

TRAVEL
GUIDE
BOOK

ARMENIA
GUIDEBOOK



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EDMC
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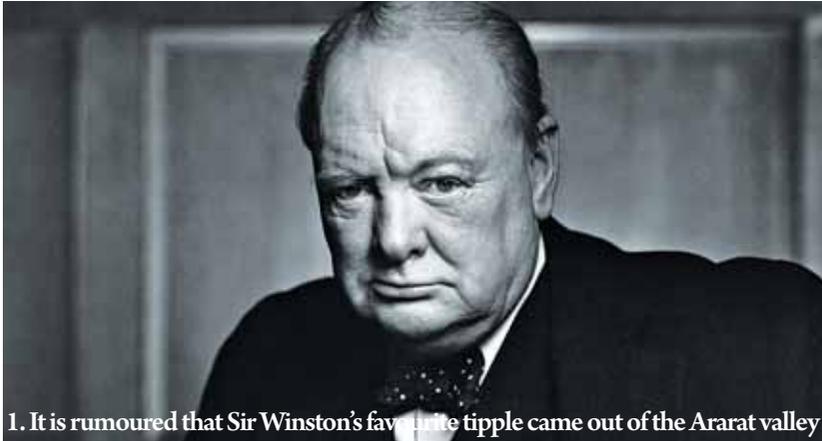
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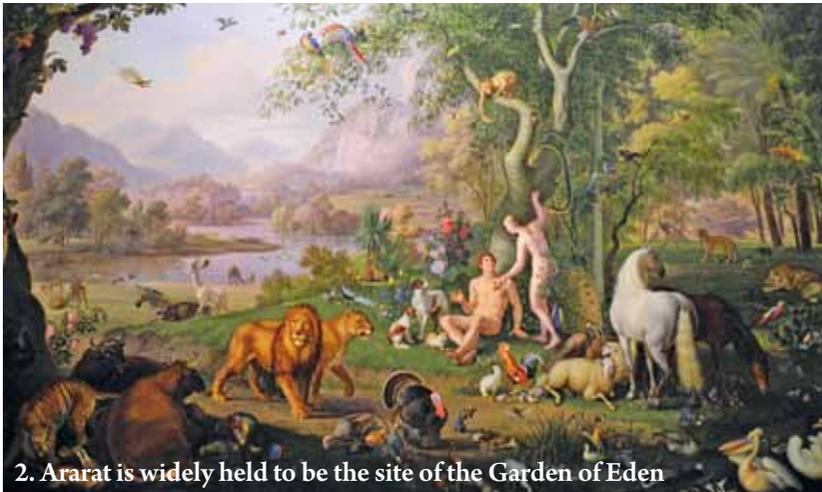
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ARARAT MARZ GUIDEBOOK

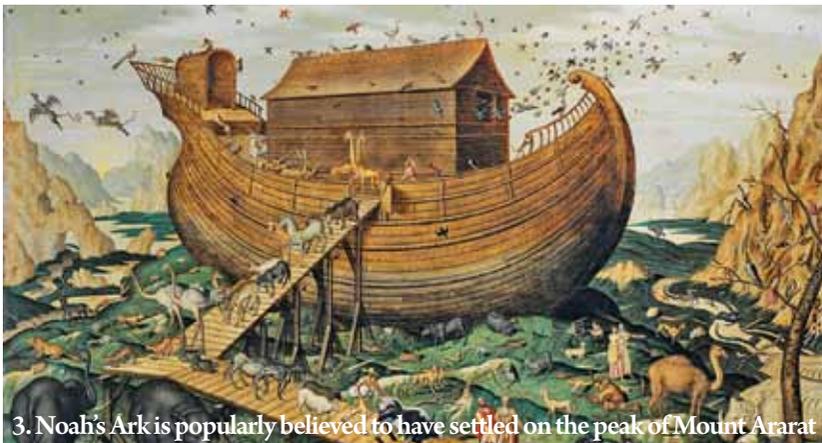
ARARAT FACTS



1. It is rumoured that Sir Winston's favourite tipple came out of the Ararat valley



2. Ararat is widely held to be the site of the Garden of Eden



3. Noah's Ark is popularly believed to have settled on the peak of Mount Ararat

ARARAT

Ararat is one of Armenia's 10 provinces, whose capital is Artashat. Named after Mount Ararat, the province borders Turkey to the west and Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to the south. Two former Armenian capitals are located in this region, Artashat and Dvin, as well as the Khor Virap monastery, significant as the place of Gregory the Illuminator's 13-year imprisonment and for being the closest point to Mount Ararat within Armenian borders. The province consists of 97 communities, known as hamaynkner, of which four are considered urban and 93 rural.

Spanning an area of 1995 km² and home to a population of 311,400 people, its administrative Center is Artashat which is 29km from Yerevan. Ararat borders the following provinces: Armavir to the northwest, Kotayk to the north, Gegharkunik in the east and Vayots Dzor to the southeast. Ararat also has a border with the city of Yerevan in the north, between its borders with Armavir and Kotayk. Ararat's mountains include the Yeranos range, Vishapasar 3157m, Geghasar 3443m, and Kotuts 2061m, Urts 2445m. The province also has a number of lakes including: Sev, Azat, Armush, and Karalich as well as the Arax, Azat, Hrazdan, Yotnakunk, Vedi, and Artashat Rivers.

During the period from 331 BC to 428 AD, the Armenian Kingdom was also known as Greater Armenia (Mets Hayk) and consisted of 15 states. One of those original states was Ayrarat. Throughout its existence, the state of Ayrarat was Armenia's leading cultural, economic and political Center, a fact borne out by such historical accounts:

- The Silk Road passed through the state, an inter-regional trade route over 7000 kilometres long, which connected China with Central Asia and Europe. It used to operate from the 2nd century BC to the 16th century AD.
- The majority of Armenian capitals were located in this state. Among them were Armavir, Yervandashat, Artashat, Vagharshapat, Dvin, Kars, and Ani.
- The present capital of Armenia, Yerevan, was established in the Ayrarat State in 782 BC. Back then, city was known simply as Erebuni. Erebuni-Yerevan is one of the oldest cities in the world, having celebrated her 2795th birthday in 2013.
- The Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin, the seat of the Armenian Church, has also been located in the state for centuries.

Today, Ararat Marz (province) is agriculturally the most important region of Armenia, the rich valley of the Arax River south of Yerevan abound in vineyards, orchards and fishponds. This area is surrounded by the hills of the lower Azat and Vedi river watersheds, with their fine green valleys and mountains of the Khosrov

Reserve. This landscape is dominated by the Mountain. Ararat, whose snow-capped peak hovers above the hazy southern horizon, seems as if a giant father protecting his own. The main tourist destination here is the Khor Virap monastery, the site of captivity for Gregory the Illuminator, the founder of Armenian Christianity, which sits among the ruins of Ancient Artashat. Other cultural sites include the ruins of Dvin and numerous ancient churches and monasteries. Culturally, Ararat has seen the constant ebb and flow of civilizations as Muslim, Persian, Mongol and Turkish invaders came, conquered, plundered, and went on their way.

The territory of the Ararat Marz is accurately divided into two parts – plains and mountains. The plains are located between the river Hrazdan and the border of Armenia with Turkey. A major part of the population of the basically consists of Armenian immigrants from what is today known as Iran, who arrived there in the 1830s.

Most of the mountain regions are occupied by the slopes of the Gegam Mountains as well as the Urts and the Eranos ranges, left practically uninhabited. The jewel of pride in this area is the Khosrov reserve – the woods planted by Armenian tsar Khosrov Kotayk in the 4th century.

PLACES OF INTEREST

The cultural and historic heartland of Armenia Ararat has a wealth of attractions for the visitor all within easy reach of the capital, Yerevan. To the south the Ararat Valley is rich in agriculture and boasts an astonishing variety of wines and Cognacs as well as many fascinating historic sites. To the north the mountains offer adventure for the outdoor enthusiast as well as offering nature lovers the pristine Khosrov Reserve, the world's oldest protected area.

Mount Ararat

We can't really talk about the Ararat province without talking about Mount Ararat itself. This snow-capped peak, which totally dominates the landscape of the area, is inexorably woven into the history and culture of Armenia, so much so that this mountain, which actually now lies within Turkey, is even centrally featured on the country's national crest.



Figure: National Crests Past and Present

Armenians consider Mount Ararat to be the symbol of their state as well as being the holy summit where, according to the Christian religion, Noah moored his Ark after the Great Flood. Mount Ararat stands on the right bank of the Araks River, near the border with Turkey, and consists of two extinct volcanic cones with a common base. The western main peak is Big Ararat, which has a height of 5,165 meters. The lower eastern peak, Little Ararat, is 3,925 meters in height. The geological age of the Big Ararat is about 3.5 million years, while Little Ararat is more recent and estimated to date back a mere 150 thousand years. Locally, these twin peaks are known as the “two brothers” - Sis and Masis. The peaks of these extinct volcanoes dominate and are clearly visible from Yerevan. Big Ararat is covered by the permanent snow cap under which, it is believed, the remains of Noah's Ark rest. There are about 30 small glaciers, the largest of which - St. Jacob - stretches over a length of two kilometres.



KHOSROV FOREST STATE RESERVE

One of the leading attractions in Armenia, offering fun, adventure and amusement in a pristine natural setting, is the Khosrov Forest State Reserve located in the province of Ararat. Here, locals and tourists alike can enjoy every minute spent getting acquainted with the reserve's amazing and wonderful landscapes, enchanting flora and fauna, as well as the legends each stone has to tell.

Historical evidence regarding the reserve was found in the writings of Armenian historian Pavstos Byuzand. There were initially two forests; one was called Tachar Mayri, which lay between the Garni temple and Dvin city, while the other was called Khosrovakert and lay between the cities of Artashat and Dvin. Tachar Mayri is translated as "Sacred Forest," and Khosrovakert means "founded by Khosrov." With centuries passing by, the forest of Khosrovakert was lost and there remained only the Sacred Forest. The latter was then merged with the surrounding natural forest.

The region was declared a reserve zone in 1958 by the Government of Soviet Armenia. The goal of the reserve was once again clarified and it goes as follows, "The purpose of Khosrov Forest State Reserve is the protection of Azat River resources, juniper and oak, arid mountain vegetation, rare animals and plants."

Khosrov Forest State Reserve, which covers 300 square kilometres, is one of the oldest protected areas in the world and the largest natural reserve in the country. It was first established by King Khosrov III, a Christian monarch, around the year 330 in order to improve climatic conditions in the nearby city of Artashat. Trees were planted on the high slopes and populated with wildlife for royal hunting parties. It is believed that this reservation was the only one of its type in the Roman Empire.

The Khosrov Reserve extends along the Geghama Ridge at an altitude varying between 1600 and 2300 meters and is noted for its diversity in unique European and Asian flora and fauna. With approximately 30 per cent of the reserve forested, Khosrov is reputed for its spectacular scenery, pristine environment, and rich historical legacy, including associations with the Silk Road. The reserve has been granted official status by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and is now managed and operated as a non-profit organisation.

Remarkably, the reserve has four diverse ecosystems; semi-desert, mountain steppes, woodlands, and alpine meadows, all boasting a rich variety of flora and fauna depicted in the new Visitors' Center for the Reserve constructed in Garni. Around 15% of the Reserve is composed of forest and 20% is open grassland meadow. Khosrov holds an impressive variety of flora comprising over 1800 species, in-

The first Democratic Republic of Armenia was established in 1918, and was also known as Ararat Republic. The territory of Mount Ararat was passed to the rule of Turkey in 1921, based on agreements between Moscow and Kars; after which Armenia became a member state in the Soviet Union.

The mountain has been a frequent source of inspiration to numerous Armenian artists and is often seen in the works of local painters, writers and poets. The mountain is depicted in numerous works by the famous Hovhannes Aivazovsky. During one of his exhibitions held in Paris, the painter was asked to what extent the Armenian theme was displayed in his works. The answer was more than extraordinary. The painter approached his painting "Noah Descending from Ararat" and proudly said, "This is our Armenia."

The mountain has found expression in the poems of such writers as Charents, Hovhannes Shiraz, Paruyr Sevak, Gevorg Emin, and Silva Kaputikyan. Mount Ararat has also appeared in many legends, particularly in those related to Mount Aragats, in which they either appear as sisters or brothers. Another legend has it that Armenian King Artavazd is chained to the boulders in the abyss of Mount Ararat and spends an eternity attempting to flee his prison.

cluding endemic, rare and endangered plants. The semi-arid areas are dominated by wormwoods, buckthorn, almond, caper and thyme. Arid grasslands have small strands of junipers, almond and maple, as well as extensive areas of oak.

Khosrov is home to 33 species of reptiles which populate a range of habitat from semi-desert to the subalpine meadowlands. The main varieties of lizards found in the Reserve are the Caucasian Agama, Azerbaijani Lizard, Snake-eyed Lizard, and the Caucasus Emerald Lizard. The main snakes found in Khosrov are the Wood Snake, Mountain Grassland Viper, and the Armenian Viper. Several varieties of rare snake species are also present, including the Golden Grass Mabuya, Black-headed Ground Snake, and the Transcaucasian Rat Snake.

Incredibly 56% of all the bird species present in Armenia can be found within the Khosrov Reserve, this amounts to a total of 193 species of which 83 are migratory. The Reserve is particularly rich in raptors with the Bearded Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Peregrine and Lanner Falcons all found in Khosrov. Species included a number of endangered genera, such as the Black Vulture, European Roller, Mongolian Finch, and the exceptionally rare Red-tailed Wheatear. A wide variety of avian habitats exist in the Reserve although perhaps none is so impressively striking as the 'Bird Fortress', a towering and heavily eroded cliff side that has been colonised by white-chested crows. Located in the Center of the Reserve, this site can only be accessed by horseback through areas of wild forest, a journey of immense interest for nature enthusiasts.

There are no less than 41 mammal species within Khosrov, including wild boar, Grey Wolf, Eurasian Lynx, Red Fox and badgers. Species include the Ussurian Spotted Deer, which was introduced in 1594 and now thrives in the area. A number of rare and endangered animal species roam wild within the park and are best observed either early in the morning or evening, these include: the Persian Leopard, the Bezoar Ibex, an impressively large horned wild goat, the Marbled Polecat, the European Wildcat, and, last but by no means least, the Brown Bear.

Access to the reserve is strictly controlled and permissions must be obtained from the Reserve Director, who is based in a headquarters building on the outskirts of Vedi to obtain a visitors pass, the cost of which will vary dependent on the itinerary that you wish to follow within the park. Tours of the park are guided by a Ranger and use park vehicles as no private transport is allowed to circulate within the Reserve.

Entering the park from the direction of Vedi, the visitor arrives at a new multi-function visitor Center which comes with an information desk, restaurant, kitchen



Caucases Wildlife Refuge

<http://set.am/>

The Caucasus Wildlife Refuge is a 2000 hectare protected area next to the Khosrov Forest State Reserve. The area has a unique biodiversity and has been leased for conservation by the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC). The Caucasus Wildlife Refuge is the first private protected area in the South-Caucasus; it is supported by the British World Land Trust organization, the Dutch committee of the IUCN (IUCN NL) and Viva Cell-MTS of Armenia.

The core of the project is a new Eco-Training Center built on the communal land of Urtsadzor village. The village, as well as the land belonging to the community, is situated in the immediate vicinity of the Khosrov Forest State Reserve. The Eco-center is an ideal starting point for outdoor activities, including hiking, horseback riding, jeep riding and wildlife watching. The center is equipped with solar thermal heating, bed rooms, kitchen and two bathrooms offering comfortable accommodation for up to eight people.

The Urtsadzor Eco-Training Center aims to improve the local population's skills to use the area's biodiversity resources sustainably. Moreover, as the community suffers from poverty and migration due to a lack in job opportunities, the Eco-Training Center will raise the local's capacities to generate income based on environmentally friendly approaches and nature conservation by offering training in eco-tourism, nature guiding, birding, and sustainable practices in agriculture. In the long term, the project aims to involve the entire community in the management and protection of a large pristine area of communal land located adjacent to the village and to the Khosrov Forest State Reserve. Additionally, the center serves as a hub for the scientific exploration of the biodiversity in the project area by cooperating with Armenian as well as international universities and research institutions.

One of the priorities of the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets is to attract nature loving tourists to the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge and to Armenia as a whole. Eco-tourism is one of the best options to offer the population of rural and remote Armenian regions additional income opportunities. Therefore in cooperation with international tour operators FPWC developed hiking and biking tours.

Utilizing the Eco Training Center as a base camp for scientific researchers will contribute to a better understanding about the interconnections between the specific habitat in the project area, anthropogenic factors, and the occurrence/non-occurrence of certain species. Currently, these areas are not well explored.

The center offers accommodation and basic equipment for field trips conducted by scientists from abroad as well as by university students who do their research in the project area. For more information contact:



and six bedrooms for up to 20 guests. The Center also has toilets and guest bathrooms. Laying close to the Visitor Center a very attractive camping area has been developed with tent pitches, toilets, barbecue, covered dining area, and even a traditional Armenian bread oven ("tonir"). The reception area also has ample parking spaces, park ranger accommodations, and large stables for the horses used by Rangers and visitors to gain access to some of the more remote areas of the Reserve.



Sun Child Eco Tours - <http://set.am/>
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Goravan Sands State Reserve

The Goravan Sands Sanctuary was nominated by the Government of Armenian SSR in 1959. In those times, it was named Gorovan Sands Sanctuary, after the old name of nearest village Gorovan. Recently, Gorovan was changed into Goravan. The Goravan Sands are represented by sandy habitats spread in elevations ranging from 850 to 950 meters above sea level, and are covered by an area of around 175 hectares. Goravan Sands Sanctuary presents a mix of sandy, clay, stone, and rocky habitats which support about 160 species of vascular plants and 40 species of vertebrates, as well as many invertebrates. In addition, the area supports 11 species of vascular plants and numerous bird species, one of which, the *Testudo Gaeca*, is acknowledged as vulnerable worldwide (IUCN, 2006).

This area is in the Center of the interest to biologists, and is included in the list of hotspots by CEPF (Caucasus Biodiversity Hotspots, 2003). However Gorovan is in a neglected state and under pressure from encroaching development for pasture, stone and sand mining, illegal collection of plants and animals, as well as waste depositing.



Khor Virap State Sanctuary

The Secretariat is pleased to announce that Armenia has designated its third Wetland of International Importance, Khor Virap Marsh (50 hectares, 39°53'16"N 044°34'18"E), a State Sanctuary located in the ancient Arax riverbed in the central part of the country, close to the capital city of Yerevan and within sight of Mount Ararat. As summarized by Ramsar Assistant Advisor Kati Wenzel, this freshwater marsh of semi-artificial origin consists mainly of reed beds fed by an irrigation canal and surrounded by drainage channels.

The site is important for over 100 species of migratory waterbirds, of which 30 species are breeding here, including the globally threatened Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) and endangered White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), as well as national threatened species such as the Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*) and Gadwall (*Anas strepera*). The site also supports a number of mammal species such as the Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*), European Otter (*Lutra lutra*), and the only non-native wild mammals such as the Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*). Large numbers of dragonfly species have settled here, including the nationally endangered *Hemianax ephippiger*.

The marsh plays a significant role in flood mitigation downstream and in sediment trapping. It is used for hunting, fishing, reed harvesting, and, to a lesser extent, for cattle grazing. The area surrounding the site is of social and cultural value, especially the Khor Virap Monastery, which was built on the site of the ruins of the ancient capital Artashat. The site itself is threatened by a decrease in water level due to unsustainable use of water for irrigation, overgrazing, fires during the winter period, and poaching. A management plan does not currently exist but is in the works of development.

Armenia presently has 3 Ramsar Sites covering 493,511 hectares. The Convention's 160 Parties have designated 1,967 wetlands, covering 190,728,075 hectares.

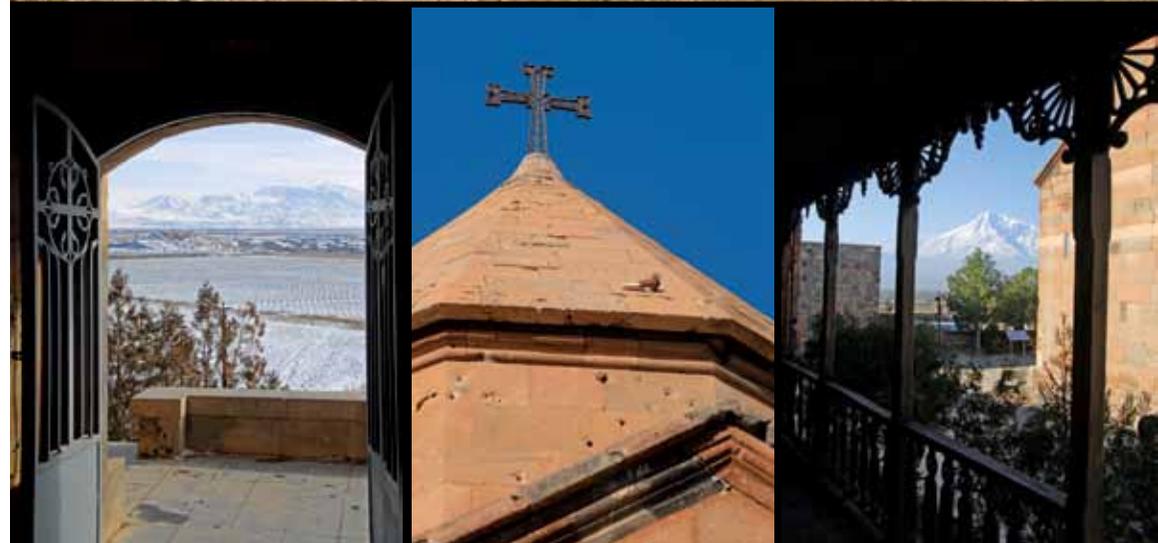
Khor Virap

Khor Virap is the leading tourism attraction in the Ararat Marz, and is as much a popular travel destination as the St. Echmiadzin Cathedral, Garni Temple and Geghard Monastery. It is reported that the monastery attracts up to one million visitors each year, although it has not been possible to validate this estimate. Khor Virap has a central place in the history of Armenia due to the legend of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the first Armenian Catholicos, who was imprisoned there for 13 years during the reign of the King Tiridates III. Ultimately, the king was converted to Christianity and Armenia became the first country to officially adopt the religion in 301 AD. Gregory was sent to Caesaria to be consecrated a bishop, where he and his children and descendants became the hereditary Catholicoses of Armenia. Later in 642 AD, Catholicos Nerses built a chapel over the jail-dungeon on the hill of Khor Virap, which was the site of the ancient capital city of Artashat, built by King Artashes I, founder of the Artashesid dynasty around 180 BC.

The monastery has a rich history behind it. During the reign of the King Tiridates III the Great, Gregory the Illuminator was trying to spread Christianity in Armenia, which was not approved by the pagan ruler. Gregory did not obey the king and refused to worship pagan Gods. The former ordered his guards to tie the Christian's hands and throw him into a deep well. King Tiridates left Gregory to die in the dark dungeon where he was imprisoned. He spent long 13 years in that dark, damp and small place, but survived due to the kindness of a woman's tender heart. When Gregory the Illuminator was still in prison, Tiridates enthusiastically followed the lead of his friend, the Emperor Diocletian, in savagely persecuting Christians. According to legend, a group of virgin nuns, led by Gayane, came to Armenia as they fled the Roman persecution of their Christian faith. Tiridates heard about the group and the legendary beauty of one of its members, Rhipsimé. He brought them to the palace and demanded to marry the beautiful virgin; she refused. The king had the whole group tortured and killed. God ultimately punished Tiridates' misdeeds by depriving him of his sanity. Tiridates III adopted the behaviour of a wild boar, aimlessly wandering around in the forest. Local legends speak of an illness that no doctor could cure, as the king stepped closer and closer to the jaws of death. In her sleep, Tiridates' sister Khosrovidukht had a dream where God appeared to tell her how bringing Gregory out of his prison would save the king. This vision repeated five times but no one believed that Gregory would be alive after so many years had passed since the Christian's imprisonment in a pit of snakes. Ultimately, Khosrovidukht dared to tell her brother of her vision. The king immediately ordered Gregory's release from his dungeon, should he still be alive. After Gregory was brought before Tiridates III, the king was miraculously cured of his illness in 301. Thus, Gregory was rewarded with the official conversion of Armenia to Christianity, wherein the country became the first to officially recognize the religion as its own. Gregory was sent to Caesaria to be consecrated a bishop, and he and his children and descendants became the hereditary Catholicoses of Armenia. Sometime after Tiridates III's baptism, Gregory baptised the whole of the royal family, including royal consort' Ashkhen, his entire court, and his army on the Euphrates River.

Later in 642, Catholicos Nerses built a chapel on the sacred land; from here the most wonderful view of the Mount Ararat can be admired. The monastery of Khor Virap is an attractive spot for a very large number of tourists throughout the whole world.

Saint Astvatsatsin or the Holy Mother Church is the main building of the Khor Virap Armenian Apostolic Church Monastery. It is of domed hall design and was built in the 17th century. The church has greatly suffered from various earthquakes, with the most disastrous being the earthquake of 1679. The church was repaired in 1703, and later in 1970 to 1980. Unlike the medieval Armenian churches that came with cruciform central domed layouts, Saint Astvatsatsin Church represents a domed hall with two annexes on both sides of the apse. Adjacent to the church, on the western side, there is a belfry built in the 19th century. Visitors should note that Saint Astvatsatsin is an operating church and therefore the rules set by the Armenian Apostolic church should be followed, especially when attending service; women should wear head scarves, and men should take off their hats or caps.



The walled monastery complex, which sits on a rocky outcrop above the river plain, offers magnificent views of Mount Ararat as well as a fine example of early Armenian ecclesiastic architecture, the ruins of nearby Ancient Artashat and the Khor Virap State Nature Reserve. The monastery site, which has been extensively restored, is well presented. The hill of Khor Virap and the territory adjoining it were the site of the important early Armenian capital city of ancient Artashat, built by King Artashes I, founder of the Artashesid dynasty around 180 BC, can be found. According to legend, the Carthaginian general Hannibal, who spent his twilight years in flight from a vengeful Rome, inspired the founding of the city. On the upper slopes of the hills, extensive excavations have revealed the foundations of residential and other structures, along with Mediterranean-style art and other traces of a rich Hellenic culture. Ancient coins and potsherds can still be found, showing links to the whole of the ancient world. Gregory the Illuminator led the destruction of Artashat's famous pagan temples to the goddess Anahit and god Tir in AD 314.



Ancient Artashat



The ancient city of Artashat was founded by King Artashes in 190 BC, on the banks of the Arax River. The city was built at the confluence of two rivers, the Arax and the Metsamor which together formed a formidable natural defence for the city. Ancient Artashat was a rival to the best cities in the Roman Empire and maintained its status as one of the preeminent cities of the Near East for 600 years. The city was centered on a citadel on the site of the present day Khor Virap monastery. Artashat was built by one of the greatest of Armenian monarchs, King Artashes I (189-160 BC). Excavations showed that in the territory where the city was built, there once stood a large Urartian city. There is some uncertainty, however, over who built the city; Plutarch and Strabo claimed the site was chosen and designed by Punic Carthaginian Military Commander Hannibal who resided in the court of Artashes I after Antiochus the Great lost the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BC. In contrast, according to Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi, the city was built by Artashes I alone. During the rule of Artavazd II, Hellenistic culture had reached its peak.

Artashat was captured in 58 AD, and a year later destroyed and burned by the Roman commander Corbulo. In 63 AD, Armenian and Parthian troops defeated Romans and the Roman Emperor Nero agreed that Tiridates, the brother of the Parthian King, could occupy the Armenian throne if the latter received the crown from Rome. Tiridates I (63-88 AD) established the dynasty of the Arshakunis. Tiri-

dates returned from Rome in 66 AD and rebuilt Artashat. Years later (114 AD) Roman Emperor Trajan invaded Armenia and captured Artashat. In 163, Artashat was once again in ruins after Armenians rebelled against Roman rule but lost. The city of Artashat remained Armenia's primary cultural, political and economic center until the 4th century; when it was destroyed by Shapur II.

For around 600 years, Artashat managed to preserve the title of one of the most populous cities of the East. Within the city, a citadel was constructed to the northwest of the Khor Virap Monastery site. The citadel included a palace, military garrisons and arsenal, as well as administrative buildings. The preserved remains of the palace cover an area of 2750 square meters, which is believed to be where Carthaginian Military Commander Hannibal once resided when he was in Artashat.

Artashat was one of the principle trade Centers of the ancient world; as a consequence, the city was connected to the other trade cities of the Middle East and Mediterranean. Witness to its importance as a trade hub is seen by the silver and gold coins belonging to other countries and cities found on the site. Interestingly, the coins of Artashat had an inscription on them which reads "Artashat, the Capital" in clear letters, which has left archaeologists somewhat baffled. Also important are the seals which were found in the city's hills. Over 8000 clay seals were discovered, dating back to 180 BC to 59 AD. Around thirty of those seals come with Aramaic and Greek inscriptions.

The city walls of Artashat ran for over 10 kilometres, 5000m of which have so far been excavated. The walls surrounded the entire city, including the city hills and the lower town. The second fortress wall in the acropolis was Urartian, reconstructed using Hellenistic military principles of defence; corner turrets were replaced with 13-15 meter diameter round towers. Five of the city gates have so far been excavated; these have an average width of 1.5-2 meters, and each had its own pair of towers.

The city was sophisticated in other ways; it was equipped with running water, waste disposal systems, and public baths. The city received its drinking water from Vedi, via large clay pipes. The water system was enough to support up to 100,000 people. Smaller pipes carried the water to the city's upper districts. Drainage channels were uncovered in different parts of the city. Armenians were familiar with the construction techniques of new types of structures, the baths which were now quite common in the Greco-Roman world. Two private baths were discovered on Hill 8 and a third thermal bath next to the Tir-Apollo temple, which used water from the Arax River.

Figure: the Ruins of Ancient Artashat

In spite of the enormous historic significance of this site, its scale and the huge range of artefacts that it has given up ancient Artashat remains almost completely unexploited as a tourism resource. It is believed that with improved access, signposting, interpretation and visitor facilities Artashat could be developed as a major attraction clustered with Khor Virap and the Khor Virap Reserve.

Masis

Masis is a town located on the left bank of the Hrazdan River immediately southwest of Yerevan, and is now effectively part of the city suburbs. The town is notable for railroad goods station that serves Yerevan, and used to connect the capital city with the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic until the closing of the border with Azerbaijan. The population in 2009 was 22,200 people and has little to recommend it to the tourist by way of cultural or historic sites but was extensively remodelled and developed during the Soviet era. That said it is one of the closest settlements to Mount Ararat and Little Ararat and from most areas of the town these twin peaks are visible as can the lights of some of the Turkish villages on its slopes at night.



Dvin

On the territory of Ararat marz are the ruins of another ancient Armenian capital city – Dvin. Built on prehistoric foundations, Dvin's emergence into history begins in 330s, when Arsacid king Khosrov II Kotak (r. 330-338) founded the city on a hill not far from old capital at Artashat (the word "Dvin" is a middle Persian word for "Hill"). Some 150 years after its foundation, in 481, Lord Nerses Bagratuni proclaimed Dvin Armenia's capital.

At its peak, Dvin's population may have reached 100,000, with Armenians, Jews, Arabs, Kurds, and others living together in reasonable harmony under a Muslim governor appointed by the Caliph in Baghdad. The Arab geographers reported that Dvin (called Dabil in Arabic), exported a wide range of wool and silk textiles, "Armenian wares" of a quality famous throughout the Muslim world, some of which are elaborately figured and dyed with cochineal. Excavations at Dvin from the 1940s through the 1970s revealed metal-working, glass-blowing, different luxury goods, and gorgeous glazed pottery, as well as coins from a mint that functioned at least until 930 AD. The city was walled, with multiple gates labelled for the roads they served: to Ani, Tbilisi, Nakhichevan, and beyond. The citadel was once thought to be impregnable.

The city was wracked by an earthquake in 863, rebuilt, and then almost destroyed by a second, more severe quake in 893, which buried 70,000 inhabitants alive. Rebuilt, Dvin continued as an administrative and religious center. It was the Seat of the Catholicos from 475 to 914 (some sources claim this lasted until 918). Byzantium captured Dvin from the Bagratunis in 1045, and then lost it to the Seljuks in 1064.

Its last flowering was the Zakarian period, with the eviction of the Seljuks by a joint Armenian-Georgian army led by the Zakarian brothers, Ivaneh and Zakareh, in the late 12th century. Unfortunately, time has not been kind to the site, and the intact mud-brick structures exposed at the time of excavation have, in most cases, slumped into inexpressive heaps. Much of the ancient site is presumably unexcavated, spread out beneath the surrounding fields and villages.

Ararat

Ararat is a town in the east of the Ararat Province, some 42 kilometres southeast of Yerevan.

The cement factory of Ararat has been operating since 1927; it is a most striking landmark and, with its dust plume, can be seen from a considerable distance. A product of the Soviet era, most of the town is composed of apartments erected to accommodate the workers. In 1935, the initial settlement was merged with the village of Davalu and the town was officially founded in 1939, to be renamed Ararat in 1947. The town has two major factories: the Ararat Cement factory and the Ararat Gold Recovery Company, the latter of which extracts gold from the raw ore sent from the mine in Sotk, located 20 kilometres (12 miles) east of Lake Sevan. The manufacturing of building materials is also active in the Ararat city.

Kaqavaberd

Kakavaberd is one of the few Armenian fortresses that are relatively well-preserved. The fortress is a great travel destination because it is a rare historical site left intact. Kaqavaberd, also known as Geghi Berd, is a fortress located upon a ridge overlooking the Azat River gorge at Khosrov State Reserve, with fortified walls 2.5 metres wide and up to 10 metres high. It is inaccessible from three of its sides because of the steep terrain. Towers at the north-eastern side are 8 to 10 meters tall. Within the fortress, one can find the ruins of a church and other structures.



The fortress was first mentioned by Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi (John V the Historian) in the 9th-10th centuries as being controlled by an Armenian noble Bagratuni family. He wrote that in 924, after losing a battle at the island of Sevan, the Arab commander and Chief Beshir went on to attack the fortress of Kakavaberd. He was later beaten by Armenian military leader Gevorg Marzpetuni.



St. Karapet Monastery

Tucked into a fold of the Urts Range overlooking a back valley of the Ararat region, S. Karapet Vank is a wonderfully remote and atmospheric spot for a picnic. The church which was constructed in 1254 is often padlocked but is well preserved, with a graveyard, a ruined bell tower, and the remains of a number of outbuildings. The road passes broken khachkars, faint ruined farm buildings, as well as hawks and harriers hunting across the sheep-cropped hillsides. To reach the site, take the main Yeghegnadzor road 19km from the Yeraskh circle, turn left on the paved road just before Urtsalanj, and then passes through Lanjar village, where you crest a small pass at 2.5km; from this point a clear dirt road follows the contour line off to the left. The monastery of St. Karapet is 7.1km along this road, which is rocky and quite steep in many places, as well as muddy after the rains; this is a route for 4x4 vehicles.

Alternately, the road continues to the village of Lusashogh beyond the St. Karapet junction, where, turning right and then left, you reach the old foundations of a church, of which a shrine known by the locals as Surp Hovhannes remains standing. A track leads on to northern Lanjanist, with a ruined old church those interested can discover. The next village is Shaghap, with another ruined 12th century church where the road joins the road from Vedi to the Khosrov Reserve at Urtsadzor.



Paruyr Sevak House Museum

This village is a new settlement named after the writer Paruyr Sevak, whose house is now a museum and the only notable feature of the village.

Paruyr Sevak (1924 – 1971) was an Armenian poet and literary critic. He is considered one of the greatest Armenian poets of the 20th century. Sevak died on June 17, 1971, in a car crash while on a drive back to Yerevan. His wife also died in the car crash. He was buried in the backyard of his home, in Zangakatun, which later became a museum, while the house-museum is located in his hometown and has displays of the poet's belongings, while the fresco in the building tells one about the indivisible fates of Sevak.

Azat Caves

The Azat Caves are found in Khosrov Forest State Preserve in Armenia. The main cave has ruins of an ancient human settlement. Access to the preserve is only allowed with express permission, and the main cave can only be reached by foot.



Aghjots Vank Monastery

Aghjots Vank is a 13th-century monastery situated along a tributary of the Azat River Valley within the Khosrov State Reserve, located a half mile walk from the hamlet of Mets Gilanlar, and near the villages of Goght and Garni (approximately 3–4 miles). Not far from this location, the fortress of Kakavaberd and the monastic complex of Havuts Tar can be found.

Though in Ararat Marz, this site is easier to access from the village of Garni in the Kotayk Marz, where you must first enter the Khosrov Reserve on rough dirt 4x4 track which continues down into the Reserve. Instead, turn upstream along the Azat River for 5km and cross a small bridge. Turning left before the gate along an even rougher track, brings one in 200m to Baiburt, where a simple, ruined basilica stands alone located left of the road, among ruins of old dwellings. Baiburt now houses three families of Reserve employees. There are, allegedly, remains from the pre-Christian period in the vicinity.

Another few kilometres uphill past Baiburt, on a poor jeep track, is the hamlet of Mets Gilanlar, with a few simple wooden huts. Turning left just before Gilanlar, where a less travelled track winds around the side of the hill, the track continues to a valley across from which are the ruins of the Aghjots Vank and St. Stepanos Church. According to local folklore, the monastery was founded by Grigor Lusavorich on the site of the martyrdom of Stepanos, a companion to St. Hripsime at the time of Armenia's conversion to Christianity in 301 AD. The early Armenian historian Agathangelos wrote that Hripsimé was a Christian nun in Rome, was to be forcefully married to the Roman emperor Diocletian. She and the abbess Gayané among other nuns fled the tyrant emperor and left to Armenia. On instructions from from Armenian King Trdat discovered where the nuns were hiding, and fell in love with Hripsimé. After her refusal of his advances, Hripsimé was tortured and martyred at the location of Saint Hripsime Church, while Gayané was tortured and martyred at a separate location where Saint Gayane Church was later built in 630.



The exact date that the monastery was founded is unknown, although it is known is that the monastery was funded by Princess Zaza during the 13th century. The complex of Aghjots Vank consists of the church of Surb Stepanos, a church of Surb Poghos Petros. St. Stepanos was built during the early 13th century and is the main church within the complex. It has a cruciform plan, four portals, and the vaulted church of St. Poghos Petros (built in 1270) attached to the northern wall. Poghos Petros has remarkable bas-relief carvings of Saints Peter and Paul over the portal.



Vardashat

To reach this village, you leave the main road to Yeghegnadzor as it ascends and climb a short stretch of motorable track towards the village itself. While Vardashat is a less than remarkable settlement, its location offers fine views over the valley towards Shaghap. Moving upward from the village requires a 4X4 vehicle as well as a local guide; a spectacular track winds through high meadows carpeted in wild flowers and herbs, eventually arriving at the ruins of a long abandoned village and church, known locally as the 'White Chapel'. Sitting at the edge of a re-entrant and under the towering mountains, this really is a special place and well worth the trip. The views that you are offered to the west of this site over the Shaghap Valley and mountain are amazing from this precipitous outcrop. More than a scenic spot, this mountain cap is also popular for para- and hang-gliders who launch from here to soar in the up currents and thermals to the valley floor far below.

Zangakan

The agricultural village of Zangakan lies at the edge of the province, just before the Tukh Maquk passes over into neighbouring Vayots Dzor. The main road, which runs along the eastern edge of the village, is generally lined with smallholders selling local fruit, witness to the extensive areas of orchards around the village. A turn off the main road into the village will reward you with a glimpse into Armenian mountain rural life, where most of the houses utilize random stone walling in a robust local vernacular architecture, and the road quickly evolves into an unsurfaced track leading to an isolated church set amidst apple orchards, by a small mountain stream. Locals may also direct you to an isolated rock monolith that bears the traces of another ancient chapel.



Wineries of Ararat

We cannot talk about Ararat without talking about food and drink, as this province, more than any other, is the pantry of Armenia and the 'mother of wine'; while other areas may claim, with some justification, to be the cradle of wine making, it is here in Ararat that the grape truly flourishes. Much of the valley is given over to vineyards and almost every village seems to boast a winery producing a range of wines, generally of exceptionally fine character and quality. The jewel in the crown of these endeavours is, however, the production of fine Armenian Cognac, a drink once rumoured to have been favoured by Sir Winston Churchill.

One of the signature products of the Ararat region is its wine and cognac. Yet in this crucible of vine cultivation, its potential as a tourist attraction is almost entirely untapped. While other wine growing areas of the world, such as France, California and Australia, have all developed wine tourism as an important element of their product and encourage the promotion of wine tours and the development of vineyard visitor centers, no such initiatives have been launched in Armenia. True, some producers have developed shops on their sites, but these generally function only as retail outlets and do not seek to engage and inform the visitors or offer a wider range of services.

Wine tourism, also known as enotourism, is focused on the discovery and appreciation of wines. Although this is a relatively new segment to the industry, it has experienced remarkable growth and is now the cornerstone of tourism in many of the world's leading wine producing regions, such as southwest France, Spain, Italy, California, and South Africa's Cape Region. This type of tourism's purpose is or includes the tasting, consumption and purchase of wines, often at or near the source of production, and even taking part in activities such as the grape harvest.

Most visits to the wineries, or vineyards, take place at or near the site where the wine is produced. Visitors typically learn the history of the winery, see how the wine is made, and then taste the wines. At some wineries, accommodation in a small guest house is also offered. Many visitors buy the wines made by the winery on the premises; in some cases such sales are reported to account for up to 33% of their annual income. As one of the oldest wine producing regions in the world with an immense range of rare indigenous grape varieties, Armenia has much to offer enotourism, not only in wines but also in fine cognac.



ARTS AND CRAFTS TOURISM

The province has a considerable number of artists and traditional craftsmen. Notably, there are carpet makers, painters, potters and sculptors who practice their art in a number of locations in Ararat. Not only are the studios of these craftsmen interesting additions to the tourism itinerary, but they also have the potential to host residential teaching courses for tourists or city dwellers. With its dramatic landscapes and historic monuments, including Mount Ararat and the Khor Virap Monastery, the province offers fabulous vistas and subject matter, as well as a tremendous quality of light to amateur artists.



A fine example of the artistic talent that lies within Ararat is that of Michael Petrosyan. Michael, whose studio is located in Nor Kharbert Village, is one of the most famous artists/rug and carpet masters in Armenia; he has been nominated for several international grand prizes. From the gates of his house you begin to notice the art in everything; the basement of his house has been made into a studio with a mixture of old traditional colouring and modern creative style. Inside this room tourists can touch the spirit of art, hear stories from Michael, and enjoy coffee with Armenian sweets.



Turkmen Amira's Mausoleum

The Argavand Funerary Tower is a Qara Qoyunlu mausoleum built in 1413 in honour of Turkmen Amira Pir Husein, ruler of Yerevan. It is located in the village of Argavand, near the Armenian capital Yerevan; interestingly until 1946 the village was known as Jafarabad. An Arabic inscription on the monument reads;

“In the name of Allah gracious and merciful! Allah... there is no god besides Him, alive (or) real. Neither drowsiness nor sleep can seize Him. He owns everything in the heavens and on the earth. Who will plead, except with His permission? He knows what was before them and what will be after them, while they perceive nothing from His knowledge other than He wishes. His throne embraces the heavens and the earth, and He is not burdened by guarding them. Indeed great and high is He. Ordered to build this blessed tomb the greatest, the noblest, abundant in generosity and magnanimity, the support of kings and sultans, refuge for the weak and the poor, guardian of scientists and those who seek knowledge, aid to the poor and wayfarers, the glory of the state and the faith, Emir Pir-Hussein, son of the late absolved Emir elevated to His patronage, the most merciful Emir Sa’ad, may the earth lie light upon him, in the days of the reign of the Great Sultan, the most generous Khaqan, the Sultan of Sultans in the East and the West, the aid of the state and the faith, Pir Budaq Khan and Yusef Noyän, may Allah perpetuate their power, on the fifteenth of Rajab of the year 816 (October 11, 1413).”

St. Sarkis Church, Argavand Village

The date of the construction of the Church of St. Sarkis of Argavand is inscribed in the record above the northern entrance to the church, where it is inscribed how the church has been built thanks to “the donations of the Armenian faithful”. The construction was concluded on August 19, 1897, and His Eminence Archbishop Nerses consecrated the church.

During the Soviet period, the church was always open and served as a chapel where the faithful flock has burnt candles and prayed. Since 1997, the church has been reconstructed and renovated; a bell-tower has been built by the efforts and donations of the local population. Presently, the church is functioning, church services, sacraments and rites are constantly performed, and Divine Liturgy is celebrated.

ROUTES AND ITINERARIES

There is certainly plenty to see and do in Ararat, while its proximity to the capital city of Yerevan makes the Marz the ideal destination for day excursions. It is only with great difficulty that the numerous villages and attractions of Ararat can be woven into a simple tour itinerary, further complicated by very low level of tourist accommodation in the province. Over time, this situation may change; but for the moment, a base in Yerevan and day excursions is your best option. While there are many possible routes to take, there two particular excursion themes; one based on culture and history, with the second on nature.

The axis between Khor Virap and Dvin is rich in historic and cultural attractions, including:

- Khor Virap Monastery
- Ancient Artashat, and
- Dvin

These sites span a vast period of Armenian history, including the Greco-Roman period and the foundations of Christianity. Visits to all sites can be accomplished in a day and numerous side excursions can be readily incorporated; these include:

- A visit to the Proshyan Winery
- A visit to the Khor Virap Wildlife Reserve, and
- Visits to local artists and potters in and around Artashat.

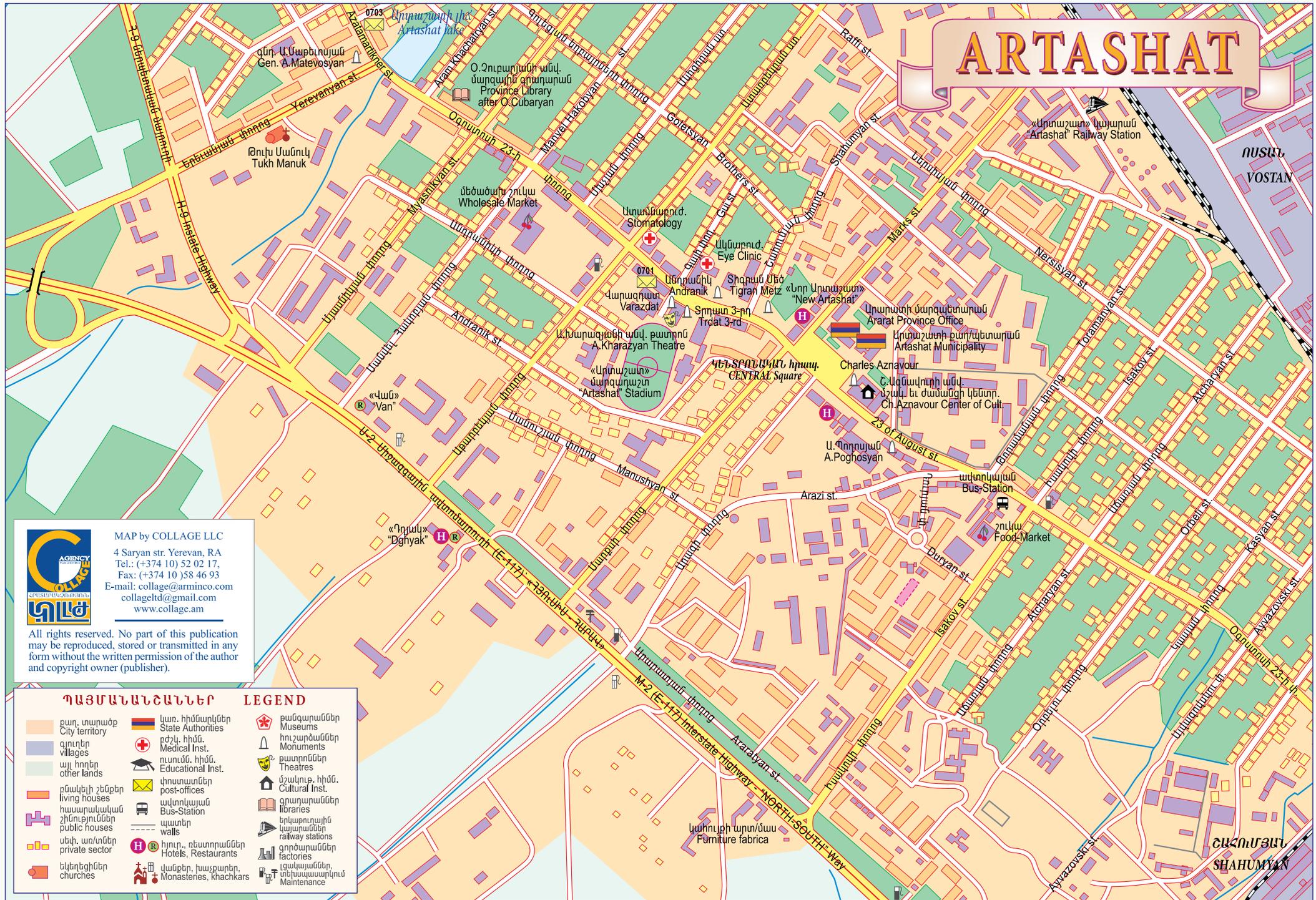
The second excursion, which is nature-based, centers on a visit to the Khosrov Reserve. This excursion must be arranged well in advance with the Khosrov management as unaccompanied visits are not permitted.

Finally, we cannot talk about Ararat without talking about food and drink as this province, Ararat more than any other region is the larder of Armenia. It is also known as the 'mother of wine' while other areas may claim, with some justification that they are the cradle of wine making it is here in Ararat that the grape truly flourishes and abounds. Much of the valley is given over to vineyards and almost every village seems to boast a winery producing a range of wines, generally of exceptionally fine character and quality. The jewel in the crown of these endeavours is however the production of fine Armenian Cognac, a drink of international repute.

Ararat, which lies just to the south of Yerevan, is above all an excursion destination easily accessible from the capital and from the main Yerevan-Tehran highway, which passes through it. This accessibility has meant that the province has never really developed significant accommodation facilities, which makes it extremely difficult for visitors to find suitable overnight lodging. The exception to this situation is the presence of several B&B establishments in and around Vedi, which serve visitors to the Khosrov Reserve.



ARTASHAT



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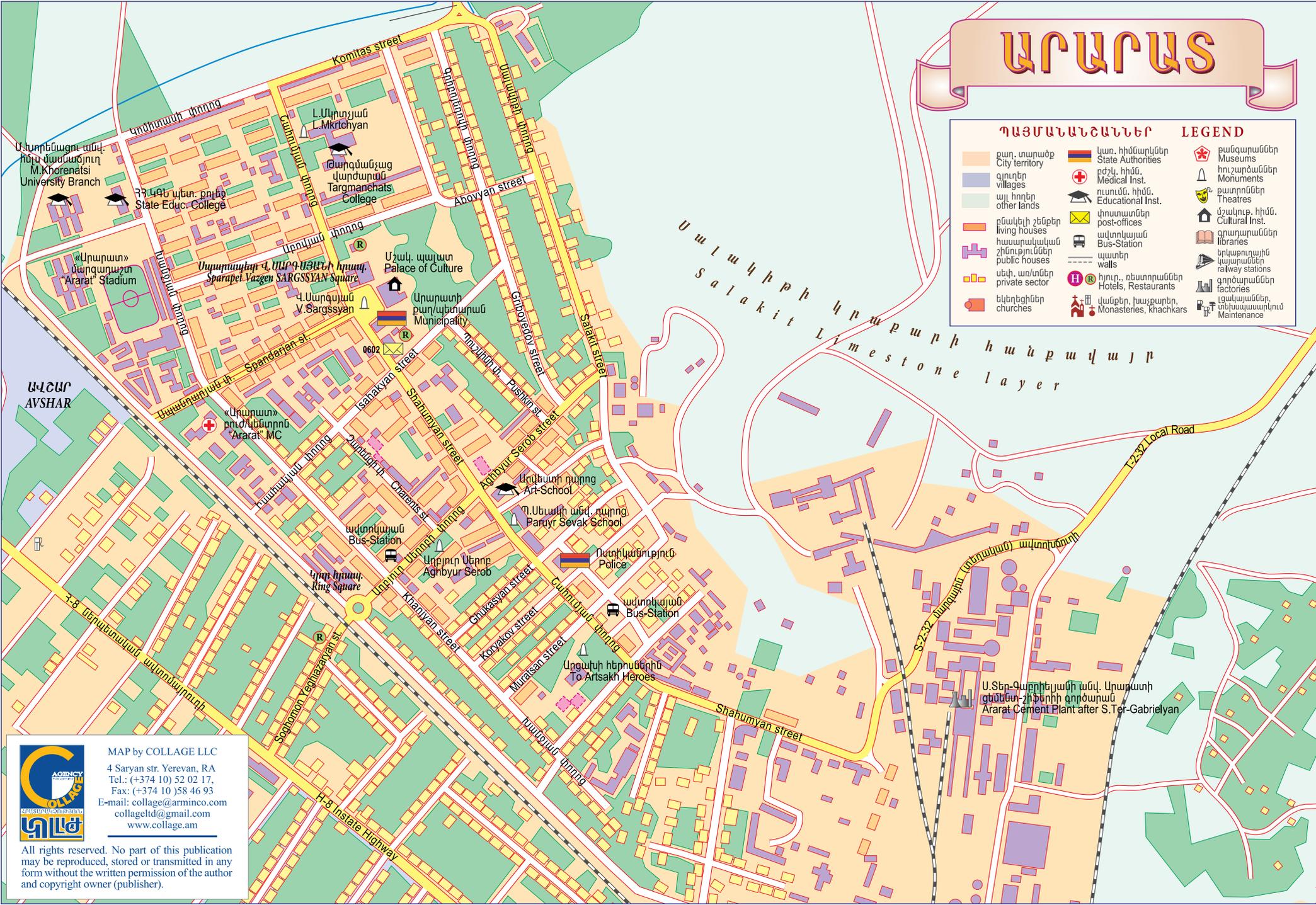
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| գյուղեր
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Medical Inst. | հուշարձաններ
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Bus-Station | գրադարաններ
libraries |
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private sector | պատեր
walls | երկաթուղային կայարաններ
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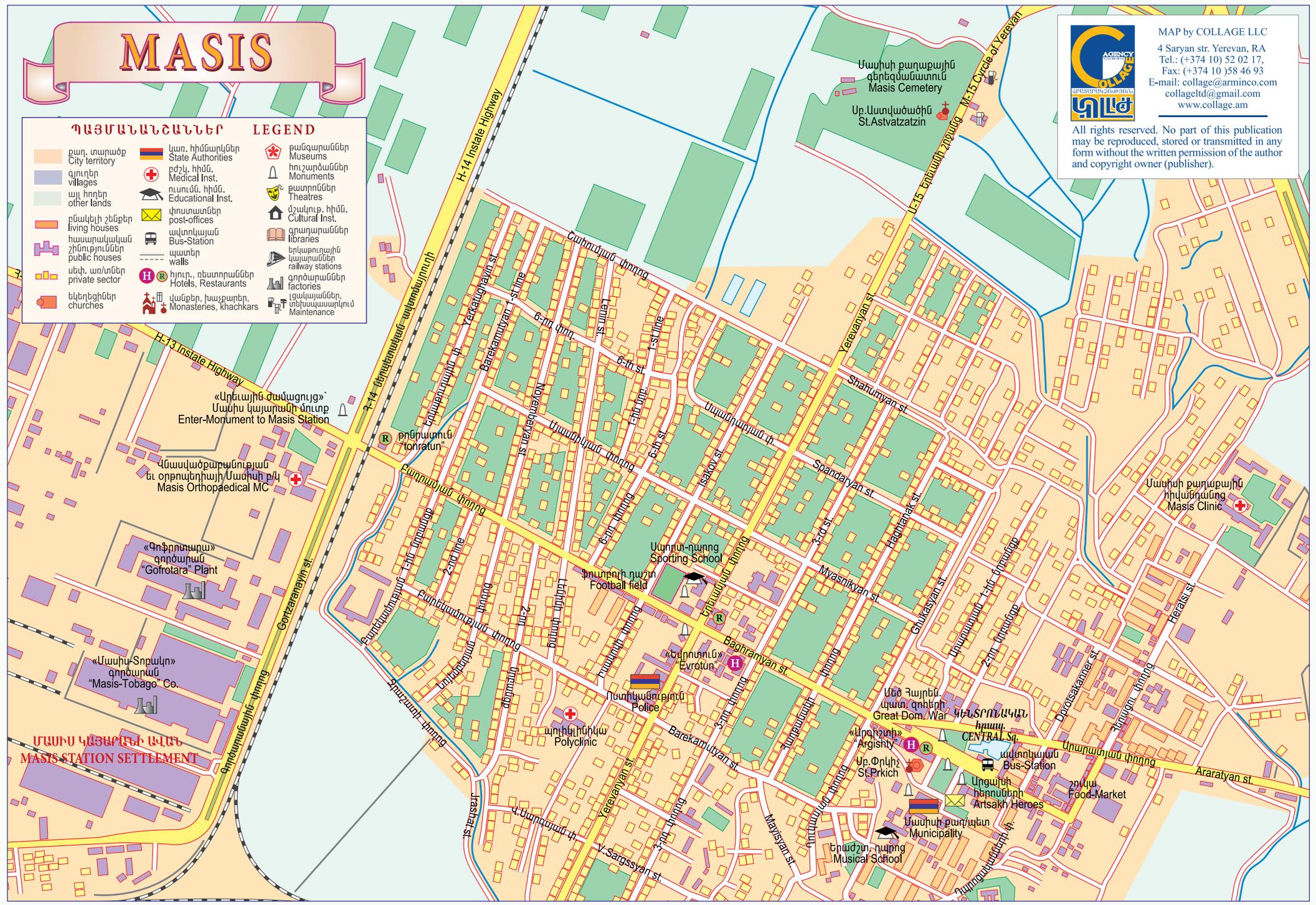
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