virtually explore four exotic lands along the Black Sea Silk Road trail including: Armenia, Georgia, Turkey & Greece—over 3,000 km of hospitality & wonder!

- * Free & easy-to-navigate for experienced & novice users alike.
- * Explore professionally-detailed tours & cultural themes.
- * Use embedded Google Maps to plan your route while on-the-go. All sites use GPS technology.
- * Find location & contact information for over 500 hotels, B&Bs, restaurants & cafés, as well as 300 significant historical, nature & cultural sites.
- * Discover family-owned B&Bs, cafés & souvenir shops for truly unique holiday experiences.
- * Connect with local guides who know the sites best.
- * Easily find nearby historical and cultural sites, complete with professional descriptions.
- * Read descriptions & reviews by other visitors before you visit.
- * Use social media to rate your experiences & share your travel photos. Available for smartphones & tablets. Go to Google play or iTunes. Search for Black Sea Silk Road.



TATON on Social Media

We love hearing from our Facebook friends! Here are comments from two of our friends. Share your thoughts with us. We'd love to highlight you, too.

AMAP :-)), I like these series of postings! Keep on going please and thank you!!!

*--Anahit, Armenia
April, 2015*

I just got back from my first trip to Armenia, and took a whirlwind tour of monasteries and museums all over the country. The AMAP signage was great. Not only was it everywhere with great information about the history and importance of the sites, but they also helped give geographic and historical context to things. Even with a tour guide, I read all the AMAP signs because they had a great way of curating the historical, cultural, geographic, and natural aspects of the Silk Road in Armenia. Thank you for giving me lots of things to look up and read about now that I'm back in Minnesota.

*--Peter, USA
May, 2015*

Facebook

Did you know that our Facebook fans are all over the world? Our friends are following us in 41 countries, spanning six continents! At this printing, the top countries are:

- Armenia / Շատ շնորհակալ եմք
- Spain / Muchas gracias!
- Italy / Grazie mille!
- USA / Thank you very much!
- Russia / Большое спасибо!



Crossing Borders...Creating Solutions

Let's Connect! We want to stay in contact with you via Social Media. We hope you do too. We want you to discover the exciting and interesting experiences in this virtually untapped, beautiful region. Our hope is that more people will learn about this area, & visit us here. Join us via your favorite social media platform & let us know what you think!



Watch AMAP's

AMAP / Black Sea Silk Road Corridor introductory video



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