Silk Road IV
The Caucasus
AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

with Julian Droogan
14 September – 02 October 2015 (19 days)
**Silk Road IV – The Caucasus**
AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

Journey through the breathtaking Caucasus to three distinctive countries – Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia – and explore one of the most culturally complex and linguistically diverse parts of our world.

Extending from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, and wedged between Russia in the north and Turkey and Iran in the south, the Caucasus occupies a strategic position between Europe and Asia. This unique location has long attracted invaders, including Persians, Mongols, Turks and Russians. It has also attracted a variety of traders travelling along the Silk Road, resulting in a rich and complex mix of religion, language and culture.

From the ancient Byzantine monasteries and churches of Armenia and Georgia, to the Persian-style palaces and mosques of Azerbaijan, Caucasian architecture is a fascinating fusion of divergent styles. The three cosmopolitan Caucasian capital cities of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan will captivate and surprise you as they blend ancient tradition with contemporary culture.

**At a glance…**

- Explore the Persian-style palaces and historic mosques of Azerbaijan
- Visit Georgia’s and Armenia’s mountain Byzantine monasteries and churches
- Discover how the Caucasus was a key leg of the Silk Route
- Wander through the Khan’s Palace in Sheki, meander the old alleyways of Tbilisi, and visit the wooden village of Dilijan
- Travel through regions of contrasting landscapes with rugged mountains, snow-capped peaks, lush valleys, large lakes and arid semi-deserts

**TOUR LEADER**

Dr Julian Droogan is a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie University where he teaches in Asia-Pacific Studies, issues of Religion and Politics and International Studies.

Julian has written books and papers on archaeology, Asian history and culture as well as the role of religion in modern politics and international relations. Julian’s tours combine a focus on the art and archaeology of a region with a love of its religious, artistic and architectural heritage, while also paying attention to the dynamic forces at play in the modern world. Julian is also a visiting lecturer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

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**Map is a guide only**
Sun 13 Sep 2015  Depart Australia
Suggested evening departure from Australia on Emirates (EK419) to Dubai.

Mon 14 Sep  Arrive Dubai
Early morning arrival in Dubai.
Transfer to the Le Meridien Dubai Airport hotel. Following an early check-in and breakfast, the remainder of the day is at leisure. The resort-like hotel features numerous recreational, shopping and dining facilities.
Late evening transfer from the hotel to Dubai International Airport Terminal 1.

Tue 15 Sep  Arrive Baku
Depart (01:45) on a FlyDubai flight to Baku – 3 hours flight. 
(Not included in the tour price. This flight should be included in your international ticket.)
Early morning arrival in Baku, Azerbaijan. Transfer to the hotel (early check-in).
Afternoon coach orientation tour of Baku and its two cities: the old walled city and the downtown area prior to a welcome briefing and dinner with Julian.

Wed 16 Sep  Baku
Following a talk, join a local guide for a morning walking tour of the Walled City constructed in local almond-coloured limestone. Visit the 15th century Shirvanshakh Palace with its Divanhana, mausoleum, mosque and bath-house; continue to the 12th century Maiden’s Tower, ancient Haman, bazaar and caravanserai.
Afternoon visit to the opulent, former 19th century mansion of Azerbaijani oil baron Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev.
Tonight, enjoy dinner in the Old City.

Thu 17 Sep  Baku
Morning drive to Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. View the vast collection of prehistoric petroglyphs in situ, dating to 10,000 BCE.
After lunch visit the spectacular Heydar Aliyev Cultural Centre (architect Zaha Hadid) and the new Azeri Carpet Museum, designed to resemble a rolled-up Azeri carpet.
Evening at leisure.

Fri 18 Sep  Baku – Shamakhi – Sheki
Morning drive from Baku to Shamakhi, once a royal seat and one of the key towns on the Silk Road. Visit the impressive, recently rebuilt Friday Mosque – originally built in the 8th century – and a group of 19th century tomb towers, set amidst a field of much older gravestones.
Following lunch, travel through the Muganly Mountain Pass to Sheki. Visit the lavishly decorated 18th century Qajar style Summer Palace of the Sheki Khans, renowned for its lavish frescoes and mosaic tiles.
Dinner at a local restaurant.

Sat 19 Sep  Sheki – Sighnaghi, Georgia
Depart early for Georgia. After a border crossing (Australian citizens do not require a visa) drive through Kakheti and the heart of the world’s oldest wine region. Enjoy some famous Georgian wine with lunch in the Khareba Winery.
Travel via the 16th century royal citadel of Gremi, once capital of the Kingdom of Kakheti, and a lively trading town on the Silk Road (photo stop of the reconstructed citadel).
Continue to the 11th century Alaverdi Monastery complex, then onto Tsinandali to visit the summer residence of Alexander Chavchavadze, once the gathering place of poets and artists of the 19th Century.
Evening at leisure.

Sun 20 Sep  Sighnaghi – David Gareja – Tbilisi
After breakfast depart Sighnaghi and drive to the David Gareja monastery complex located on the rocky, arid slopes of Mount Gareja, originally founded in 6th century (the impressive cave frescos involve a steep climb for the fit and adventurous).
After lunch, continue to Georgia’s capital, Tbilisi.
Dinner at a local restaurant.

Itinerary
Baku, Azerbaijan
David Gareja Monastery, Georgia
Mon 21 Sep  

Tbilisi
Following a morning talk, begin your exploration of Tbilisi. Drive to the 13th century Metekhi Church and nearby equestrian monument of Tbilisi’s founder, King Vakhtang I Gorgasali. Continue to the remains of the Nariqala Fortress and enjoy a panoramic view of Tbilisi.

Return for a walking tour through the Old City to see the Mosque, Orbeliani Baths and Synagogue. After lunch, explore the Old Town, with visits to the Sioni Cathedral housing the Cross of St Nina – who introduced Christianity to Georgia in 327 – and the 6th century Anchiskhati Basilica, the oldest surviving church in Tbilisi.

Remainder of the afternoon and evening at leisure.

Tue 22 Sep  

Tbilisi
Begin today with a morning visit to the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia to see its exquisite gold treasures. The Museum houses hundreds of thousands of artefacts from the Caucasus’ archaeological and ethnographical antiquity. Valuable exhibits include the Homo Ergaster fossils discovered at Dmanisi, and the 5th century BC Akhalgori hoard which contains unique examples of jewellery blending Achaemenid and local styles.

This afternoon visit the National Gallery of Art exhibiting around 140,000 items of Georgian, Oriental, Russian, and European art.

Dinner at a local restaurant.

Wed 23 Sep  

Tbilisi – Gori – Tbilisi
This morning travel to the Uplistikhe Cave Complex where the Silk Road used to pass. It is comprised of structures from c. 1200 BCE to the 14th/15th centuries and is located in the ancient kingdom of Kartli.

After lunch continue to Gori and visit the Soviet-style museum dedicated to Joseph Stalin, who was born in Gori.

Return to Tbilisi for an evening at leisure.

Thu 24 Sep  

Tbilisi – Mtskheta – Kazbegi
This morning drive to the ancient capital and religious centre of Georgia – Mtskheta (3000 years old), one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities. Visit the 11th century fortified Svetitskhoveli Cathedral – the headquarters of the Georgian Orthodox – and the nearby 6th century Jvari Monastery perched on a rocky mountaintop, overlooking the Mtkvari and Aragvi rivers.

Drive along the Georgian Military Highway visiting the 17th century Ananuri architectural complex, where the two churches and fortress overlook the Zhinvali water reservoir. The carvings on the churches are one of the best examples of Georgian art.

Continue further through the spectacularly high Caucasus Mountains to Kazbegi.

Dinner at the hotel.

Fri 25 Sep  

Kazbegi – Tbilisi
Begin with a morning walk (leisurely 2 hours) through the beautiful woodlands and valleys to Gergeti Trinity Church (drive option available).

Following lunch in Kazbegi, return to Tbilisi.

Evening at leisure.

Sat 26 Sep  

Tbilisi – Sadakhlo (border) – Dilijan, Armenia
Depart Tbilisi, Georgia and drive to Armenian border (Armenian Visa obtained at the border). Visit the 10th century basalt Haghpat Monastery, a beautiful blend of Byzantine and traditional Caucasian architecture overlooking the Debed River.

Following lunch continue onto Dilijan.

On arrival enjoy a late afternoon talk, prior to dinner at hotel.
Sun 27 Sep       Dilijan – Goris
This morning drive past Lake Sevan, the largest lake in the Caucasus, and onto Noratus Cemetery to see the ancient Khachkars (carved memorial stele featuring an Armenian cross). Continue through the Selim Pass and stop at the 14th century Caravanserai, on the Armenian Silk Road.

Following a late lunch by the Orpa River in Vayk, drive to ancient Karahunj (Armenian 'Stonehenge') with over 200 Menhirs (standing stones). Continue to Goris and overnight at local hotel. B L D

Mon 28 Sep       Goris – Tatev – Yerevan
Depart Goris for Vorotan. Take a cable car across a deep gorge to the 9th century Tatev Monastery ensemble, located on a large basalt plateau. Return by cable car.

After lunch, drive to Khor Virap monastery where Saint Gregory the Illuminator (who was responsible for Armenia becoming the first Christian nation in 301) was imprisoned. Visit the monastery and enjoy the view to Armenia’s beloved Mt Ararat, located in Turkey. Continue to Yerevan, capital of Armenia. B L D

Tue 29 Sep       Yerevan
This morning walk to the National History Museum for a guided tour. Following lunch visit the nearby Genocide Memorial Museum. Continue to the Yerevan Cascade, a popular meeting place for locals, and wander among the impressive collection of sculptures by prominent international sculptors, supported by the Cafesjian Centre for the Arts.

Evening at leisure. B L

Wed 30 Sep       Yerevan
Begin with a visit to the Geghard Cave Monastery, built into towering basalt cliffs and founded in 4th century by Gregory the Illuminator. Continue to the nearby 1st century Hellenistic Garni Temple, Armenia’s only surviving pagan temple. Return to Yerevan.

Afternoon visit to the National Art Gallery.

Evening reception at Sergey Parajanov Museum in a traditional Caucasian style noble house, with a unique collection of lively, diverse art forms created by Soviet Armenian film director and artist, Sergey Parajanov. B D

Thu 1 Oct        Yerevan
This morning drive to the 7th century Amberd Fortress located 2,300 m above sea level on the slopes of Mt Aragats. En route see the Armenian Stone Letters Monument.

Following lunch visit the remains of Zvartnots Cathedral built in the 7th century when much of Armenia was under Byzantine control. Return to Yerevan and visit the Vernissage open air flea market.

This evening celebrate the conclusion of the tour with a special farewell dinner. B L D

Fri 2 Oct        Depart Yerevan
Tour arrangements conclude after breakfast.

Suggested afternoon departure on FlyDubai for Dubai and Emirates flight to Sydney. B

Sat 3 Oct        Arrive Australia
Evening arrival in Australia.
Tour prices

Per person, twin share AUD 8,950
Single supplement* AUD 1,990
Deposit per person AUD 500
Final payment due 31 July 2015
*Single travellers may request to share. Please advise at time of booking.

Tour code AG1512

Fitness level Above average
Please see booking conditions for fitness level definitions.

Suggested airline Qantas/Emirates and FlyDubai. Please contact Renaissance Tours for current airfares and flight reservations.

Tour price includes
• Accommodation with daily breakfast (B)
• Meals as per itinerary (L = Lunch, D = Dinner). Wines with meals
• Comfortable air-conditioned coach transportation
• Comprehensive sightseeing including local guides and entrance fees as per itinerary
• Transfers in Dubai, Baku and Yerevan if travelling on suggested flights
• Visa’s for Azerbaijan and Armenia
• Gratuities for local guides and drivers
• Hotel porterage (one piece per person)

Tour price does not include
• International airfares
• Items of a personal nature (e.g. telephone, laundry, minibar etc.)
• Travel insurance

Your hotels
Dubai – Le Meridien Hotel & Conference Centre*****
Baku – Atropat*****
Sheki – Sheki Palace****
Sighnaghi – Kabadoni****
Tbilisi – Tbilisi Marriott*****
Kazbegi – Rooms****
Dilijan – Best Western Paradise*****
Goris – Mirhav****
Yerevan – Golden Tulip*****

NB. Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted
## Terms & Conditions

### HOW TO BOOK
Complete, sign and return the Booking Form available from Renaissance Tours with your deposit and page one of your passport.

### DEPOSIT / FINAL PAYMENTS
Your deposit is due at the time of booking and is used to pay hotel, airline, performance tickets and/or other deposits. It is non-refundable in the event of your cancellation.

Final payment is due 60 days before departure. Failure to make the final payment by the due date may result in cancellation of your booking and loss of deposit. Payments are accepted in cash and by cheque, bank transfer, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. A 3% service charge applies for payment by American Express and Diners Club.

### CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

#### a) Cancellation by You – Cancellation charges will be applied as shown below, calculated from the day written notification is received by Renaissance Tours. In addition to cancellation fees for tours operated by Renaissance Tours as shown below, airlines, hotels and other third parties may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

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<th>Days before departure</th>
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<td>60 days or more</td>
<td>Forfeit of deposit</td>
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<td>25% of tour cost</td>
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<td>Less than 15 days</td>
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The above cancellation charges include applicable GST.

In addition to the above, cancellation charges may apply for additional arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours, such as air tickets, hotels and travel insurance premium. If the reason for cancellation is covered by the insurance policy, you may be able to reclaim these charges.

#### b) Cancellation by Us – We reserve the right to cancel a tour for any reason (such as failure to reach minimum tour participant numbers). Except for force majeure, we will not cancel a tour less than 60 days before departure. No further compensation will be paid in the event of cancellation by Renaissance Tours. A full refund of monies paid for tour costs will be the full extent of our liability.

Cancellation and/or amendment fees may apply for additional travel arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours.

### PASSPORTS, VISAS AND VACCINATIONS
All travellers must be in possession of a valid passport – most countries require a 6-month validity from your date of entry or exit. For some countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, India, Russia), visas are included in the tour cost and will be arranged by Renaissance Tours prior to travel. For other countries, it is your responsibility to ensure you have the appropriate visa(s).

You are also responsible for obtaining all necessary inoculations and preventative medicines as may be required for the duration of the tour.

### TOUR PRICES
Prices quoted in our tour information are based on exchange rates, cost of services and applicable taxes at the time of publication. Prices may be subject to change in the event of significant currency fluctuations or the introduction of new taxes, up until final payment is received.

In the event of a price increase, whether because of a currency fluctuation, increase in taxes or a correction in advertised prices, we will advise you and you have the option of accepting the amended prices, inclusions and booking conditions or withdrawing from the tour and receiving a full refund of all monies paid.

Once final payment is received, all prices will be guaranteed and no surcharges will apply.

### TRAVEL INSURANCE
It is a condition of travel that you are covered by comprehensive travel insurance for international tours. Your travel insurance can be arranged by Renaissance Tours.

### FITNESS AND PARTICIPATION
Most of our tours require a MODERATE level of fitness. However, in certain destinations (e.g. Silk Road, Central Asia, Outback Australia, tropical destinations) or in certain seasons (e.g. mid-winter, mid-summer) or because of the nature of travel (e.g. remote rail), certain tours will require an ABOVE AVERAGE or CHALLENGING level of fitness.

If you (or we) have any doubts about your level of fitness, you may be required to have a doctor’s appraisal. This would require your doctor to read the itinerary of your chosen tour, including the fitness level, and provide you (and us) with a written confirmation of your ability to participate.

### MODERATE
For the overall benefit of the group, all tour members must possess a moderate level of mobility, including the ability to:

- negotiate airports and railway stations without wheelchair assistance
- use combined shower/bath facilities (it is impossible to guarantee walk-in shower facilities)
- undertake walking tours of 1–2 hours duration, including using stairs, walking over cobblestones and other uneven surfaces
- stand for long periods in museums and other sites
- embark/disembark coaches, trains and other methods of transportation without assistance
- handle your own luggage

### ABOVE AVERAGE
In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- undertake walking tours of 2–3 hours
- climb staircases of 100 or more steps

### CHALLENGING
In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- handle extremes of altitude (e.g. 4000 metres or above)
- handle extremes of temperature (e.g. below 0 or above 35 degrees)
- handle extremes of altitudes (e.g. 4000 metres and above).

You can find the full terms & conditions on the Renaissance Tours booking form. They can also be found at www.renaissancetours.com.au/booking-conditions or we would be happy to post you a copy on request.
TRAVEL WITH FRIENDS IN 2015

Your travel agent is

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