



wind sand stars

# Celebrating Easter in the Caucasus

7<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017

With guest speaker **Dr Erica C.D. Hunter**, Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christianity (SOAS)

Both Georgia and Armenia have a rich and ancient Christian history dating from the fourth century. Our journey begins in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. We will visit a wealth of churches and monasteries that dot the country's breathtakingly beautiful landscape; each in its own right is an artistic as well as spiritual treasure. Crossing the border to Armenia, with its dramatic mountainous scenery, from our base in Yerevan we will visit the magnificent cathedral compound at Ejmiatsin, seat of the Patriarch of the Armenian Orthodox Church, to celebrate Easter. With our guest speaker by Erica Hunter, we will be immersed in the region's fascinating history and enjoy its renowned hospitality, delicious food and wines.



Georgia belongs to the eastern Orthodox fold of Christianity with its Julian calendar, whereas Armenia's branch of Christianity follows the Gregorian calendar. Unusually in 2017 Easter will be celebrated by both on the same day, Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April. As we travel through these contiguous but quite different countries during Holy Week, we can observe their preparations for Easter, sampling traditional dishes of fish, rice, unleavened bread and distinctive decorated eggs. There will also be the option to join Easter services along the way, culminating in the Easter Sunday service at Armenia's Ejmiatsin Cathedral.

*Erica C D Hunter is Head of the Dept. of Religions and Philosophies, SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), where she is also Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christianity. She is co-chair of the Centre of World Christianity ([www.soas.ac.uk/cwc](http://www.soas.ac.uk/cwc)) and is an international authority on Christianity in the Middle East, the Gulf, the Caucasus, Iran, Central Asia and China. She has led tours to Ethiopia, Oman, north-west China, Central Asia, Armenia, Georgia and Turkey.*

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## Itinerary

*Friday 7<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 1: London – Tbilisi**

We arrive in Georgia's capital Tbilisi. Depending upon flight times, we may visit the National Museum of Georgia and see its magnificent treasury housing a unique collection icons, crosses and jewellery.

[Overnight Tbilisi, Hotel Citrus 4\* or similar]

*Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 2: Tbilisi**

We enjoy a full day in Tbilisi and discover its rich history. Founded in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Tbilisi became a key stop on the famous Silk Road between Europe and Asia. As we stroll through the narrow streets of the old quarter we can take in the ornate wooden houses with open, carved balconies. We visit its mosque and baths, the Church of Metekhi and Citadel, as well as the fabulous Rococo-style Rustaveli Theatre and Tbilisi's Holy Trinity Cathedral.

[Overnight Tbilisi, Hotel Citrus 4\* or similar]



*Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 3: Tbilisi – Kutaisi**

We head north to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia. This is where Christianity was proclaimed as the official religion of Georgia in 337 AD and it is still the headquarters of the Georgian Orthodox and Apostolic Church. We visit its stunning medieval monuments; the grand Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, the nunnery of St Nino at Samtavro Church and the 6<sup>th</sup> century Jvari Monastery, which sits upon a rocky hilltop overlooking the town. Late afternoon we arrive in Georgia's second largest city Kutaisi.

[Overnight Kutaisi, Hotel Empire 3\* or similar]

*Monday 10<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 4: Kutaisi – Bakuriani**

It is a short distance to the Gelati Monastery, famous for its mosaics and frescoes, founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. We continue to Bagrati Cathedral and, if time, we may also visit the more isolated Motsameta Monastery, with its spectacular cliff-top setting. We continue on our journey to Bakuriani.

[Overnight Bakuriani, Hotel Villa Palace 3\* or similar]

*Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 5: Bakuriani**

Today we drive through dramatic scenery, passing through narrow canyons and beautiful valleys to reach the spectacular cave city of Vardzia. We can enjoy the day

exploring this extensive rock-hewn monastery complex with its 12<sup>th</sup> century frescoes.

[Overnight Bakuriani, Hotel Villa Palace 3\* or similar]



*Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 6: Bakuriani – Tbilisi**

As we head east we come to Gori, a strategic point on the ancient Silk Route, but now known more as the birthplace of Stalin. Nearby is Uplistsicke, an ancient rock-hewn city dating from the Iron Age and notable for its unique combination of rock-hewn cultures with pagan and Christian architecture. We return to Tbilisi for the evening.

[Overnight Tbilisi, Hotel Citrus 4\* or similar]

*Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 7: Tbilisi**

St David Monastery, Davit Gareja, is still a working monastery. This cave complex includes hundreds of cells, churches, chapels, refectories and living quarters hollowed out of the rock face. There is an optional walk (2-3 hours in total with some ascent) to Udabno Monastery with its painted caves and spectacular views over the desert into neighbouring Azerbaijan.

[Overnight Tbilisi, Hotel Citrus 4\* or similar]

*Friday 14<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 8: Tbilisi – Dilijan**

Today we transfer into Armenia. After border formalities at Bagratashen (Sadakhlo) we drive to the medieval monastery complexes of Haghpat (976 AD) and Sanahin (966 AD). Built in the same era, both have played an important role in the spiritual and cultural life of Armenia. We drive on to the fabulous forested resort town of Dilijan and enjoy the special atmosphere of its wooden architecture, with an optional Good Friday service in the evening.

[Overnight Dilijan, Hotel Tufenkian Old Dilijan 3\* or similar]

*Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> April*

### **Day 9: Dilijan – Yerevan**

A day of spectacular sights and scenery begins with Sevanavank, the 9<sup>th</sup> century monastery located on a peninsula on Lake Sevan, the largest alpine lake in the Caucasus. We drive on to Armenia's capital Yerevan. Here we can attend a church service and take part in the lighting of oil lamps and candles, with a dinner of traditional Armenian Easter dishes.

[Overnight Yerevan, Hotel Republica 4\* or similar]

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*Easter Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April*

**Day 10: Yerevan**

We celebrate Easter Sunday by attending the service at Ejmiatsin Cathedral, the spiritual and administrative headquarters of the Armenian patriarchate and the oldest state-built church in the world. On our way back to Yerevan, we can stop at Zvartnots temple, a 7th century architectural masterpiece. The remnants of Zvartnots, even in ruins, are a majestic sight.

[Overnight Yerevan, Hotel Republica 4\* or similar]

*Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April*

**Day 11: Yerevan**

It is a short drive to Kotayk province where we see Garni temple, the only surviving pre-Christian classical Greek temple in Armenia. A little higher up the Azat gorge is the stunning Geghard monastery, said to illustrate the very peak of Armenian medieval architecture.

[Overnight Yerevan, Hotel Republica 4\* or similar]

*Tuesday 18th April*

**Day 12: Yerevan**

Khor-Virap Monastery is perhaps best known for its spectacular setting below Mount Ararat. This is where St. Gregory the Illuminator was imprisoned for 13 years before adopting Christianity as a state religion in 301 AD. We continue to Noravank, tucked in a narrow gorge and encircled by sheer cliffs, with several *Khachkars*, carved Mongol period tombstones. From here we drive over the Selim Pass (2,410m) and visit Orbelian's Caravanserai, an important trading point on the famous Silk Road built in 1332 to accommodate weary travellers and their animals. We return to Yerevan for our final evening in Armenia.

[Overnight Yerevan, Hotel Republica 4\* or similar]

*Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April*

**Day 13: Yerevan**

We can visit the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, one of the world's richest depositories of medieval manuscripts and books, with free time in Yerevan until our departure.



## Costs

<b>Land arrangements</b>	£2,450
<b>Flights</b>	£350 - £450

*(from London Heathrow into Tbilisi and return from Yerevan, please note costs depend upon route and time of booking).*

**Cost Includes**

- Qualified Wind Sand & Stars leader
- Experienced local guides
- All local transport and accommodation
- Meals provided B&B, dinner in Bakuriani, bottled water
- Entrance fees and permits, as described in the itinerary
- Comprehensive travel insurance

**Cost excludes**

- Gratuities £65 (invoiced)
- Single supplement £480 (invoiced)
- Lunch and evening meals, extra drinks and any other personal expenses (allow up to £5 lunch, £8 dinner)
- Any additional entrance fees not listed in the itinerary
- Additional insurance premium, if required

**Visas**

British and EU passport holders do not require a visa to visit Georgia and Armenia. Other nationalities must seek advice from the relevant embassy. If you have any questions, please contact the office.

**ATOL protection**

The air holidays and flights in this itinerary are ATOL Protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 6382. For further Information, visit the ATOL website [www.atol.org.uk](http://www.atol.org.uk).



**Please note that all itineraries are subject to change.**

**Contact Wind Sand & Stars to request a booking pack:**

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