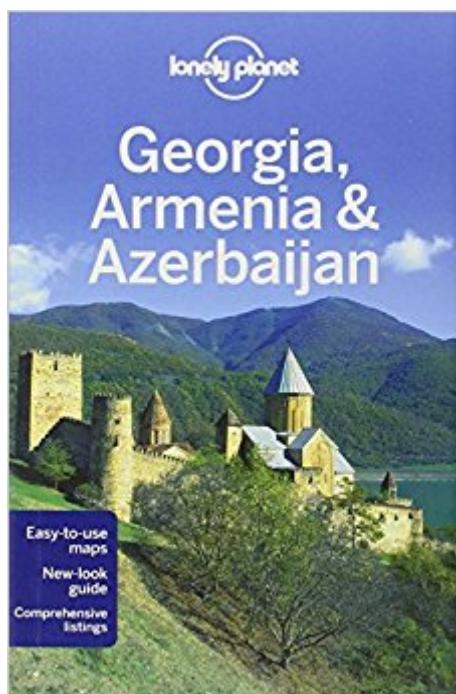


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Lonely Planet Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan (Travel Guide) By Lonely Planet (15-Jun-2012) Paperback



Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a review for the 4th edition of the Lonely Planet "Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan". All-in-all, this is a positive review. To put it in perspective: I have not used the previous editions of this book, or any other travel guides for the region. I travelled all three countries in two weeks, actually using the route (Tbilisi, Baku, Seki, Yerevan, two monasteries, Tbilisi, Kazbegi) suggested by the book for such an endeavor, even if decided independently from the book. The LP proved to be quite useful, in particular when it comes to the maps and information on transportation (departure sites and times). Of course, some timetables change, so if you tend to plan tightly, try to inquire ahead of time. The map material was generally sufficient, though sometimes slightly inaccurate, which may also be caused by the vicious construction activity particularly in Georgia. A separate map for the Kazbegi area would be helpful. It would be nice to have some information on hiking Debed Canyon in Armenia. It is almost essential for information on some sights, as occasionally there is no or very sparse information in English at the actual sight. So if you want to read a little about the history of the place you are looking at, the LP provides some. At this point, I would like to make a suggestion for future editions, though: Some of the sights *do* have information in English, sometimes more elaborate than the LP. If the intention is to keep the book at a reasonable travel size, one could leave out information on the sites that do have their own and include some more info on the sights that don't have a lot for people not knowing the languages of the region. The way things are now, the history sections in the LP are quite brief. The writing style tends to be slightly sarcastic, which seems to be a matter of taste. I would also include a little more information on the languages, in particular the alphabets for Georgian and Armenian, respectively. I printed those out separately, and while I did not have time to learn the Armenian alphabet, I did learn about 60% of the Georgian (the most important letters), which is extremely helpful when reading road signs for locations (often in Georgian only) or menus at non-tourist eateries. (Tip: Print out a few essential words, such as Tbilisi, one, two, three, your name in the original script and transliterated. Learning the letters by

memorizing a few common words makes it a lot easier and more fun. Also, you can make the locals happy if you learn a few words such as hello, how are you, my name is ..., and thank you.) For the most important locations, the LP does include the name in Georgian with the description of the place in the book, but I believe it wouldn't hurt to do this with almost all locations. Here are a few more specific issues: The marionette theatre in Tbilisi at the time of writing only has shows on Fri, Sat, and Sun. This is not posted outside the theatre, you need to ask an employee. There seems to be no operational post office in Tbilisi (or Georgia in general). We and multiple other travellers had no luck finding one at the various suggested locations. Train 372 from Yerevan to Tbilisi leaves Yerevan at 15:15 in the summer; the train number may be different as well. There is no overnight train to Tbilisi. Mugam Club in Baku is closed on Monday nights. To get to the main bus terminal in Baku, leave the subway at 20 Yanvar, then take a bus to avtovagzal (about 20 minutes). The exchange rates for Dram (Armenia) and Manat (Azerbaijan) are incorrect. The hike up mount Kazbeg to the glacier takes a little longer than the LP seems to suggest. We left Gergeti at 10 am, spent about 30 minutes at the monastery, and then climbed the mountain with essentially no breaks. We had very little to carry and overtook almost all other hikers, which were, without exception, multiple day hikers trying to climb past the glacier. Yet, at 3:50 pm, being within 500m of the glacier, we decided to turn back without having reached it, in fear it might get dark before we hit the main road again. I estimate it to be a good 1h 45m - 2h from the rest point at 2960m until you reach the glacier. In total, we hiked for 9h 45m, including a few 5 minute breaks, but did not make it. Be aware and start at 8 am. Bring water. Note: We are in our early 30's and in decent shape, I run 8 miles a week, my friend swims 2 or 3 km a week, both at a decent pace. One final note: I also bought the 'International Travel Maps' map "Azerbaijan & Armenia" — Azerbaijan & Armenia 1:560,000 including inset of Baku and Yerevan, which also includes a good portion of Georgia (except Kazbegi). I cannot recommend this map. The transliteration of names into English is quite bad, to the point where you cannot recognize them sometimes, and names in the original scripts are not included. Further, some towns and villages are shown on the map that don't seem to exist, while existing ones are excluded. In total, I found the small maps within the LP a lot more helpful than this map. The best maps at various scales are available from Geoland (in Tbilisi and online: geoland.ge). Addendum 01/26/13: We experienced very little corruption or attempts at double-crossing. The occasional taxi driver may claim that you agreed with him on a price of 50 Manat or Lari instead of the 15 you clearly remember, but in the two cases we experienced this, we firmly repeated the originally agreed upon price once or twice and the attempts were stopped (one of the taxi drivers even made a slightly embarrassed face right away). One thing happened,

however, in Baku: When we descended the steps from the monument for WW2 as well as the war in 1992 at dusk, we were approached by two men who claimed to be police and flashed some kind of ID in front of our faces. They claimed to have seen us kissing on top of the stairs, close to the memorial and a mosque which is also located up there, and said this was a serious impermissible act. My friend and I have never exchanged a kiss in the 12 years that we have known each other. They proceeded to threaten us with taking us to the "police station". We kept stating that we did not kiss and were willing to accompany them to the police station to make a statement. Eventually, they left us with a warning and vanished. We are fairly certain that these gentlemen were interested in obtaining money from us in exchange for not taking us to the police station. We have experienced similar situation several times in formerly Soviet occupied countries and can only recommend showing the same readiness to be taking to "the authorities" to other travelers.

We have just returned from a month-long trip through the three countries of the Caucasus and found, sadly, that they (to paraphrase the old Kingston Trio song) don't like each other very much. While Georgia is on good terms with both neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan, the latter two seem to be on a collision course... reinterpreting history to suit their own current political ends. If you visit Armenia first and travel to occupied Karabagh, forget getting into Azerbaijan. You will even be hassled at the airports of both capitals if your passport contains a visa from the other country. This whole bit of nastiness between the two even extends to guidebooks a traveler might be carrying upon entering one or the other. If authorities notice in Baku that you have an "Armenia Guidebook" they will confiscate it... and visa versa in Yerevan if you have an "Azerbaijan Guidebook." This, therefore, makes the Lonely Planet Guide that covers all three countries a good choice for a guidebook to be carrying through the region...if for a sad reason. While other guidebook might provide more detail on history and places to see, as usual, this Lonely Planet Guide manages to do a good job covering things in all three countries in one slim volume. Well done, again, Lonely Planet!

I used this book just for Georgia. It was fine for the most part. But for hiking in Tusheti and Mestia areas, it is of very limited value. Definitely inadequate for those purposes. Unfortunately, I could not find any good info on hiking in the Georgia Caucasus. The National Park office in the Tusheti area is also of limited value without useful maps or expertise. There are topo maps at a nice shop in Tblisi, but these maps do not show the trails. Maybe because there really aren't any, especially in Tusheti. If you go off the road to climb the passes, which I did, it is very difficult. Give yourself many hours to

figure out where you're going. Mestia was better organized with more information, but still very very tricky.

I used this book mainly for Georgia with a brief foray into Armenia. Overall it is a great book and lived up to the high Lonely Planet standards. The practical information about traveling, like the list of mini-bus fares and timetables to various locations, was extremely useful. There are thoughtful features like a food glossary and chart of khachapuri (cheese bread) varieties... which you will definitely need, since the food is a highlight of the region! The recommendations for restaurants and bars were mostly spot-on, occasionally a bit perplexing, and once or twice REALLY bad (ahem, Armenian jazz bar) but maybe I just don't share the exact taste of the authors. A few of the places we tried to go were no longer in existence, or seemed like they might have changed since the review a few years ago, so it seems like an update is due. However, I would still recommend this book and will use it again if I go back to this fascinating region!

This is my least favorite LP by far. I purchased the Kindle version and found it horrible to navigate. My issue was mostly with the layout of the information - instead of presenting the information as three separate countries, it was jumbled together. I had a hard time distinguishing which country the sight was located. Most of the sightseeing focused on Armenia and Georgia. I wish I could recommend a better English guide for Azerbaijan, but this one as lacking as it was, is perhaps unfortunately the best.

Took it on a 10 day trip to Georgia. The information is mostly accurate minus the political situation and prices that naturally, change every year. I would strongly suggest making Georgia a separate book (most of the people I met did not include Armenia or Azerbaijan in their routes) so I do not have to carry around 2/3 of the book weight for nothing. I would then use the freed space to add some pictures and maps like they used to do (i.e. France).

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