

## Yerevan, Armenia

Our Middle East Tour in April, 2008 was completed in the capital city of Yerevan, Armenia. In all the countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia), the Tour Group would provide Guides from each of them. They were all very knowledgeable and would begin their introductions after the border checkpoint with a story. As we entered Armenia, this version came about:

*".....the Tour Guide in Georgia had explained to you that when God was allocating the countries after THE FLOOD, that the Georgian people were late for the meeting because, they had met on the other side of the hill and were partying, drinking wine and very excited about their prospective country. When they arrived the next day, God had bad news that all the countries were already doled out and that now there was nothing available for the Georgian people.*

*'But, God, we were celebrating how honorable and just you were, they protested. We toasted and made speeches about your fairness and kindness, how could you forget about us?'*

*God, relented and confided that he had saved one country for himself and in consideration of their request, decided to give that country to the Georgian people. That is why the Georgians refer to their country as 'God's Country'.*

*Well, the Armenia people were also late because ever since Noah and the Ark touched land on Mount Ararat, they were the first to be asked by Noah to disembark and find a place to grow food but found Armenia totally covered by rocks and so had to immediately begin gathering and sorting out these rocks so that they could cultivate enough land for agriculture and survive.*

*Therefore, the Armenians were very busy and not able to attend the meeting at all and ended up with 'Rocky Armenia'....."*

It was a wonderful beginning to our tour of Armenia and I admit the scenes outside our bus windows was not that impressive.



Our eyes opened wide when the bus stopped at the Marriott Hotel and the valets began unloading our luggage while the hotel staff expertly provided direction to our rooms. Again, my cousin Lloyd and I continued as roommates and I was forced to repeat my inability to win at *Гольй (Naked)* a Russian card game. At this point of the trip, Lloyd won 53 games to my 1.

This beautiful water feature was in the streets where our

hotel was situated. The building behind the feature is an Armenian Government building. City residents would take walks on this Promenade which was a center point of interconnecting streets. The water feature would be displayed with lighting, dancing geysers and in concert with music of Bach and other Legendary Musicians.



Travelers and Locals alike were treated to a masterpiece in architectural genius.



This luxurious Plaza emanated from the water feature and consisted of an underground transit vehicle in addition to the shops, stairs and other architectural features. The entire development was financed by a successful Armenian living in America.

There were day tours as part of the planned travel itinerary. Khor Monastery in view of Mount Ararat was one such venture.

Mount Ararat is located, totally, in Turkey.

Besides the unique architecture of the monastery, we were treated to a quartet of young women that sang several Armenian songs. The voices 'melted' into the stone structure with harmony that was beyond description.

The story by the Armenian Tour Guide became a visual part that contributed a better understanding of Mount Ararat and the influence of its majesty over the countryside at the border between Turkey and Armenia.



Tsitsernakaberd Monument in Yerevan was dedicated to a genocide by the Turkish Islamic Government of the Christians in Armenia in the early 1920s. This quotation from Google provides a historic record that is not recognized by many countries in the World.

".....The **Armenian Genocide** was the systematic killing and deportation of Armenians by the Turks of the Ottoman Empire. In 1915, during World War I, leaders of the Turkish government set in motion a plan to expel and massacre Armenians. [By the early 1920s, when the genocide finally ended, between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians were dead, with many more forcibly removed from the country<sup>1</sup>. Most historians call this event a genocide: a premeditated and systematic campaign to exterminate an entire people .....](#)"



religous genocide of all these people.

The eternal flame is a reminder of the



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During our tour in 2008, Armenia was a close Russian ally and Russian language was used as much as the Armenian language. I found that my 109-year-old version of “Doukhobor Russian” was readily understood and accepted. The only comment I had was *Вы из Украины?* (*are you from Ukraine?*) My parents spoke their understanding of Russian and that was the family communication from my birth to when I left home at 17 so it is plausible that our many Ukrainian neighbors influenced our conversation Russian as I never did receive any formal Russian education.



The entire Middle East Tour was organized by my Aunt Florence and my cousin Doris. Doris was responding to her aunt’s desire to visit the homeland (Georgia) which was the birthplace of her grand parents and parents. Unfortunately, there was no ‘packaged’ tours that were readily available to Georgia and so this tour included three countries but did not satisfy our Aunt’s interest to see the birthplace of her ancestors.

The monasteries and churches in each country were great attractions but by the time we reached the last monastery, Lloyd, and I just “had enough”, you might say.

This Harichavank Monastery is about two (2) hours from Yerevan and I am not sure if the photo is actually the one visited but here is my story of what happened on the last day of our tour.

1. Lloyd and I asked the Tour Guide to stop the bus at the brow of the hill that overlooked the monastery so that we could walk down. (*Lloyd is on the left with our cousin Jane (did not walk with us) and Elmer Verigin*)
2. We could not help but notice that many campers were on the right side of the creek and valley that separated



the monastery from the campground.

3. There were children playing soccer and smoke emanating from campfires along with tents and picnic tables set around.

4. I commented to Lloyd as we walked, “we have never really met ordinary citizens in these countries. We were housed in first class hotels and taken to upper class restaurants and did not interact with the people.

5. I suggested we cross the small valley and have a chat with the campers while the rest toured the monastery.
6. Lloyd was not sure, but I seized the opportunity and started to climb down the bank while Lloyd continued to ‘mutter’

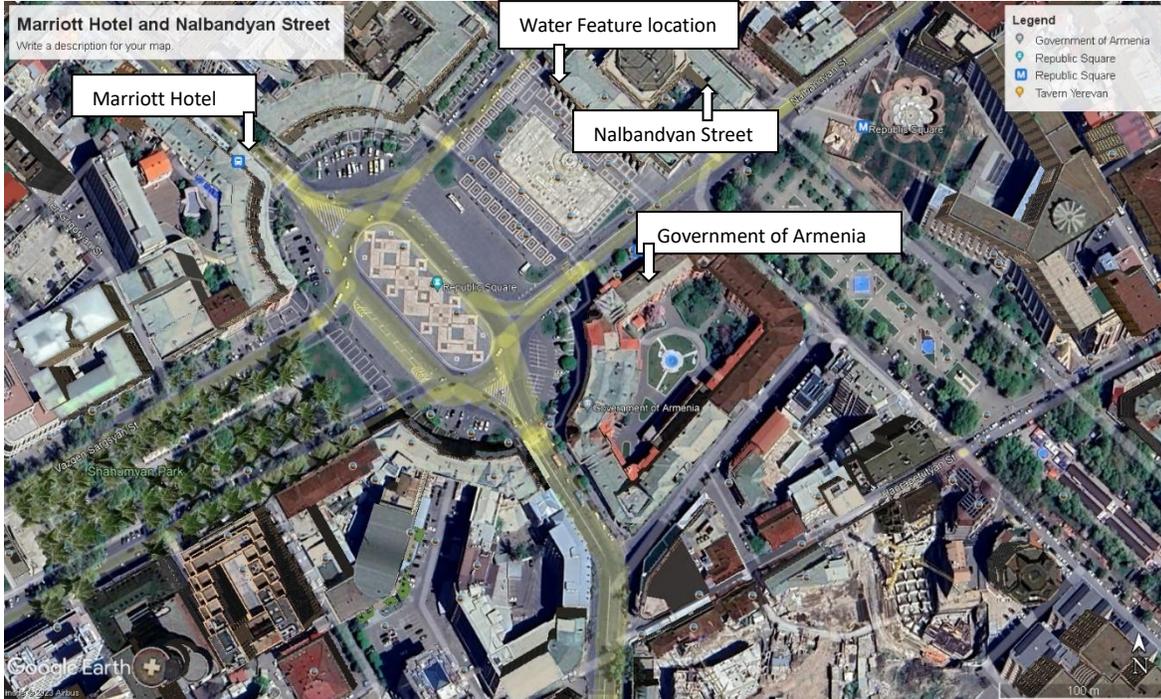


7. Too late, I realized that the bank was steeper than I had expected, and I slid on the cobbles and rode my rear end to the bottom. Good thing that there was camouflage that disguised my inglorious visit with these people that I had yet to meet.
8. There were three (3) men sitting on each side of a long table with an abundance of food and drinks thereon. Their partners were lounging around, and I noticed that the burning campfire had a grill on it with an Armenian Sweet Bread cooking over the fire.
9. They were all looking me over as they had witnessed the discussion that Lloyd and I were having near the monastery parking lot. Suddenly, I was challenged to make my greetings, but I had no clue what language I should use.
10. So, I my tried Russian and was thankful that they all readily responded.
11. *Вы из Украины?* (*are you from Ukraine?*) was my immediate reaction from the seated men.
12. *Нет, я канадец* (*no, I am Canadian*), I responded.
13. There was misbelief from my new friends, and I was ready to produce my Canadian Passport.
14. I was offered food which included 'shishliki' and I regreted the recent picnic lunch which we had just eaten about an hour ago. Then they pointed to the three bottles that contained clear liquid which obviously was an alcoholic spirit. I asked them what was in the bottles.
15. *Это русская водка, это армянская водка и это наша* (*this is Russian Vodka, this is Armenian Vodka and this is ours*) they responded while pushing a tall glass in my direction as invitation.
16. My friends who had traveled in Russia had shared with me how important was the custom to be offered a drink by your host and to graciously accept that hospitality.
17. *Я приму твою* (*I will accept yours*) and they filled this large glass half full. I knew that they were having difficulty accepting my Canadian citizenship, but I also knew the Russian custom that it was 'bottoms up' and so I had to rise to the occasion.
18. *За ваше здоровье и гостеприимство* (*To your health and hospitality*) and I 'downed it' and hoped they wouldn't notice the sweat breaking out on my forehead.
19. Their exclamation was in unison *Он пьет по-нашему* (*he drinks our way*)
20. I noticed the lady's placing food on a paper plate and I quickly interjected that I was not hungry and they said *Это не для вас, а для вашего друга на другой стороне* (*this is not for you but for your friend on the other side*)
21. I started to rise and thank them when the men stopped me with *Теперь ты должен выпить за своего друга* (*you must have a drink for your friend*)
22. This time we twined our arms in a traditional Slavic Toast. (as shown in photo for example)
23. I tried hard not to stagger away but the two (2) drinks were starting to take effect as we all bid our farewells.
24. I carried to plate of food to Lloyd and I passed it to him, I said "this was the high-light of our trip."



Lloyd countered with, "I watched the entire performance, and I regretted what I missed".

This map locates the area where the Marriott Hotel (left corner of the square) is adjacent to area where we stayed for five (5) days at the



These are scenes from the "open air" market where everyone was able to visit to shop, eat and drink.



There were many Jewelries as well as Rug Vendors.





We spent the entire day here relaxing before we were treated to an Armenia Restaurant and Bar in the evening.

Lloyd and I found a Vendor that was cooking Pyrahee and so we had a few with Armenian Beer.

We all enjoyed Armenia and its friendly citizens.

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