

ARMENIA



Armenia is poised to become adventure travel's next big thing, with incredible skylines dominated by 3,000m+ peaks and mountain-top monasteries. Get there first to trek Armenia and to conquer the challenging ridges and summits in the country's fable-drenched lesser Caucasus mountains.

Aim

The aim of this epic trek in Armenia is to venture out into the lesser Caucasus mountains range to summit multiple peaks rising above 3000+ metres before descending to the breath-taking Vorotan River Gorge and Tatev Monastery.

Meet Armenia's best mountain guides

Secret Compass works with Armenia's best mountain guides to bring you a pioneering route, as trekking is not generally 'done' in this region in this manner – most trek groups stick to the more quickly accessed northerly national parks. These remote mountains (and their endless skies and sunsets viewed from wild camping spots) will be yours alone. The terrain varies from verdant leafy forests to arid peaks and valley floors to seas of peaks stretching off in the direction of Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Highlights

- Trek Armenia in 2018.
- Trek in one of the earliest Christian civilisations.
- Visit Tatev Monastery, dating back 2,000 years.
- Be among the first to trek southern Armenia's high peaks.
- Pass old Soviet infrastructure – the remains of Armenia's turbulent past.
- Feast on local delicacies like churchkhela and lavash bread.
- Explore the Caucasus mountains as featured in Levison Wood's 'Crossing the Wild Frontier'.

Why Go

Mount Khustup

Mount Khustup is the one of the resting places of the Armenian national hero Garegin Nzhdeh (1886-1955). He was involved in national liberation struggles and revolutionary activities during the First Balkan War and World War I. Nzhdeh played a crucial role in the formation of the Armenian statehood and his request to be 'buried on the slopes of Mount Khustup' was partly fulfilled with his right hand being buried near the Kozni fountain. The team will make a basecamp near his memorial in readiness for the summit push on Mount Khustup. These ranges hold huge historical significance in preserving Armenian identity, and their inhospitable nature has provided a haven for retreating Armenians over the centuries as they have fled from various waves of suppression. For those keen on looking up some pre-trip reading, these mountains drip with fables, myths and legends.

Pioneering adventure travel

Imagine taking a large sheet of paper. Crush it into the tiniest ball then lay it flat again, a mass of close-wrought lines and wrinkles. That is the topographical reality of southern Armenia. To tackle this region, Secret Compass works with expert guidance from the president of the Armenian Alpine Club; an experienced climber and skier who's been guiding here for years.

"I like the way Secret Compass is trying to capture the spirit of this region, attempting this ambitious, adventurous trek in a self-supported way," he says. "It will allow the team to experience Armenia's natural environment undistracted. Their expedition has pioneered trekking in this manner in our country's southern Caucasus."

Geography, politics and religion

Armenia has suffered invasions from four directions and has consequently oscillated between Byzantine, Persian, Mongol, Turkish and Soviet control, as well as periods of independence. Even today, the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and between Armenia and Turkey, remain closed due to ongoing disputes. Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as its state religion and features hundreds of churches and monasteries that are often located on the tops of hills, built into the rock. Tatev has played a significant role in the history of the region and has been the centre of economic, political, spiritual and cultural activity for centuries.

Experience Yerevan

European-like Yerevan is one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities (782 BC). As the Telegraph says, 'Some 30 years before Rome was founded, the city was an important stop along the caravan routes from Asia to Europe. It was invaded by Assyrians, Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Seljuks, Mongols and Turks, and later by the Soviet Red Army in 1920. Yerevan is a great place for a pre- or post-expedition break with fascinating cultural and historic attractions to visit. It also has a vast range of restaurants representing the food heritage of the many peoples who've passed through over the centuries. As a Christian country, the dress code is positively relaxed and western.

The Plan

Secret Compass runs expeditions with framework itineraries, rather than guided tours with set daily plans. Read more about [Our Approach here](#). A fuller itinerary will be provided in the Armenia Expedition Handbook which is available on request or upon application to join the team.

Teammates arrive

All teammates fly into Yerevan. Most international flights land in the early hours, and those on other flights will need to return to the airport for the expedition's official start. Met by your Secret Compass leader, the team will then take

a private bus transfer straight down to the southerly town of Kapan. The official expedition introduction, briefing and welcome meal will take place in a hotel in Kapan. The next day, kit sorted, it's a short drive to Meghri to begin the trek proper.

On expedition

For the next five nights, it's you and the epic, deserted mountains. You'll be carrying your personal kit for the day with up to four litres of water. The rest of the equipment will travel in the 4WD support vehicle. (The vehicle is purely to refresh team water supplies and fresh lunches every night and won't be seen from morning until night). It's tough, it's steep, it can be very hot. Dress to keep cool in the heat, with layers at the ready for the higher or more exposed ridges.

There'll be stops for fresh lunches every day, with rehydrated meals the order of the day at breakfasts and dinners due to the lack of opportunity in this sparsely populated region to reliably buy food en route. At night, suitable wild camping spots will be located, generally with incredible views with mountains rippling to the horizon. Teammates will each have a one-person tent and should prepare for colder than expected nights. Ice on the water bottles before breakfast is not unheard of, don't be fooled by daytime temperatures. Believe the kit list and come prepared.

Providing a pure sense of escapism, the vast landscape lies untouched by tourism and inhabited only by the occasional shepherd watching his herd. There will be summit attempts of 3000m+ peaks tackled en route and, depending on team speed, neighbouring peaks might also be incorporated into this flexible expedition framework

Goal achieved

Mountains climbed, you can now look forward to cold drinks and ice cream in Tatev village. Visit the monastery and surrounds and enjoy a delicious meal in a hospitable local guesthouse. Fruit will be laid out and drying in piles wherever you look. On the expedition's penultimate day, the team will rejoin the private minibus to retrace its hairpin-bend filled journey back up to Yerevan. There will be a few hours to explore Yerevan plus a celebratory meal in a downtown restaurant, with a night spent in a comfortable hotel. The expedition officially ends after breakfast, with teammates welcome to leave on flights departing at any time on this day (including early morning flights). With everyone on different flights, it is teammates' responsibility to organise their return transfer or taxi to the airport.

Fitness

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. Team members should be willing to be part of a team working together to achieve the goal of the expedition. The biggest challenge on this expedition will be the unrelenting ridgelines and peaks and the hot climate. Applicants will receive a Handbook with further expedition information. View Secret Compass's suggested [Training Plan](#) and get in touch with any fitness, health, training or kit questions that remain. Teammates who arrive without meeting the agreed minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves and the expedition's goal so do take training seriously, prepare as appropriate and arrive fit and ready to go. Teammates must be comfortable with the following.

Minimum fitness requirements

- Trek: up to 25km per day.
- Carry: up to 10kg per person.
- Terrain: steep, challenging and occasionally exposed terrain with daily ascents and descents of up to 2000 m and at heights reaching 3,500m.

- Climate: hot and humid conditions up to 35°C during the day, far colder at altitude.
- Age: 21+

Included

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- Secret Compass leader.
- Specialist local guides.
- Tented accommodation throughout.
- 4x4 vehicle support.
- All food (snacks and meals) and soft drinks.
- Internal transport as outlined in itinerary.
- Any local permits and permissions required.

Not included

- International flights/ travel to and from Yerevan.
- Airport transfers.
- Travel insurance (obligatory).
- Visas where relevant.
- Tips to local guides (discretionary).
- Alcohol unless provided by hosts with meals.
- Personal equipment (full kit list in the Handbook).

Exped FAQ

On application to join this epic expedition to Armenia, potential teammates will receive a detailed Expedition Handbook. Here are some expedition-specific questions and our [general FAQ](#) will answer many other questions. Get in touch if your question remains unanswered.

Do women need to cover?

Armenia is a Christian country. This means that Western dress is fine across the board (including shorts and vest tops) and hair need not be covered.

Can I charge all my electricals?

This will be very challenging with no access to power once the trekking section begins. Please ensure that you are self-sufficient in terms of charging your appliances by bringing things like spare batteries, lightweight solar panels or power packs to avoid frustration. There is one support vehicle with one lighter socket which is a priority of any Secret Compass devices but this might be able to be used on a very limited basis.

I'm a vegetarian. Can I join?

Teammates with dietary requirements are welcome to apply for this expedition. Vegetarian ration packs can be used for the trekking phase and albeit limited vegetarian options are available in guesthouses. Vegetarians might want to consider bringing their own protein source.

Will there be telephone signal?

Signal in and around the towns and cities of Armenia can be expected. Signal once in the mountains cannot be guaranteed at all times though some teammates might be lucky and receive or send the occasional message.

I haven't done much trekking, is that OK?

Though shorter than most Secret Compass expeditions, this is a very challenging trek. Teammates will be carrying a full day-sack with personal kit plus lunch and water with large daily ascents and descents of up to 2000 m. Please read the fitness requirements and train in advance if necessary.

Can I arrive a day late?

This expedition takes place in the south of Armenia which entails a long private coach journey from Yerevan Airport, with the same journey repeated at the end of the expedition so its dates are set.

How can I find out more?

Apply for this expedition team using the button below (a no-obligation form). You will then receive your Expedition Handbook with fuller details. Secret Compass is then on hand to answer any questions or to firm up your place on the team.