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TSAGHKADZOR

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By [Rick Ney](#)Maps by [Rafael Torossian](#)Edited by [Bella Karapetian](#)

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Tsaghkadzor ▲

(DD 40.53281 x 44.72044)

✳️ **TSAGHKADZOR - ՇԱՂԿԱԶՈՐ** ("Flower Canyon", before Kecharuik, Tsaghkotsadzor,

Tsaghkuniats Dzor, Tsakhnots and till 1949 Darachicak, elev. 1837, pop. 1645) is surrounded by forests on the eastern slope of Mt. Tsaghkuniats (2820.5 m). Located in one of the most beautiful areas of the country, the village exists as a resort, its once pristine hunting grounds for the rulers of Armenia now teeming with modern tourists hot-dogging down its ski runs or lounging in the cool summer breezes at any of a number of pensionats, hotels, motels and camps. Second only to Lake Sevan for the summer trade (only 20 km away), a growing number of "Novi Armeniyi" commuters between the two resorts, basking on the beaches of Sevan by day, partying at one of the disco-bars in Tsaghkadzor at night.



In the winter, all eyes are on Tsaghkadzor, which is still Armenia's only ski resort. Until other, better ski runs are built, if you want to downhill ski, this is where you come. Impromptu winter festivals pop up each year, drawing large groups of the in-crowd who pluck up their Kodak-courage to side-slip downhill but feel (and look) more in place at one of the new lodgings popping up in town. Enough of the family trade continues, and locals and visitors alike are friendly and open, something not seen much more upscale, western resorts.

New restaurants and bars add to a cosmopolitan atmosphere that somehow mixes well with the historical, family-oriented aspect of the resort, if it drives up prices. Like Sevan, Tsaghkadzor is in danger of pricing itself out of business, something to watch. In the meantime, cheaper spots exist, and if you don't mind going rustic, it can be pretty affordable.

The village is also the location of the Olympic Sports Center, one of the most popular training sites in the former Soviet Union before falling on hard times in the post-Soviet world. The center is in a constant state of renewal, now making its way as both a training center with new facilities (including a state-of-the-art Olympic pool) and a resort hotel.

The village is also the location of the reconstructed Kecharis Monastery and a number of hiking trails that comb the surrounding forests and alpine meadows.

BACKGROUND ▲

History Tsaghkadzor's history goes back to the prehistoric era, inhabitants logging and hunting in the dense forests that covered the Tsaghkuniats Range. The town was built over earlier settlements going back to the Bronze and Iron Ages and was a part of the Urartian conquests recorded in inscriptions attributed to King Rusa. Tsaghkadzor was and was one of the Persian King Sardur's favorite retreats and hunting areas during the Persian period of occupation.

It was later a part of the Arshakuni holdings, the early medieval historian Moses Khorenatsi describing "Tsaghkotsadzor" or "Tsaghkuniats" as one of the most important settlements in Varazhnunik province, controlled by the powerful Varazhnuni nakharar family who "lent" the hunting lodge and game preserve to Arshakuni kings. The hunting is no longer as good as it once was, when hunters could spend weeks hunting Stags, Roe Deer and Wild boar, as the occasional Mountain Lion and Javelin, reputedly piling trophy kills as high as banqueting halls, roasting the most prized kills for days-long banquets. By the 20th c. deforestation and hunting (see "Ecology" below) had reduced the area and fauna to below subsistence levels.

In the 6th c the area came into possession of the once powerful Kamsarakans, who had been almost wiped out by Arshak II (mid 4th c) but rebounded by marriage alliance with the Varazhnunis in Kotaiik. In the 9th c the Varazhnunis-Kamsarakans repeated their act, this time making alliance with the Pahlavunis, a branch of the Bagratuni royal family. The Pahlavunis renamed the site Tsakhots ("flower bed").

The town was also known as Kecharis or Kecharuk, after the 10th-13th cc Kecharis Monastery, in the center of the town, founded by [Grigor \(Magistros\) Pahlavuni](#) with the construction of its first church, S. Grigor Lusavorich in 1033, followed by S. N'shan in 1051. The monastery, town and region fell to the Seljuks a few years later, its fate tied to the ability of the Pahlavunis to placate their new overlords.

In the 12th c the region changed hands again, this time by the Georgian Orbeli (Orbelian) kings, related to the Pahlavunis, and who granted the area to the Zakarian brothers in return for their success at liberating Georgia and northern Armenia. The Zakarians in turn sold the region to the Khaghbakians (later known as the Proshians), who held it until their collapse under Mongol and Shaddadid invasions. The monastery, town and region was devastated by 14th-15th Timurid invasions, its population decimated during the long Ottoman-Persian wars of the 16th-18th cc.

In the 16th c it was renamed again, this time "Darachichak" by Persian Shahs, a name it kept for almost 400 years. By the early 18th c the regional government used to perform an Armenian version of the British Raja summer move, relocating the entire government from the stifling summer heat of Yerevan to the cooler climes at Tsaghkadzor. Few relics of this time remain, when it could take a week or two to perform the transition, and the entire upper class made the annual trek uphill to both work in a more pleasant atmosphere and make the summer rounds of upper society gatherings and dinners. Unlike their British counterparts, the Persian government was a more sedate season, Armenians restricted in their freedom and ability to have what we would call a "season". But like their counterparts in India, the affect of a foreign upper class was as humiliating and difficult, and fermented the seeds of revolt that would appear with the Russian Armies in the early 19th c.

By the 19th c few Armenians lived in the region but the Russian-Persian and Russian Turkish wars of 1801-1806 and especially 1828-1829 resulted in an influx of Armenian settlers, immigrants escaping the wars to the west and south. The 1828 treaty of Turkmanchai formerly joined the region to the Yerevan gubernia, ending 900 years of Turko-Persian influence. Darachichak continued to be a hunting retreat, this time for wealthy

industrialists and merchants from Yerevan and Tiflis (Tbilisi), who prized the clean air and hunting trophies in the thick forests.

Its name as finally changed to Tsaghkadzor in 1947, ushering a new age for the town. Some say Tsaghkadzor's charmed life began in the mid 20th c, when Soviet authorities created a modern resort at the town, converting the old mansions and houses into pensionats and rest areas for the proletariat. It did equalize things, making a heretofore haven for the idle rich into a workman's vacation stop (though party bigwigs grabbed the choicest spots). Tsaghkadzor was also a popular artist retreat, painted or sculpted by [Martiros Sarian](#), [Hakob Kojoian](#), [Minas Avetsian](#) and Levon Tokmadjian (contemporary sculptor, creator of the Yengibaryan statue in front of the circus in Yerevan).

When the Soviet Union collapsed the area went through a short period of decline but quickly rebounded, privatizing venues and is now experiencing something of a building boom in the 2000's. still it maintains its charms, and if anything, the new construction means public spaces that were once neglected are now better maintained, in it self a miracle of the new Armenia.



Weather. With summer average highs of +17c (80F) and lows of +15 (59F) and average humidity of only 20%, the resort is a welcome respite from the 45C (113F) highs of August in Yerevan.

Winter weather is also pleasant, with abundant snow fall followed by sunny days and winter average lows of -2C (28F).

Springs are cool and wet (wildflowers peak in May), autumns cool and dry.

The average number of sunny days per year is 280.

Ecology The Teghenis Range averages 2846m high and forested up to 2400m. The area still hosts a variety of species, despite their eminent danger of extinction. The forests are populated with oak, maple, lime and pine trees, with small stands of just about every variety found in Armenia.

Fauna include deer, fox, rabbit, and the every decreasing populations of bear. A large variety of bird species call the area home, including [mountain forest](#), [mountain slope](#), [subalpine](#) and [alpine](#) (see p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**)

Flora varies according to altitude, topography and time of year. Spring is the best time to catch the flowery display, with summer flowers blooming in the highest elevation in July-August. On the edge of the forests and in clearings you can find white and blue campanulas, geraniums, impatiens, various ferns and wild roses. Further up, in subalpine and alpine country (2400-2800m) there are grassy meadows with wild iris, Ornithalgam, Chartolepis and poppies (orientale). The alpine country features dwarf rosette forming plants with large bright colors.

Dangers The area was once very rich ecologically; you have only to look at the existing forests to imagine what all of Kotaik once looked like, with teeming forests and thousands of Roe Deer and wild boar inhabiting the wooded areas. Beginning around the Persian era, and accelerating with the Russian Tsarist period the wild population dwindled, as much from the deforestation as from hunting, and the remaining wild animals—all listed in the red Book of Endangered Species—face ever increasing risk from illegal logging and hunting sanctioned by the local government and army officers insistent on recreating the blood letting of their ancient forebears (To hunt here is merely a matter of changing money with the right hands). It is unlikely the wild population will survive the next decade unless drastic changes are immediately made.

Costs A weekend at the resort can run from \$50-500 depending on where you stay and how much you rent. If you are willing to split an apartment in town with several folks and take the bus or

minivan (500/1000 AMD respectively) and cook your own food, you can probably get by for \$25 or less for the same weekend. Stay in a pensionat or split a cottage with friends and you can get by for \$50 but barely. Figure \$100 for 2 for an average weekend stay, sharing lodging.

BEARINGS [▲](#)

The town is easy to navigate, if a bit of distance from end to end. The main road connecting the town to Hrazdan is the H-28 or Kentronakan p. There are a number of restaurants, motels, resorts and pensionats off this road, as well as a few B&Bs.

Another north-south road, Grigor Magistros, which passes Kecharis and in a jog turns into V. Harutunian p. passing a number of pensionats, lodges and camps en route to the ski lift.

The road to the Olympic Complex and upper pensionats turn west off of Grigor Magistros. Another road branching off east of Grigor Magistros crosses into the east river canyons, where a number of summer camps and more pensionats are located.

The primary east-west streets are Orbeli and Charents, which frame the top and bottom of the main square and extend eastwards. These have the bulk of the restaurants, cafes, Konik/Kodak, pharmacy, shops and mterks.

Tsaghkadzor is easy to walk through in the center but it is not a small hike from top to bottom. From town limits to the square it is about 1 km; from the square to Kecharis 200 m, from Kecharis to the Olympic Center 1 km, from Kecharis to the ski lift 1.4 km. Some of the best places to stay are at the south and north ends, making a taxi ride pretty much required to hop on over.

Minivans let off at the bus stop on the main square between Charents and Orbeli pts, and at side streets on the hill from Hrazdan.

Taxis are available throughout the town, in the center and by pensionats, hotels, cafes & restaurants. They want 1000 AMD to go anywhere in town, never mind the official rate is 100 AMD per km. If you want to use one to explore the region, bargain at 100/km. Confirm price before starting on your trip.

SIGHTS [▲](#)

SKI RESORT

The resort has become one of the country's top tourist destinations, matching Echmiadzin for numbers if you include the hoards of winter fanatics taking advantage of Armenia's only ski resort. The snow falls begin in October and reach their maximum depth by the end of November when weekend groups turn into a miasma of humanity vying for ski lanes and night fun. Tsaghkadzor was one of the first resort areas to recover from the economic slump of the 1990s and still leads the country for tourist dollars (and high prices).

Note: the resort is under development, and some major investment is planned to convert it into a world class resort area. A master plan for "Flower Valley" has been created by TigerDev Swiss SA, and to glimpse the future, you can [download the plan for yourself](#).

TigerDev Swiss SA, CH-1936 Verbier, Switzerland



Ski Slopes Skiing is on Mt. Tsaghkuniats (2820.5 m). There are currently three ski runs, with more being developed. Slopes are maintained for off-piste skiing and snowboarding (fine, ice, powder) with sledding tracks on the lower slopes.

Current length of ski trails is 7200 meters, vertical drop – 850 meters. There are three main runs on the mountain slopes; a lower run from the upper lodge, a beginner's run with tow cable / intermediate run, and the long run from the top of the third lift. The long run includes a "roundabout" that passes through a forest and requires some skill.

None of the runs are considered world class or competitive, but try telling that to the hot dogs racing down the slopes at hair-raising speeds and configurations.

Snowboarding is a popular sport as well, and equipment can be rented in town or at the lower of upper lodge.

The sledding area is directly in front of the upper lodge, also where you can rent sleds.

There are also trails for snow mobiles, which has quickly become a favorite of testosterone teens impressing girls. They snowmobile as recklessly as they drive, so be forewarned. Snowmobiles and trails are from the lower lodge.

Equipment Gear can be found at most hotels/resorts (Olympic Center and Kecharis Hotel are best, but most pensionats have equipment) and at the lower or upper lodge. Ski rentals (skis, boots and poles) are around 6000 AMD.

Snow boards and sleds are rented at the lower and upper lodges. Boards (board and boots) are 15,000 AMD, sleds 5,000 AMD.

Snow mobiles (lower lodge, in town) run from 2500 AMD per lap to \$25-30 an hour. Locals also rent sleds, skis, horses and apartments, the latter from 5000 per night to 50,000 per week.

ATV rentals are also at the lower lodge. Prices vary, not cheap.

Ski Lessons There is ski school underneath the upper lodge that also rents skis. A private lesson from a professional instructor is 10,000 drams an hour. The instructors are skilled and very polite.



Ski Lifts Currently there are 3 chair lifts and 1 slide lift. More lifts are planned to be constructed in 2007-2008. The first lift takes you to the upper lodge (1234 m), where a second lift begins the ascent to the peak (2819 m). There is a tow rop for beginners and those wanting to ski from the top of the middle run (2465 m).

All lifts are 1000 AMD per single run or 6000 AMD per day. A 7-day pass is 40,000 AMD. The tow rope for beginners costs 500 AMD.

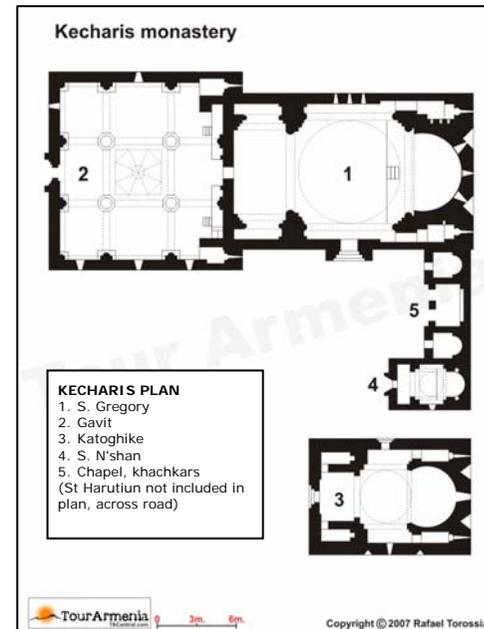
The lifts are new (2006-2007) and efficient, but they have one major drawback: they give little time to get off and get out of the way of the chair, and for those wearing skis and/or new, this can be difficult to maneuver. Ski workers are less than sympathetic.

The lower ski lift works year round and is popular among summer guests, with stunning views of the Kotaik plateau, the Geghama Lehr and glimpsed of Lake Sevan. The peak is even more breathtaking, adding views of Aragats and the Ararat valley.

Ski Lodge There are two lodges on the ski slope, mid way up and at the bottom. These are where the ski lifts originate and terminate. The lower lodge is new (2006) and has an outfitted shop, equipment rental and café. The upper lodge is at the top of the first lift, where the first (easy) runs and sledding are, as well as ski instructors. The café is small and over priced.

In Town

The town's main site is Kecharis Monastery, one of the better documented religious sites in Armenian



history, which—along with its location inside a major resort—earns it more attention than it probably deserves architecturally. Still it is a pretty site and a must see when you are here.



KECHARIS MONASTERY [▲](#)

The 10th-13th cc monastery is located in he NW of the town, off the main street as your go up hill to the Olympic Complex.

Background The monastery of Kecharis was a major center of learning in medieval Armenia, tied to the greatest Armenian nakharar families, the Pahlavunis, Orbelis (Orbelians), Zakarians, and Proshians. Its greatest period was from the 11th-13th cc, and to the Armenian academicians and political statesmen Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (nee Bagratuni), Vasak Khaghbakian and Khachatur Kecharetsi (Khachatur of Kecharis).

Some type of church had been on the site from the time of conversion, replacing pagan shrines that glorified the ancient gods of Armenia, favored of the Arshakuni and Parthian rulers that hunted in the area. Nothing is known about the earlier structures except for a 5th c basilica which remains have been found, and references to the site as part of the royal domains, given to the Varazhnunis and Kamsarakans in the 4th-6th cc, who probably enlarged or built churches on the site.

In the late 10th c, the Pahlavuni family inherited the region. The monastery was established by Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni in the early 1000s, who commissioned the first church, S. Grigor Lusavorich in 1033, followed by the smaller S. N'shan (Holy Sign) in 1051.

The church fell into Seljuk hands with their invasion of 1060 and fell into disuse. In 1196 the monastery became part of Zakarian holdings when they liberated the region, ostensibly for the Orbeli kings of Georgia.

In 1201 the Zakarians gave the monastery and its landholdings to Vasak Khaghbakian for his services in repelling Seljuk invaders and Kecharis' second golden age is traced to this period. The Khaghbakians became very rich very fast, and endowed a number of monasteries, rebuilding and enlarging them during their short reign, including the small katoghike (1214) and the later gavit (2nd half 13th c).

The vank fell to Mongol invasions in the mid 13th c (1236-1243), most of its churches devastated then restored a few years later. It was also in this period that the poet and priest Khachatur Kecharetsi (13th-14th cc) had his own school in Kecharis. Kecharetsi was a poet and songwriter

who was influenced by the hayren (folk song) tradition, augmenting his sacred writings with secular subjects such as an allegorical poem about a rose and nightingale, and several lyrical songs. His translations were also recognized, especially a re-translation of the ancient Greek "Alexandri Varuts Patmutiuny (History of Alexander's Deeds)", attributed to Allisthenes.

The monastery was devastated again in the 14th-15th cc by the armies of Timur and his allies the Shaddadid Emirs, forebears to the Yezidis in the region. The monastery remained destroyed throughout the Ottoman-Persian period (15th-18th cc), despite Persian interests in the area for hunting and as a summer center.

Earthquakes in the 19th c mostly destroyed the vank and it was deserted before the Soviet period, which ironically saved it from utter destruction by shoring up walls and attempting restoration in 1947-1949 and in the 1980s. It was finally restored in 2000 when Armenian benefactor Vladimir Harutunian donated the funds to complete the restoration.



The Complex

The **complex** consists of two sites with 4 churches, a gavit, 2 chapels and a number of 12th-13th cc khachkars. The largest church is S. Grigor Lusavorich (Gregory the Illuminator) and its gavit. The small S. N'shan is immediately to its south, followed by the second largest structure, the Katoghike to the south of S. N'shan. Two chapels and some khachkars are also in the main compound. Across the road is the small S. Harutiun memorial church with khachkars.



S. Grigor Lusavorich Church The church was built (or consecrated) in 1033, during the height of the Byzantine-Seljuk conquests in Armenia and the last years of the Bagratuni-Pahlavuni Kingdom. It was commissioned by the founder of the monastery, [Grigor \(Magistros\) Pahlavuni](#) (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**), a theologian, scholar and teacher, and one of Armenia's greatest minds of the medieval period.

He was also a member of a powerful ruling family, able to endow the monastery with gold and silver plate, furnishings and décor, as well as land holdings to support the fledging monastery.

Entrance to the church is from the south doors. The church is a domed cruciform building with two-story antechambers flanking the main apse. The exterior is fairly refined for its time and position as a monastery under royal patronage. The walls have niches with fan arcs and ribbing along the cornices but is otherwise restrained and almost boring when compared to Geghard. Inside it is more elaborate, but still just a backdrop for the enormous treasure that Grigor Magistros brought to decorate the main hall.

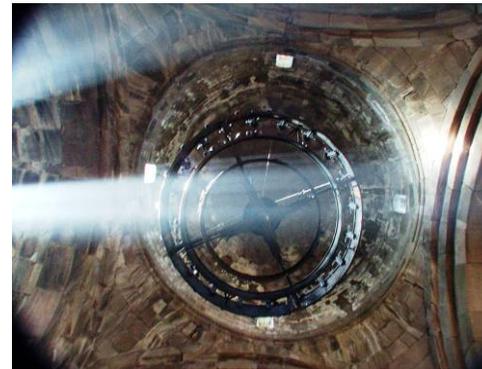
Usually placed as a domed hall type, the church is actually a transitional device. On the outside the building combines the hall type church on its lower level with a cruciform above, the walls of the inner cross jutting above the rectangular base. The inside has slightly protruding north and south walls, giving it a shallow cross form. As a domed hall it is comparable to 6th c Ptghni ([See Trip 5 of Kotaik marz](#), www.tacentral.com/kotaik) and Haruch (7th c, Shirak marz), but, built more 400

years later, Lusavorich extends their design to something almost unique.

The square that supports the drum juts above the cruciform walls with intersecting corners. Typical for its time, the church's façade trades extravagant design motifs with its monumentality and sheer weight. Like [S. Astvatsatsin in Bjni](#) (also established by Grigor Magistros), the décor is at a minimum, with simple ribbons at the cornices and window frames. In fact, Lusavorich is in many ways plainer than its sister at Bjini, without the geometric patterns and zigzag effect for the roof.

This may be due to Grigor Magistros' asceticism, the monastery's purpose as a place of learning, or the Armenian struggle with the Byzantines in this period, and their desire to differentiate themselves from the orthodox penchant for icons. But this flies against historical references to the tremendous wealth bestowed in the church by Grigor Magistros, especially the gold and silver plate he donated to the church.

It has been whispered the plainness is due to the church's many reconstructions, which stripped the more decorative elements in lieu of simply restoring the building. Whatever the reason for its outwardly austere appearance, the church is impressive for its size and for the simple touches that enhance its appearance. The doorway has an arched lintel, the arches resting on protruding columnettes. The three narrow windows at the top of each cruciform wall have thick ribbing above their casings and the top peak of each wall has a small carved sun symbol.



The drum is round and smooth with four windows at the cardinal points of the compass. It is topped by a thin cornice and topped by a circular gabled stone roof, the ribbing for which divides the roof into ten sections with three ribs between each.

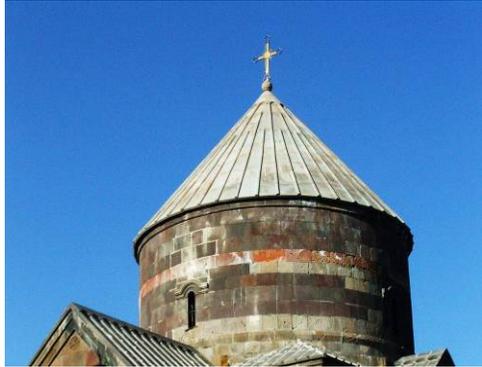
The inside of the church is roughly divided into three sections by protruding columns built into the walls. The west, center and east sections are in a roughly 1 to 2 proportion, the apse and western hall each about ½ of the diameter of the central hall, which is topped with mammoth drum and cupola. The drum carves out the interior space, adding tremendous depth to the space. The arches for the drum rest on protruding columns at each of the square's corners. Pendentives between each arch gracefully curve to the drum's base rim, defying the dome's tremendous weight.

The apse is horseshoe shaped, embedded within the walls of the church. The back wall has three niche windows, designed to catch light from the sun at any point on its eastern axis, resulting in a brighter than usual altar space. The altar panels are modern, a painting of Madonna and child. The altar is unusually reached by central steps that divide the apron into two halves. The apron is itself decorated with a frieze of the twelve apostles, replacing what was certainly a geometric mosaic of stone in the middle ages.

Overall the décor is restrained, focusing on plate-band column capitals and bases, triple archivolt (molding sets) on the windows and arched columnettes flanking the entries. There is little to show what an opulent place of worship this was. The columns for the doorways have capitals and bases similar to those at the cathedral in Ani, built for Vahram Pahlavuni around the same time (983-1001) by the master architect T'rdat.

Taken as it is, it may be hard to imagine just how richly endowed this church was. Armenia's churches have long been stripped of their rich tapestries, silver and gold candelabras, crosses, censers and plate, the thick piled tapestries and carpets on the walls and floors, the rich silk and brocade garments worn by the priests. Even the treasures at Echmiadzin pale in comparison to historic descriptions of the precious metals, jewels and brocades given to monasteries around the old kingdom. What you see now is a stripped down version that architects love for studying structural form, but give little idea of its true grandness at the time. It's a bit like looking at the Greek

Parthenon, learning it was once painted over with vibrant hues of blue, white, red and green, now prudishly stripped of its old glory, a cream colored shadow of itself. Engineers love it (they also like hulks of steel spanning rivers), the rest of us have to imagine.



Gavit The Gavit is entered from the western portal of the church. It is alternately dated to the late 12th c (1196-1206) for the Zakarians and Vasak Khaghbakian, or the mid-to-late 13th c for Vasak's nephew Prosh, whose exploits gave the family its more famous name, Proshian. Both dates may be correct, the earlier for an original structure that was pulled down in the mid 13th c Mongol invasion, which was rebuilt by the Proshians in the short period of Mongol tolerance.

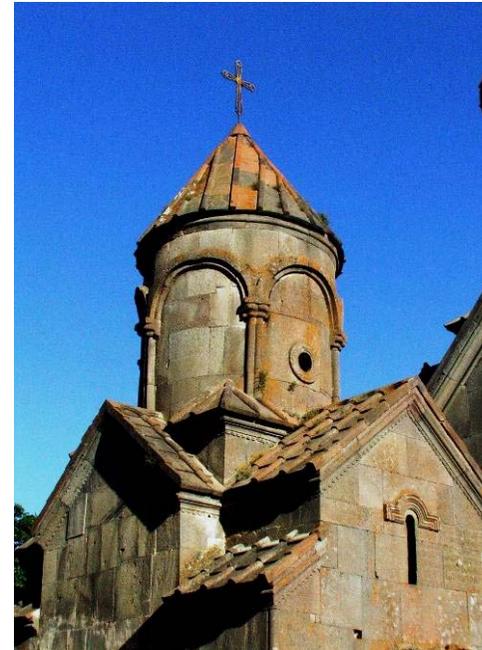
If earlier, it is contemporary to the gavits at Sanahin and Goshavank, both created for Zakarian benefactors and resembling the gavit at Kecharis with their central plan, massive columns and elaborate vaulting. Rather more impressive with forty pillars supporting the interconnecting arches and elaborately carved vaulting. Typical for gavits of the time, the square plan is divided into nine sections by the main columns and intersecting arches, which rest on protruding wall abutments. The central dome is made from alternating octahedrals stacked on top of each other, ending at an aperture at the very top. Unique to Kecharis are the two-story chambers flanking the western door of the church, a feature imitated at other monasteries. Wall paintings over the western church doors are from the 13th c, showing orthodox influences brought in by the Georgian court.



The subject of the fresco is of Christ flanked by the Madonna and Grigor Lusavorich, the arch immediately above covered with the faces of saints and possibly a benefactor or two. Its preserved state is remarkable considering the gavit lay in ruins for 400 years before 20th c restoration.

The exterior of the gavit is simple, matching that of the church. Windows are topped with profiled ribbing and simple band cornice work. The central window on the south wall features an eight-petal rosettes and sundial, widespread in the medieval world. The western wall has carvings as well.

Chapels On the eastern edge of the complex between S. Lusavorich and S. N'shan are the ruins of chapels, small rectangular structures with an apse and vaulted ceilings. The chapel closest to S. Lusavorich church housed the burial vault for Grigor Magistros, suggesting it was built in the early-mid 11th c, dating it to the early-mid 11th c. The chapels were connected to a small vaulted building which may have been the academy.

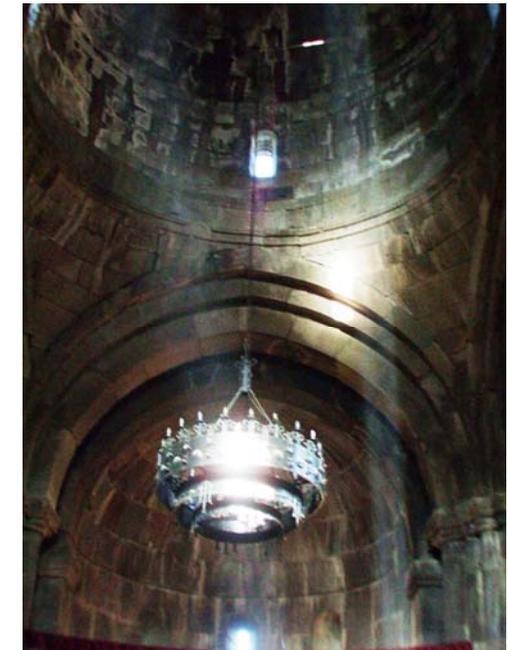


S. N'shan Church The small church is just south of S. Lusavorich and Pahlavuni chapel. S. N'shan is a true domed cruciform type, built for The Pahlavuni family in 1051. Smaller, but slightly more elaborate than S. Lusavorich, the building is a product of its time, when Asian influences in design began entering the kingdom. These include the more elaborate motifs on the façade and the elaborate cross patterning on the western wall.

The church was used to house relics, which may also explain its rather more detailed décor. The tall round drum is decorated with six arches resting on twin columnettes. The dome is topped with a ribbed tent roof of multi-colored stones, imitating earlier tiles that were replaced by stones in one of the renovations. The hall is roofed with tiles. The facades have inscriptions from benefactors to the monastery.

Inside the small hall is mostly stripped of the paintings that once adorned its walls. The dark hall makes it hard to discern the design, but the drum rests over arching the rests on protruding wall abutments and the columnettes at the corners of the apse.

Katoghike The katoghike is just south of S. N'shan. It was built for Vasak Khaghbakian in 1203-1214, during the short re-blossoming of Armenian culture following the ascendancy of the Orbeli Kings in Georgia and the Zakarian Brothers, who liberated the area from Seljuk control. The architect is probably the medieval master architect, Varpet Vetzik, who is buried nearby. An inscription mentions his name in connection with the building, and dates its commemoration.



A domed cruciform, the church has an elongated hall with two-story annexes in its corners. Entrances to the upper chambers on the east side are from the altar, while those on the western end are reached by cantilever staircases, an innovation in church construction.

The Katoghike is the most elaborate of the churches, a testament to the period, a last gasp of Armenian culture before the Dark Ages of the next 400 years. Mongol (Asian) influence can be seen by the geometric patterns in the western wall and rosettes on the other walls. The niches on the southern and eastern walls are typical for churches

of the period, taking their practical use to catch the light of the sun in different position into an art form with fan-shaped carvings at the top. The round dome is decorated with 12 arches resting on protruding twin columns, carving a rhythmic pattern on the otherwise plain surface. The dome was destroyed in the 1927 earthquake and only recently restored.

By comparison the inside is austere, stripped of its frescoes and treasures that once graced its walls. There are carvings on the walls, crosses, rosettes that also feature on the pendentives that support the drum. Like the other two churches, interior door arches are set into the wall rather than the typical protruding design.



Khachkars The compound has a number of khachkars from the 10th-13th cc. including a famous 13th c memorial khachkar dedicated to the architect of the Katoghike, Varpet Vetzik. It lies just south of the church. Graves include those for Ishkhan (Prince) Apiratian and Mets Ishkhan (Big or Elder Prince) Proshian, who led troops against the Seljuks in the 12th c.

S. Harutiun Church Across the road from the main complex standing in a stand of trees is S. Harutiun memorial church, built for "the son of Asan" in 1220 and used as a family mausoleum. The small domed hall has a cruciform interior, with slightly protruding north and south apses. It is of uniform color, the same basalt used for the walls, roofing and dome. The gavit is on the west side of the church, looking like an extension of the main hall though it is narrower. Unlike gavits typical for the 13th c, this plan is extended with a vaulted ceiling on its east-west axis. In this it is

typical of 10th c narthexes found Vahanavank (Siunik marz) and Gndevank (Vayots Dzor marz), which served more as spilling space for their churches than as community spaces. The western entrance is divided by columnettes and topped with twin arches. The cemetery has a number of gravestones and khachkars,

OTHER SITES ▲

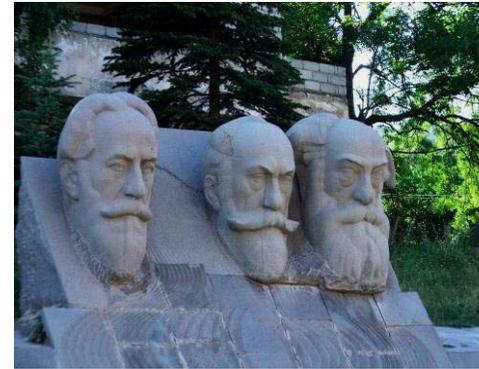
The town itself is worth strolling through, with its wooden and stone houses with carved balustrades and its blend of old style European with the growing number of European chic hotels, motels and restaurants. The main square has a central garden with benches, fountain and at its north end, the **WWII Monument** a marble statue of two eagles with extended wings, sculpted by David Benjanian and dedicated on May 8, 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of VE day.

MUSEUMS ▲

Orbeli Brothers Museum, Orbeli Brothers p. (tel. 52085) was founded in 1982 to commemorate the 100th birthday of Levon Orbeli and displays around 2400 books, documents and personal effects of three brothers from the Soviet era, an Oceanographer, a physiologist and a director of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The museum has six halls containing books, documents, personal belongings related to the life and work of Orbeli brothers (approx. 2,400 items).

The brothers were born into a family of intellectuals, descended from the Orbeli kings of Georgia. Their father, Abghar Orbeli (1849-1912) was a lawyer, graduate of Petersburg University. Their mother, Varvara Movses Arghutian, was also descended from nobility, and grew up in Tflis (Tbilisi). Part of the collection contains books from the library they assembled, one of the largest of its time.

The eldest brother, "the father of Soviet oceanography," was Ruben (1880-1943), who graduated in law like his father and served in the failed Dumas of pre-revolutionary Russia. After the revolution he left law and pursued an interest in oceanography and submarine technology.



The middle brother, Levon (1882-1958), was born in Tsaghkadzor, from the easy to the difficult. Trails include forests, mountain meadows and the top of the Tsaghkuniats Mountain Range, with days hikes to Mts. Shaghsel and Teghenis, and a 1-2 day hike to Hankavan crossing the mountains.

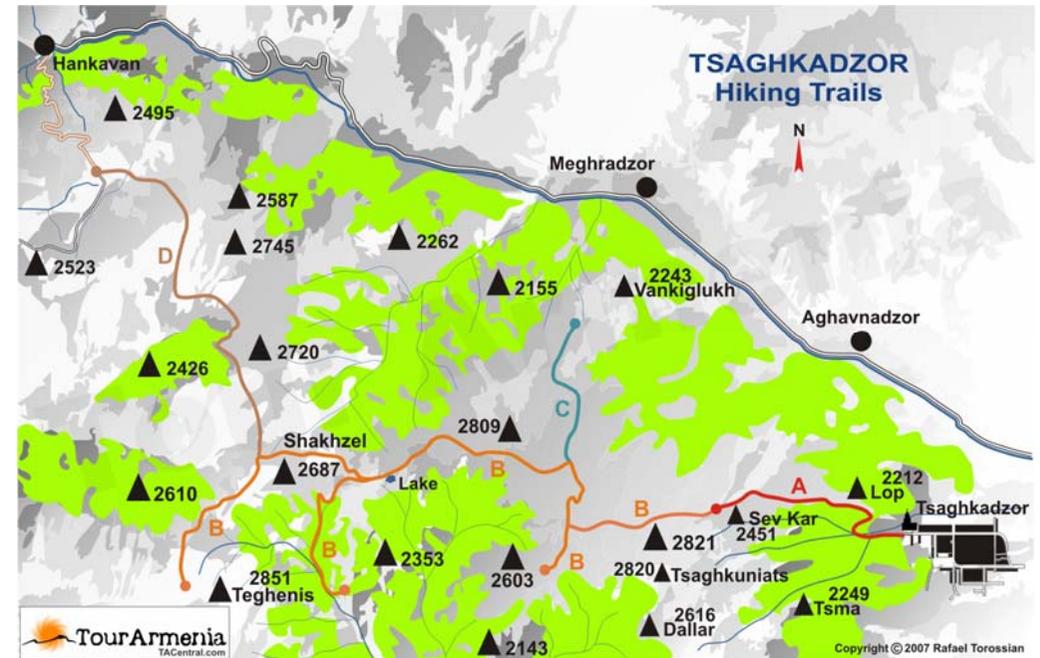
The youngest brother was Hovsep (1887-1961), who graduated from the History-Philology faculty of Petersburg University and became a protégé of the Orientalist and Archeologist Nikolai Marr, working with his team on excavations at Ani. Hovsep became a respected Orientalist and expert in the new science of Armeniology (Armenian studies). In 1924 he was appointed the Head of the Oriental Section of the Hermitage Museum, serving as director of the museum for seventeen of his thirty years at the museum. He was the first president of the Academy of Sciences of ASSR.

The middle brother, Levon (1882-1958), was born in Tsaghkadzor. A graduate of the Petersburg Medical college, he became a protégé of the Russian physiologist Pavlov (of Pavlov's dog fame). His research into the properties of the cerebrum and it controlling effects led to new treatments of mental disorders. He was the head of the Army Medical college and a member of the Soviet and Armenian Academies of Science.

There are a variety of hiking trails around Tsaghkadzor, from the easy to the difficult. Trails include forests, mountain meadows and the top of the Tsaghkuniats Mountain Range, with days hikes to Mts. Shaghsel and Teghenis, and a 1-2 day hike to Hankavan crossing the mountains.

NATURE TRAILS ▲

Forest Trails are all around the town, heading south from the Writer's House, Alpina, Nairi Hotel Noy Hotel, Alik Hotel, plus south of the square.



The northern trails take off from the river gorge below Kecharis, and above the ski lift. There is one 5 km hike heading SW from the pioneer camp S of town that skirts Mt. Ima (2249 m) following a mountain stream the S base of Mt. Daliar (2616 m).

(A) The Sev kar trail starts at Kecharis Monastery, following the asphalt road into the river gorge, crossing the river and continuing W on the road to its end at a camp (1 km). From there follow a 1 km trail that switchbacks N up a forest path to Mt. Lop (2212.6 m) from where it continues 3 km W to just above Mt. Sev kar (2451.7 m)

(B) Tsaghkuniats Trail is a full day hike that continues past Sev kar from where it skirts the N face of Mt. Tsaghkuniats (2820.5 m) on its way to the Tsaghkuniats ridge in about 3.7 km where it meets North-South trails that continue on top of the ridge. South on the trail ends in about 1.2 km at some ruins. The north trail switchbacks in about 600 m and taking the first L (N) trail meets an E-W trail in about 1.1 km, from which a L (W) turn on a 3.6 km path skirts a 2809 m peak and turns SE for another 1.8 km to the Alibek region and a small mountain lake. From there SW trails descend the mountains to Aghveran and Arzakan Valley (3.4 km), or W/SW to Mt. Teghenis (2851.1 m) in about 7 km.

(C) Tezharuik Hike is a half-day to full day hike to the 13th c monastery by Meghradzor, in the Marmarik valley. The hike follows the path to Sev kar, continuing on the Tsaghkuniats trail for 3.7 km to the N/S trail. The north trail takes a sharp R in about 600 m and taking the first L (N) continue northerly for about 4.5 km to [Tezharuik](#).

(D) Hankavan trail is a long day hike on some difficult terrain. For a one day hike arranged to be picked up at Hankavan, otherwise plan an overnight returning the next day. Follow the Tsaghkuniats trail to the mountain lake, taking the westerly 3 km trail to the north face of Mt. Shaghsel (2687 m) and intersects a N/S trail. Take the N 10.3 km trail, going in a N/NW direction passing the ridge's top peaks before meeting a 4 km mountain road switch backing to Hankavan.



Tsaghkadzor Map Key

H OVERNIGHT, HANGESTIAN GOTI

3. Edem Hotel
5. ADIGAZ pensionat
7. Ani Ski Resort Community
8. Sister Arusiak's Camp
9. Tsakunuk
10. Vanatur
11. Viardo
12. Splendor Hotel
13. Valeta Hotel
14. Valeta Cabins
15. Hangestian Goti
17. Leya Pensionat
20. Kechi
25. Kecharis Hotel
29. Saya Motel
30. Sport School Pensionat
35. Usachits (Teachers) House
37. Zvartnots Rest House
38. Hangestian Goti
39. Cottages
40. Olympic Sport Complex Hotel & Multi Rest Resort
41. Pensionat

42. Alpina
43. Writer's House Pensionat
44. Nairi Hotel
45. Alik Rest House
46. Noy Rest House

C CAMPING

- Edik Amirbekian's B&B, 3a Aghbabian
Lusine Simonian's B&B, 26 Orbeli
Haykiant's Tun Holiday House, 21 Maimekh

S SANITORIUM

19. Ripa Sanitorium

▲ FOOD & DRINK

2. Burmunk Restaurant
4. Jrapin Khorovatz
5. ADIGAZ restaurant
21. By Emma Bistro
31. Tsaghkadzor
34. Hotsatun
36. Restaurant

☐ CAFÉ, Tea House

23. Coffee break
26. Feya Tea House

🏛 MUSEUMS, ART GALLERY, SCHOOL

24. Orbeli Brothers Home Museum

🗿 MONUMENTS - SITES

31. Eagle Monument

🏪 CHURCHES

16. S. Harutiun Church
18. Kecharis Monastery

🛍 SHOPS

📧 INTERNET, PHONE, POST

28. Central Post Office

🏛 GOVT. OFFICES, LIBRARY

27. Tsaghkadzor Mayor's Office

🏦 BANK, ATM

33. ACBA ATM

🗜 SKI LIFT

1. Ski Lift

■ SERVICES

22. Book Store

PRACTICALITIES

Area Code: 223
Long Distance: 0223 + local number
From abroad: +(374) 223 + local number
Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell
International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + local number
Unless otherwise noted, local numbers require the (0223) prefix if calling long distance, or +(374) 223prefix if calling from abroad.

INFORMATION

Town Center, 10 Orbeli Brothers p. (tel. 52213, fax 52212), E-mail: meria@tsakhkadzor.am, URL: www.tsakhkadzor.am has some basic information

about the town and can point you in certain directions. Not a full service tourist info office yet, they can be very helpful or annoyed, depending on how hectic they are.

IN AND OUT

By Bus, Minivan

There is no bus service to Tsaghkadzor, passengers take the bus to Hrazdan and connect via a Marshrutni taxi (Minivan) or taxi. Minivans are more convenient, dropping you off pretty much where you want. Though they do not follow a set schedule (they often wait or a full van before departing, especially to villages are Yerevan), drivers and passengers can tell you about when to expect the next one.

Buses There is no direct bus service to Tsaghkadzor (go figure). Take the Hrazdan bus from the Northern bus station in Yerevan (300 AMD), then take Marshrutni taxi (minivan) from Hrazdan to Tsaghkadzor (250 AMD). You may have to wait awhile for the minivan. Alternately take a taxi from Hrazdan for around 3000 AMD for up to four persons.

Minivans (Marshrutni taxis) leave from the central square between Orbeli and Charents pts. Minivans do not have a set schedule, they leave when they are full and generally run once or twice a day to outlying villages, so ask. Tsaghkadzor Minivans connect via Hrazdan, which costs around 250 AMD. From Hrazdan you can connect to Yerevan (300 AMD), Sevan (250 AMD), *Hankavan* (250 AMD), *Bjni* (150 AMD), *Arzakan* (150 AMD), *Charentsavan* (150 AMD), and *Abovian* (250 AMD).

By Taxi Taxis are more expensive but the most convenient way to travel (you decide when you go, and you can stop along the way). If you split the price between 2 or more travelers, it can be pretty cheap.

Yerevan-Tsaghkadzor Taxis

From Yerevan, just about any taxi will take you to Tsaghkadzor at around 100 AMD per kilometer (late night trips may have to double cost to cover driver's return) and dedicated cars to Tsaghkadzor are located at *Kino Hairenik (Kino Rossiya)* at the corner of Agatangeghos and Movses Khorenatsi pts. Cars normally charge 6000-8000 AMD for up to four passengers, though be prepared to bargain and for the taxi driver who wants to wait for a full carload to make the extra fare. You can also order

a taxi by phone (6000 AMD). Most Yerevan taxi services provide this service, but we used Kalina (tel 010-555-333). Note even the best can go bad overnight, ask around when you arrive for best taxi service.

From Tsaghkadzor, taxis in Tsaghkadzor are around town and at major hotels. Rates vary depending on the ability of the driver to get return fare. Taxis to Yerevan are 6000-10,000 AMD, to Hrazdan around 2000 AMD. Call taxis in town, they advertise their numbers around town.

By Car Tsaghkadzor is at the W end of the (H28) which connects to the Hrazdan-Bjni-Yerevan Road (H5) and the (M4). At the (H5) intersection, the (H28) continues NW to Hankavan. Tsaghkadzor is 7.5 km from Hrazdan, 23.5 km from Lake Sevan, 41 km to Hankavan and 61.6 km from Yerevan on the (H5) or 47.5 km on the (M4).

Petrol stations are on the highway from Hrazdan and the M4.

AROUND ▲

On foot is a bit of a hike from the center to the ski lift (about 1.4 km), but easy enough in the center, and if you want/need to walk, this is a great place to stroll. You can cross center in 10-15 minutes, 30-60 minutes for outlying areas. [See Bearings \(Error! Bookmark not defined.\)](#) for a layout of the town.

Taxis Tsaghkadzor has plenty of taxis, in the center and at area hotels. The service is good, the drivers knowledgeable (few speak English). The rate is 1000 AMD around town center, or 3000 AMD if you try to take one from the ski lift down!

Regional Taxis Taxis are a good way to explore the region, and very reasonable if you split costs between two or more travelers. Prices are for up to four passengers. Negotiate before starting on your journey, figure 100 AMD/km as fair, add 500 AMD per hour for waiting. Some taxis now add a "service Charge" of 200-400 AMD just to enter the taxi. If there are others around, shop around to get the best deal. Always fix a rate before entering. Taxis can take you from the center to Hrazdan (7.5 km), Lake Sevan (23.5), Bjni (17 km), Arzakan (23 km), Meghradzor (Tezharuik vank, 17 km) and Hankavan (41 km). A full day's trip into region and back should cost around \$20-

25. Note you buy the driver's meal if you stay out all day.

Taxi Services

Look for taxi service ads at the center and area cafes, restaurants and motel. They change by the season, sometimes by the week. Also inquire at your lodging. Most offer the service or will find someone for you.

TRAVEL AGENCIES ▲

Sirak, 5 Spandarian p, apt 20, in Hrazdan, sells air tickets and organizes day tours.

Check at your hotel or pensionat, they may have tour guides for day trips.

For nature or adventure tours, see [Adventure Tour Operators \(Error! Bookmark not defined.\)](#).

COMMUNICATION, ETC. ▲

Fire – 101
 Police – 102
 Ambulance service – 103
 Rescue Hot Line - 118
 Gas emergency service – 104
 Trunk Line – 107
 Telephone directory information – 109

Phone, telegraphs

Tsaghkadzor is covered by both Armentel and Vivacell mobile services. International calls can be made at the *Central Post Office*, Grigor Magistros p. [See HayPost \(HyePost\) site for list \(www.haypost.am/EN/abt_offices.html\)](#). The post office has trunk line phone service, sells phone cards (30 minutes 3000 AMD) and can deliver telegraphs.

Additional phone services are at hotels in town. Rates vary.

Internet

Kecharis Hotel has internet service in its lobby, available to public when not busy.

The city has installed high speed Wi-Fi with coverage of much of the town, including most hotels. Prepaid cards are available in most shops and hotels. The city hosts an instruction page on their web site at www.tsakhkadzor.am.

Bank, Exchange

Money wires and credit card advances can be done at banks; ATM and exchange at bank.

ATM, Square, ACBA-Credit Agricole Bank
Unibank, 15 Orbeli p.

Shopping

There are a number of shops in town, including mterks, souvenirs and clothing stores. Most are on Orbeli Brothers p. and Charents p. There is a book shop on Charents p. across from the Coffee Break Café.

Ski Related

Ski Rentals are at the Ski lodges, the Sports Complex, Writer's House, Kecharis Hotel and larger overnight venues. Other hotels may have equipment for rent, ask at your lodging. *Clothing outfitters* are at 1 Chopanughi and Yerevan (52 Terian, tel. 56-73-37).

Film, etc.

Film can be bought at shops and the larger hotels in town. Writer's House has photographic developing. Batteries are suspect, bring your own.

Pharmacy

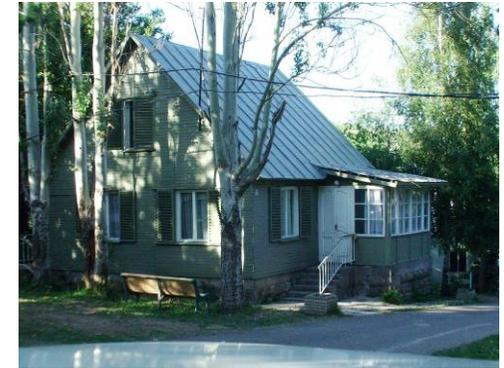
Apotekas (Armenian: deghatuner) can be found in the center of town, on Charents and Orbeli pts.

Hospital, Polyclinic

There is no clinic or hospital in Tsaghkadzor. For a medical emergency, contact your lodging venue or go to Yerevan. The ski area has emergency response for ski accidents and skilled medical personnel.

Dentist

Tsaghkadzor has no dental clinic, it is better to go to Yerevan for dental work; they are better equipped to serve tourists.



OVERNIGHT ▲

Lodging runs the gamut of venues from apartment or house rental to sanitariums, pensionats, hotels, motels and cabins in the woods. Pensionats and sanitariums now call themselves 'resorts', some of which is warranted, much of which is wishful thinking. Prices vary according to the season; winter and summer are high season, with \$100-150 not unheard of for the priciest spots. It is possible to get space for \$15 or less per person if you are willing to schlep it with a group, otherwise figure \$30-50 as a minimum for singles. Tsaghkadzor is a sure sign of how the country is in danger of pricing itself out of the market. Some spots cost more than a suite at the George V in Paris.

HOTEL / MOTEL

Alik Resort Hotel, Isahakian p (tel. 52676, 010-23-03-57) has 40 rooms and a swimming pool, sauna, billiard, table tennis. Amenities include hot and cold water, TV, fridge, parking. DBL/TRIP-QUAD/LUX (6 persons) at 18,000/30,000/65,000 AMD. Three meals a day at 5000 AMD. Accepts CC.

Alpina Holiday Hotel, next to Writer's House (tel. 52252, 52003, 52004, and 091-43-00-31) has cottages on a slope of the Tsaghkuniats mountain range. Good point to begin a hike. Amenities include hot and cold water, balcony, kitchen and bath. Cottages for ten people low season/mid/high season at 25,000/30,000/35,000 AMD. This is cheap enough to overlook the drawbacks.

Kecharis Hotel, 15 Orbeli Yghbairneri p (tel. 52091, 52092, 52093, 52094, and 52095), e-mail: kecharis@hotel.am, info@kecharishotel.am, is the swankiest joint in town, opened in 2006 with all the trimmings (and prices to match). The internet center is popular with youngsters. Also has a weekend disco, sauna, bowling and billiards, sport (ski) equipment rental. Facilities include a conference hall (cap. 60-100), business center, Internet service. All rooms are for 2 people with Econ/Bus/Semilux/LUX/DBL LUX at 30,000/32,500/37,500/42,500/42,500 AMD. Price includes breakfast.

Leya Hotel Resort, (tel. 52600, 52606, 091/3-40-68-01) offers 115 rooms in hotel and chalets in varying states of repair, with hot/cold water, TV and fridge. Hotel has billiards and sauna. Hotel has TRP/QUAD at 12,000/15,000 AMD with 3 room (5-6 people)/4 room (6-8 people) chalets at 25,000/25,000-30,000 AMD with a renovated 3 room chalet at 40,000.

Mashtots Hotel, Tsaghkadzor, has 25 DBLs starting at 15,000 AMD.

Noy Hotel, Charentsi p. (tel. 52055, 52028, Fax: 52028) has ten rooms equipped with satellite TV, telephone, air conditioning, mini bar, cold and hot water. Restaurant, business centre, table tennis and conference hall. DBL/LUX at 25,000/35,000 AMD

Saya Hotel, Grigor Magistros p. (tel. 52435, 52635, 091-20-52-35) is a micro hotel near the square with ten rooms each with 2-3 beds. Amenities include TV, fridge, hot & cold water, billiard, sauna. LUX at 18,000 AMD. Breakfast is 2000 AMD.

Vanatur Hotel, Grigor Magistros next to Viardo has 11 rooms with double bed and 4 bed rooms. Prices from 15,000 AMD.

Zvartnots Rest House, Hrazdan Road at turnoff to Ususich Pensionat (tel. 52326, 091-55-06-61), has 34 rooms. Amenities include Bar/Lounge, Play Hall, Telephone, Satellite TV, Fax, Internet, Billiard, Tennis, Swimming Pool, Postal Service, Taxi Service, Parking. DBL/LUX at 17,000/45,000 AMD. Full board, add 3500 AMD.

GUEST HOUSES / CABINS / CHALETS

Cottages S. Tas, 11 Charentsi p, across from Noy Hotel (tel. 52829, 091-20-34-07) has 4 delightful cottages with 1-2 bedrooms with kitchens for 25,000-30,000 AMD each. This is a jewel.

Nkarich Holiday and Creativity Resort / the House for Painters Creativity, town square, is the oldest guest house in Tsaghkadzor with room for sixteen people. The historic house has hosted such notables as Martiros Sarian, Hakob Kojoian, Minas Avetisian, Harutiun Kalents and Hakob Hakobian. Staying at the house is arranged from the Art Conservatory in Yerevan, usually difficult to get. It is possible to do a walk in if they are not busy, but hard. Six rooms at 8,000-15,000 AMD +.

Multi Rest House (Hotel/Chalets), (tel. 52662, 52292, 52033, 010-28-74-50), e-mail: info@mrh.am, URL: www.mrh.am, has an annoying web site (no address or map to the place but lots of jingles and useless animation) but a brand new hotel and 15 two and three story chalets with a total of 270 rooms. Chalets have kitchens. Complex features include a fitness center, pool, playground, sauna, conference room, sauna, internet, game zone, cinema, football, basketball, tennis, billiards, restaurant & bar. DBL/DBL/LUX hotel rooms at \$80-150 and chalets from \$100-\$250.

Sevan Recreation Area, Tsaghkadzor, has 10 cottages with 2-4 beds each for \$40+.

Splendor Holiday Resort, Grigor Magistros p, next to Viardo (tel. 52425, 010-56-38-99) has 8 chalets with bedrooms, kitchen, and bathroom, hot, cold water; TV, fridge, phone. Some have Hair-drier, Iron board, Satellite channels, Cosmetic mirror. Restaurant, Bar, Vegetarian food, Armenian traditional cuisine, open-air breakfast and dinner area on the edge of the gorge, all wooden furniture with Standard (1 bedroom-2 people)/LUX (2 bedrooms-4 people) chalets at 25,000/30,000 AMD. Full board for an extra 2500 AMD per person.

Terjan Tsaghkadzor Guest House, 3a, Kh. Kecharetsi p. (tel. 091-22-29-41, 093-47-37-83) has three bedrooms, living room with fireplace, kitchen / self-catering utensils, 24 hour heating and hot water, with full capacity at 9 people just 10 minutes walk to the ski lift. House is available at 36,000 AMD per day, catered meals extra.

Viardo Tour Center, Grigor Magistros p. (tel. 52147, 52620, 091-47-75-75, 093-47-75-75), used to be a great find, with lovely little cottages nestled into a thick stand of trees, friendly staff and cheap prices. The trees are still there, the staff still nice, but the cottages are no longer the lovely little places they used to be and prices can be outrageous, the manager proudly quoting \$500 for their VIP cottage. Nothing about it warranted the price (this is where the price is all about location, location, location. Like Paris.), unless you like red velvet (hmmm). The cottages are now called "chalets" and feature hot, cold water, furnished kitchen. The complex has conference facilities (can room ~100 people), ski and motor-sleigh rental, billiards, volleyball, basketball playground & swimming pool. The cottages can be affordable, if you are in a group and split costs. Otherwise it can be pricey. Standard cottages are 4 people/6-7 people/10-12 people at 30,000/45,000/80-90,000 AMD; renovated cottages for 6 people are \$100-150; LUX (2 bed, 2 kitchens, 2 bath) are 45,000 AMD; VIP at 200,000 AMD. 3000 AMD for meal.

HEALTH RESORT / SANITARIUM

Adigaz Sanatorium, Grigor Magistros p. (tel. 52390), e-mail: admin@adigaz.am, URL: www.adigaz.am, is in a woody area of town with 42 rooms, a playground and an open swimming pool, billiard, table tennis, motor-sleigh, sauna, basketball, volleyball. Rooms include hot, cold water, heating, bath, TV set, phone, refrigerator and internet connection. SGL/DBL/TRP at 11,000/20,000/45,000 AMD plus 3000-4000 AMD for additional persons. Three meals a day are 4000 AMD per person.

Ripa Health Resort, Kecharetsi p (tel. 52610, 091-41-30-14) is one of the grand old sanatoria of Armenia, still muddling through with 58 rooms and a faded glory space for nostalgic visitors who swear by its treatments. If renovated this could be the grand dame of resorts. Probably will be torn down to make way from some neon monstrosity. Standard rooms have cold water only, others have hot & cold water, TV, fridge. Restaurant, bar, gym. Standard/LUX at 8000/12,000 AMD.

RESORT / PENSIONAT

Nairi Guesthouse, Isahakian p (tel. 52701, 52846, 010-28-28-91) is multi-level hotel/pensionat with 75 sad rooms in varying states of repair. Rooms have no real amenities, except LUX and Deluxe

which have hot/cold water, TV and refrigerator. Otherwise hot water is in public bathrooms only. TV & Video in lobby. The hotel has table tennis and billiards. SGL/DBL/LUX/TRP/DELUXE at 7500/7500/9000/11,000 AMD per person, includes three meals a day.

Usuchi Tun (Teachers House) Hotel Resort, has eight rooms in a building on a turnoff across from Zvartnots Hotel. DBL/TRP/QUAD start at 20,000 AMD.

Writer's House, Orbeli p by Alpina Hotel (tel. 52532, 52534, 010-28-10-81, 28-21-01), e-mail: info@writershotel.am, URL: www.writershotel.am, is probably the most famous pensionat at Tsaghkadzor and certainly one of the most interestingly designed with wood paneling, meandering halls and an impressive lobby. The pensionat is built on a slope of the Tsaghkuniats Mountains, with several nature trails arching through the surrounding forest. The pensionat rents ski equipment and has a cinema, restaurants, sauna, Jacuzzi, pools, gym, table tennis, billiards, bar, salon, dentist. Services include excursions, transport service, seminars and conferences, business center (scanner, printer, Xerox, internet, digital video, audio and photo developing), equipment rental (skis and snow mobiles). 77 rooms with Satellite TV, telephone (international calls possible), VHS and Karaoke (by order). SGL/DBL/TRP/QUAD at \$30/31/50/85 AMD.

Youth Center, has Canteen, Bar, Sauna & Pool, Billiards, mini-Cinema and 100 rooms available with DBL at 15,000 AMD+. Meals extra.

YSU Guest House, ----, has 82 rooms, Canteen, Bar, swimming pool, gym, playground, table tennis, billiards and conference room. Prices are high-low season with SGL/DBL/TRP/QUAD/LUX at 9000-7000/14,000-12,000/18,000-16,000/26,000-24,000/30,000-30,000 AMD

SPORTS COMPLEX

Tsaghkadzor Sport Base/Olympic Center (Sport Baza), 1 k north of Kecharis on Sports Baza p. (tel. 52344, 52421), URL: www.hrazdan.am (Armenian) has 128 double rooms and 2 suites in a gorgeous setting. The complex has a hotel, restaurant, bar, cafes, bistros, discothèques. There are also training and competition facilities for 35 types of sports. There are 4 sport halls with 72x18 m with equipment, a hall 252x18 m, 2 swimming pools

21x50 m and a 10m springboard. The complex has all facilities for International Conferences and Seminars. DBL at 9.000/10.000 AMD per person.

BOARDING/APARTMENT

This is a distinct possibility in Tsaghkadzor, though done informally, there are no organized rentals. Ask around when you arrive. 6000-10,000 AMD per person seems to be the going rate, can be less if you split a room or apartment. Ask around when you arrive. Travel agents in Yerevan arrange apartments or cottages at \$20-60. Also try Hyur Service in Yerevan, 50, Nalbandian (tel. 010-56 04 95), e-mail: contact@hyurservice.com, URL: www.hyurservice.com.

CAMPING

Free Camping is hard to find near Tsaghkadzor, you can find some spots on the Hankavan (Marmarik) valley or on the mountain range away from town. Otherwise negotiate camping at one of the Resorts that have cabins and woods. Figure 3000-5000 AMD for a tent spot, 5000-8000 AMD if they throw in facilities or in high season. Not really worth it unless you like the town.



FOOD AND DRINK ▲

Restaurants and Cafes are around town, as are Khorovatz joints in town and on the highway to Hrazdan/Sevan. Food can also be bought at Mterks (food shops) around town.

\$ = 2000 AMD or less for meal w/o drinks

\$\$ = 2000-3500 AMD

\$\$\$ = 3500 AMD or more

Burmunk Restaurant, off of Grigor Magistros p by Kecharis Monastery and the gorge, is something of a delight, with small zoo, restaurant and dining cottages. The menu specializes in tonir cooked khorovatz, very good. \$\$-\$\$\$

Coffee Break, Charents p, is a traditional café with hot and cold drinks, sandwiches and lunch platters. Coffee is 150-250 AMD, meals around 1500-3000 AMD. \$\$

Family Restaurant, Olympic Sport Complex, serves Armenian food in a dining hall or one of their outdoor cottages. \$\$

Feri Tea House, Charentsi p, is famous from Soviet times as one of the tea houses in Armenia, specializing in black, green and herbal teas, including Armenian blends picked in the region. Sandwiches and desserts. \$-\$\$

Gor Khashatun, center of town, features Armenian khash. \$-\$\$

Hatsatun Restaurant, Kentronakan p near Writer's House, is an old favorite, serving traditional Armenian food. \$-\$\$\$.

Kecharis Restaurant, Grigor Magistros near Viardo, features old ("lost") Armenian dishes, served in dining cottages. Interesting interior and good food. \$-\$\$\$

Natalie Tavern, next to post office on Charents p, is a restaurant-bar made from wood with Armenian-Russian food. Delightful décor, smoky. \$\$-\$\$\$

Tsaghkadzor Restaurant, Square, features Russian and Armenian dishes in a large dining hall. Armenian rabiz music. A Novi Armeni favorite. \$-\$\$\$

ENTERTAINMENT ▲

You don't have to be a guest to enjoy some of the entertainment venues in town. Worth checking into on your off-piste hours.

Discos are in Kecharis hotel and the Writer's House, as well as impromptu summer discos at most camps and resorts.

Bowling is at Kecharis hotel.

Cinemas are at the Writer's House and YSU Guest House.



DAY TRIP: HANKAVAN VALLEY ▲

TSAGHKADZOR – (J'rarat) – ([Aghavnadzor](#)) – (Marmarik) – ([MEGHRADZOR](#) ([Tezharuik](#)) – ([Dzorak](#)) – ([Piunik](#)) – ([ARTAVAZD](#)) – ([Hankavan Pensionats/Camps](#)) – [HANKAVAN](#)

This trip explores the Marmarik Valley, also known as the Hankavan valley, with one of the largest concentrations of children's camps (jambars) in Armenia, along with hangestian gotis, pensionats and hotels nestled into the northern folds of the Tsaghkuniats Range. To the north are farm fields and the gold mine at Meghradzor, and the distant peaks of the Pambak Mountains dividing Kotaik from Lori and Gegharkunik. The road is a pleasant drive of an hour or so, half days if you stop at the monasteries at Tezharuik and Artavazd, then visit the Greek village of Hankavan.



Hiking from the valley is spectacular, especially above Hankavan, with day hikes to Aragatsotn and Aparan, or Lori and the Molokon villages at Lermontovo, Fioletevo and Margahovit. Hankavan Valley is also known for its affordable venues, which share the same forests with Tsaghkadzor but at half (or more) the price. Most venues are not as well kept, though newer spots are popping up and renovations are ongoing. But for the price, I find I can overlook a lot. Typical prices here are between 4000-6000 per person, compared to a 15,000 at Tsaghkadzor. Pensionats at Aghavnadzor are open year round, a poor man's retreat for avid skiers and summer vacationers.



Stay: Overnight in pensionats, hotels and camps at Aghavnadzor, Dzorak, Piunik, Artavaz and Hankavan and village homes (rustic). Camping

throughout the area, on river beds and in forest clearings.

Eat: Aghavnadzor, Dzorak, Piunik, Artavaz and Hankavan pensionat, cafes & bistros, roadside stands, village homes.

Springs: River bed, Tezharuik Monastery, Aghavnadzor, Meghradzor, Dzorak, Piunik, Artavaz, Hankavan.

☞ From Tsaghkadzor take the NE Kentronakan p to the intersection with the Hrazdan road (H5) turning L (NW) and over the bridge, past the huge cement plant and dairy farm at (J'rarat DD 40.7461111 x 44.0883333) 🏠 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: (J'rarat - Ջրաբան formerly Randamal, elev. 2235m, pop. 800) village has little to speak for it, save the gigantic furnaces at the Mika Cement Plant and its cooperative dairy production with nearby Aghavnadzor. On the left side of the road after you cross the bridge and veer to the left continuing on the (H28) for about 1.5 km is a low hill with a cemetery and a small domed cruciform grave chapel. The cemetery is mostly 19th-20th cc, but the little mausoleum is interesting.

About 500 m past the cemetery, also on the L (N), are some old **khachkars** and **animal stones**, the remains of a graveyard of medieval Armenians and Yezidi villagers. The stone huts nearby are of Yezidi origin.

Camping is possible in the area (ask if someone lives close by); **Overnight** in the area or village possible (rustic, 3000-5000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in along the river.

Continue on the (H28) for about 3 km where the tree cover thickens and the R turnoff to ([Aghavnadzor](#) DD 39.7836111 x 45.2280556) and in another 1.2 km (signposted "Mush") the L (SW) turnoff to ([Aghavnadzor Valley resort area](#) DD 40.57140 x 44.68417) 🏠 🏠 🏠

SIDE TRIP: ([Aghavnadzor – Աղավնաձոր](#) till 1948 Babakishi elev. 1425m, pop. 905) was founded in 1829 by immigrants from Alashkert (Aghashkert) in Ottoman Turkey, during the exchange of populations after the Russo-Turkish war of 1828. The village is a dairy center (God help the cows so near to the cement facility).

Just NW of the village, taking a L off of the (H28) is the Aghavnadzor Valley Resort Area, with a number of pensionats and a summer camp built into the slopes of the mountains. The mountains are tree-covered, and a trail beginning from the L (S) road (above the new hotel) parallels the valley's mountain stream and leads uphill for about 2.7 km, where a south trails ends in about 2 km just N of Mt. Sev Kar (2451.7 m), and continuing W takes you in about 5 km to the Tsaghkuniats Ridge.



Overnight

The lodging here is much cheaper than at Tsaghkadzor with almost as good a view but some decidedly run down rooms. A new Hotel is being built, which will probably drive prices up, but until then, enjoy the cheap digs. Stay here and drive or hike to Tsaghkadzor for the party at better than half the price.

Karap Pensionat, is first on the left, facing the road. The run down, poorly managed spot somehow gets by on the kindness of strangers who stumble on the joint or locals who remember a better time. Grounds include football, basketball. Almost no amenities, but cheap enough with SGL/DBL/LUX at 3500/4500/5500 AMD.

Aghavnadzor Camp, is across the road, an old pioneer camp and pensionat that was closed when we came by in September but which locals say is open in high season and cheap enough with beds starting at 2500 AMD and rooms from 3000 AMD. Better grounds than Karap.

Zartonk Pensionat, is just above Karap, take the side road that leads to Karap, then veer

straight/R to the neat and tidy pensionat. Very clean space, friendly atmosphere, family oriented, basic but clean rooms, some with hot water, communal baths also clean with hot water. This is a great find. Meals included with DNL/LUX at 6000/8000 AMD. This is a keeper.

New Hotel, go back to the road and further N then L is a brand new hotel that was under construction when we were there. Top secret apparently, no one around to tell us what it will be. It is a large compound with hotel, restaurant and cottages. Looked expensive.

Mush Rest House (tel. 27323, 091-21-02-15), is further up, off of L (S) turnoff. The large complex has some OK rooms with hot, cold water, bathroom, toilet, refrigerator, telephone in the lobby. The rest house has a playground, tennis, billiards, outdoors swimming pool. The big drawback is the rude management who didn't seem to care if they had business or not. Not to be trusted, they advertise rooms with no meals/meals at 4000/5000 AMD but quoted us 7500 AMD for same.

Cottages, (tel. 093-43-33-48, ask for Garik) go back to the road and continue uphill to where the valley narrows and a series of two story cottages with turquoise/aquamarine trim are on the R. All of them are being renovated and they have glorious views of the forests on the opposite side of the valley. First years are always a charm in Armenia, so 2007 is the year to try out these cottages with kitchen, bath and upstairs bedrooms. 2-3 bedroom cottages starting at \$50.

International Summer School of Informatics Camp, (tel. 010-42-22-17, ask for Robert), in the old Pioneer campgrounds has domiks and buildings around a central asphalt courtyard. The rooms are pretty basic, but it is at the end of the road so nature is all around you. Excellent hikes and views. Food included with beds for 3800/4000 AMD.

Food at pensionats and a café just uphill from Aghavnadzor Camp; **Camping** is possible in the area, but stay away from lodgings unless you want to pay; **Overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village and along the river.

➡ Backtrack to the (H28), turn L (W) and continue for about 1.4 km to the L (SW) turnoff to (Marmarik DD 40.5827778 x 44.6683333) 📍 🗺️

SIDE TRIP: (Marmarik – Մարմարիկ formerly Dali Pasha, elev. 1751m, pop 560) is located immediately across the Marmarik River in front of a river bluff. The village has the S. Hovhannes church, built over older structures that might have been pre-Christian, but collective memory is not what it used to be, the current residents descendents of immigrants from Ottoman Turkey.

The valley just to the N of the village has jambars and pensionats, comparable to those at Aghavnadzor Valley.

Camping is possible near the village (ask first); **Overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village and along the river.

➡ Continue NW on the (H28) for about 3.5 km to **MEGHRADZOR** (DD 40.59855 x 44.64927) 📍 🗺️



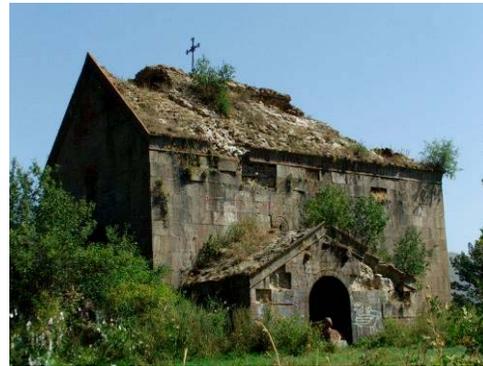
⚠️ **MEGHRADZOR - ՄԵՂՐԱԶՈՐ** ▲ (formerly Taicharukh, elev. 1779m, pop. 1631) is a farming and mining community set at the confluence of the Marmarik and the Meghradzor ("Honey Canyon") Rivers.

The village has a gold mine that has resumed operations, dropping significant sums into

government pockets (sorry, no free samples). Mining is believed to have begun in the area in the Late Bronze Age, possibly earlier. It is mentioned in the chronicles as a part of the Bjni holdings, prized by Arshakunis and their descendent lords. On the N and NE ends of the village there are a couple of cemeteries with graves dating back to the medieval period.

The rail line that has been paralleling the highway veers N here, cutting through the Pambak Mountains in a 9 km-long rail tunnel, connecting Kotaik with Lori at Margahovit, and the Hrazdan line with the Dilijan railway. A 24 km road parallels the rail line with numerous switchbacks and spectacular views, good 4x4 trekking in summer time. Also a good (long) hike for those wanting to hoof it into Lori.

There is at least one summer camp outside of Meghradzor, meant for children but a decent place to crash if you are intent on hiking the Pambak Mountains and want a jumping off point. Season is June-August. About 500 m N of the village.



Tezharuik Vank – T'rdat Church (ԹԵՃԱՐՈՒԿԻ ՎԱՆԿ - ՏՐԴԱՏԻ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻ)

Built around the 7th c T'rdat church, the late 12th c Tezharuik monastery is an extraordinary complex, one of the few Chalcedonian (Georgian orthodox) types in Kotaik.

To get there continue NW on the (H28) and in about 900 m you will see a L (SW) bridge and steep path going uphill. Follow the path (the main one is rutted, there are offshoots that are shorter but steeper) uphill for about – km (20-30 minutes) to Tezharuik **vank** (DD 40.608333 x 44.653055).

Apostle Warrior

We walked outside to the back of the church, and I saw on the bottom of a hill a large oblong stone, rounded at the top, and flat on one side, obviously toppled from its place along the wall of the church.

On the surface was an etching of a warrior. The carving was unlike any I have seen except among those on display under the side portico to the Matenadaran, a few fish-like gods carved in stone, as well as a warrior like this, drawn as if on the face of a cave, a reminder of a time back to Galilee and the apostle fishermen, warriors for God.

Somehow it struck me as even pre-Christian. The etching a ghost of the man it celebrated, like figures on temple walls, the etchings like phosphorescent drawings in space.

My friend thought it might be a contemporary recreation of early Christian stones found in other areas of Armenia, but I preferred to think it had tumbled out of the wall of the church which was built from the stones of a temple, and it showed us the history within.



The church was built in the 7th c, its footprint suggesting it replaced a large pre-Christian temple on the site. Locals treat the church as a Tukh Manuk, bringing animals for matagh and tying strips of cloth on a "burning bush" near the entrance to the building. The monastery was enlarged for the 12th-13th cc atarbek Ivaneh Zakarian, the other half of the [Zakarian dynamos](#) that liberated large swaths of Armenian land from Seljuk rule in the 12th-13 cc.



The renovations added fortifications, a western gavit and vestibule on the south side, each elaborately decorated in the Orthodox style. The builders added cornice work to the roofline and frescoes painted on the interior walls. The monastery continued to have an important place in the area, training priests and instructors up to its destruction during the Mongol and Timurid invasions.

Complex The complex includes a church with an anteroom or small chapel, a gavit and a shrine all within a walled compound.

The **church** (T'rdat) was built between 1196-1199, at the same time as the monastery. The church is a single nave type with towering walls and a rounded vault ceiling under the pitched stone gable roof.

The outside of the church is covered with finely hewn basalt stone with decorative motifs on the walls and elaborate carved cornices. Among the carvings is an **eagle** over the southern entry, symbol of the Zakarian family. The **red tufa animal** by the entry is modern, a commemorative

Pulse

Candles glowed in the semi-darkness, as women, men and children pressed them into sand boxes before the paper pictures of Jesus. Some played among the stone steps and uneven flagstones while others hummed or chanted prayers.

Outside, groups of women and children circled the church, following a path worn into the ground at the base of the walls. They were praying for help, for comfort, for some gift from God, and as they prayed, they circled the church 7 times. Seven times. Seven, symbol of completion and ascent.

Was this Pagan? No one would tell me. As I walked into the ruined enclosures, surrounded by the sweet smell of pine trees and the lush green of grass still thriving in the upper elevation, I began to think about ley lines, those underlying pulses of energy that supposedly crisscross the world. Specialists have been mapping them for most of this century, and have found intersecting points at churches and temples around the world. Was T'rdat on a ley line?

If it's true or not I cannot say, but there was a gentle pulse of energy about this old building, whether it was its classical refinement, the perfect proportions of the stone, or the setting among piney woods. It exhilarated as it subdued. I can not but wonder that some earlier goddess was worshipped here.

benefactors to the monastery. The stone was added after church construction, the outline of its later placement can be seen on the wall.

stone based on a Pagan motif. The words on front read "Given in memory of Taicharukh Vank".

The eastern wall has a pair of birds (eagles or hawks), the one on the right a little larger than the left, symbolizing the Kaghbarkians or Prince Bubak and his wife,



Just downhill from the eastern façade there is a low clearing, with a 12th or 13th c **gravestone** leaning against a tree (at least when we were there). The stone once graced the floor of the gavit or church, a place of honor reserved for members of the monastic community or wealthy donors. This anonymous soul is roughly outlined on black basalt, typical for graves of this type. The shape of the stone suggests it may have been the top of a sarcophagus, and if so, it is an uncommon example of coffin graves. More likely the edges broke off when someone pried it up (grave robbing was a common occurrence in times of turmoil and not restricted to Turkish raider).



The entrance to the church is from the South Side through a small 12th c **vestibule** that was completely covered with frescoes, the remains of which cling to portions of the walls and over the church doorway. The remaining painted motifs are elaborate vines of grape leaves on the front of the central archway, part of a trio of arches on the entry wall.



The **inner hall** is impressive, a massive space made to look even larger with the clever use of repeated arches meeting on wall abutments and smooth arched vaulting. The height was reinforced again by arcature on the lower walls, adding both height and rhythm to the design. Sounds absurd, but architectural lines can have rhythm, creating the felling of movement in an otherwise static object.

The walls were once painted over with elaborate designs and religious motifs. Considering the

wealth the Zakarians amassed the effect of the frescoed walls with the silver and gold plate typically used to adorn churches must have been awe-inspiring to the peasantry that worshipped here. What am I saying? This was not a peasant church until much later; Tezharuik was a royal vank, reserved for the upper crust. They might have taken the gold in stride.

The 12th c North **room** is just off the hall, by the apse apron. The small space has arched niches in its walls which once held relics. This open anteroom would have been treated like those in other Armenian churches that flanked the apse, as a place of prayer, service preparation or as a treasury.



The small **gavit** adjoins the western façade of the church, integrated into the structure unlike other gavits of the time which were added to existing structures. The floor is paved with gravestones. Among the graves is that of prince Bubak, one of Ivaneh Zakarian's vassals. Subject to the suzerainty of the Kaghbakian family, who inherited the region from the Zakarians, burial in a favored spot on church grounds indicate the Chalcedonian Prince Bubak and his descendants (also buried here) continued to have influence in the province and with the monastery. The floor of the gavit has been badly ruined, like the roof and ceiling of the main hall a product of invasions and attacks, the last by Soviet Armenians who tried to demolish the space then to sue it for housing herds. In bad weather the hall can still be found protecting horse or sheep.

The outside walls have a number of other carvings, including protruding rosettes, pomegranates,

elaborate motifs of geometric patterns on the cornices, and a sundial on the southern wall.

To the south of the church in a stand of trees there is a low foundation for a small building. This chapel is from an early period, its footprint suggesting it may have been a Tuxh Manuk before housing medieval graves. This is also suggested by the shape of the stones that lie about, solid pieces of carefully carved rock more typical of Urartian or Hellenistic eras than the 13th c.

The remains of vank fortifications are on the southern and western edges of the compound, obscured by trees and bush. There is not much to show how substantial they were, believed to have risen 7 meters.

There is a clearing in the forest SW of the vank, with signs of a campfire. Good spot to camp or picnic.

Camping is possible at the vank or near the village; **Overnight** in nearby pensionat, hotel, camp or village home (rustic, 4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village and along the river.

➔ Continue NW on the (H28) for about 1.8 km to a bridge and immediately after a L (SW) turnoff to **Dzorak** DD 40.6 x 44.616667) 📍 🏠 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Dzorak – Հորսկ** previously Korchlu, elev. 1889m, pop. 700) is deep within the folds of the mountain, with pensionats and jambars up the village road (6000-8000 AMD).

Hankavan's recreation area begins at Dzorak, a continuous string of jambars that continue past the village. Hotels and pensionats are there as well, and some have become pricey, but most stops are jambars, which are rustic by nature (communal facilities, meals at the cafeteria, group activities for the kids) with perhaps a private space with separate facilities for the staff which might be available to rent out. They are popular and busy, so don't count on being able to stay, but if one is free and you don't mind roughing it, jambars are delightful ways to meet locals first hand. The kids are great fun, there are performances, contests and discos in the evening (a blast) and you can come away feeling pretty good about Armenia's future. I think it is worth roughing it.

Hotels, Restaurants/motels and Pensionats fit within the jambars, in varying states of repair and renovation. The pricier ones are \$40 or more per room, cheaper around 4000-8000 AMD per person. Figure these prices unless otherwise noted.

Overnight near Dzorak:

Shoghk jambar, Dzorak, left bank. Children's summer camp that operates June-August. Welcome visitors if not full. 3000+/- AMD for bed, more for a room.

Hangestian Tun, Dzorak, left bank. Rooms, camping spots and picnic facilities. 4000-6000 AMD per person.

Camping is possible in the area (ask first); **Overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village and along the river.

➔ From the turnoff to Dzorak, continue NW on the (H28) for about 1.5 km to (**Piunik** DD 40.60892 x 44.59057) 📍 🏠 🌿

SIDE TRIP: (**Piunik – Փյունիկ** before Akhundov, till 1939 Dadaghislagh, elev. 1911m, pop. 500) its old name was for an Azerbaijani Communist who translated Marx and Lenin into Azeri. The village settled by descendants of Turkish raiders who settled in the area in the 14th-15th cc, Azeris who left during the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh.

The village stands out, inserting its worn, picturesque homes and gardens nested within the hills, pensionats and jambars. The architecture of the village shows its Turkish influence in its use of contrasting colors and a more "middle Eastern" flavor. When we visited there was a large ochre stucco building (closed and none of us could find out what it once was), arrested by the imposition of an olive green sagging wooden door on its right hand side. Other village houses retain traces of the reds, oranges and greens the Azeri's used to decorate their homes. A small pond has been constructed, and paddle boats rest on the "shoreline" ready for comers. Along the road there are a few kiosks selling sodas and candy bars, and an occasional offering of in season fruits or vegetables.

Overnight between Piunik and Artavaz:

Kanaz "Baze" jambar, left bank, was the only working jambar in the late 1990's, and housed refugees from the Karabakh. It has just been purchased with plans to renovate into a resort area 2007-2008. No prices available.

Polytechnic Sports Hangestian Tun and cottages, Left bank (tel. 010-25-07-60), has colorful but run down cottages, and basic amenities (no hot water) but friendly staff and cheap enough rate at 2200 AMD per person. Camping spots possible.

Marmarik Pensionat, Right bank, has rooms and meals from 4000-5000 AMD.

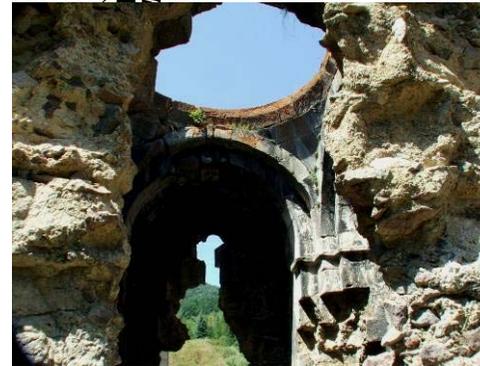
Nairit Hangestian Goti, Left bank, has rooms and camping spots, 4000-6000 AMD per person.

Lusabats jambar, Left bank is full most of the season, but welcomes visitors when there is space.

Hasmik jambar, Left Bank, is another busy place in the summer, with great staff. Try them, if they have room, worth it.

Food at Balyazit Café, above Narit with khorovatz, 1500-2000 AMD; **Camping** is possible near the village (ask first); **Overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village and along the river.

➔ From central Piunik continue NW on the (H28) for about 2 km to ARTAVAZ (40.61358 x 44.56260) 📍 🏠 🌿



✳ **ARTAVAZ - ԱՐՏԱՎԱԶ** 📍 (formerly Takyarlu, elev. 1839m, pop. 1866) is in a rise in the valley, perched over the river. The old village lay on the valley floor, moved uphill when the nearby Mararik Reservoir Dam was constructed in the 1960s. Faulty engineering (read: shoddy workmanship and skimming off the budget) resulted in massive leaks in the dam, which threatened to break open flooding the entire valley floor. It remains unused.

Artavazd Vank - Արտավազի Վանք

Down in the lower valley (reached by taking a village road that angles back to the left, next to village shops) is the Artavazd vank and cemetery. What remains of the small but stately structure is enough to see the beautifully proportioned design, and the wealth lavished on its construction. Khachkars and carved detail stones lie strewn around the base of the church. Where the dome was, there is a gaping hole that illuminated the interior.

The vank is made of two structures; a domed cruciform type (9th-10th cc) and an older single nave basilica (4th-5th cc) on its north side, built over a Pagan temple. Locals refer to both structures as Arshak II church and treat the basilica as a Tuxh Manuk, including tying bits of cloth on a bush growing from the apse, supporting an earlier date for the space.

The vank was in much better condition up to the 20th century. The story is that when the reservoir was built, Azeri's living in nearby villages dismantled the churches to build their own homes with. Possible, though the stones seem to be have been taken more by Armenians, judging by their buildings. Others say the engineers began dismantling the church themselves when working on the dam, one of the last instances of Soviet attacks on religious structures. Either story would do, and the destruction is shame, but the result is intriguing; the building's "skeleton" exposed, a fine example of medieval engineering.



Some very old stones are scattered about the vank, including samples of 4th c carvings, as well as a few that might be pre-Christian in origin. Khachkars are in the church yard and cemetery, itself dating to the Pagan era.



Overnight near Artavaz

Erebuni & Vartina, L across the dam (tel. 0223-94177) is reached by taking the road over the reservoir dam about 1 km NW of Artavaz. There are two renovated motels/pensionats in a complex on the hill overlooking the valley, Erebuni about 600 m from Vartina, which is closest to the Hankavan road. The rooms are decent (they wear quickly, get them while they are new) with hot water, TV and good views. The complex has billiards, sauna and tennis courts and hiking paths into the nearby forests. Vartina has cottages and rooms starting at 10,000 AMD, Erebuni has SGL/DBL/LUX at same price.

Camping is possible near the village (ask first); **Overnight** in village home (rustic, 3000-4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village.



☞ From Artavaz center continue NW on the (H28) about 8.5 km in a series of climbing turns and a switchback the apex of which has a small waterfall to the upper Hankavan valley and (**Hankavan Pensionats/jambars**) 🏠 📶 🗺

SIDE TRIP: (**Hankavan Pensionats/Camps – Հանքավանի առողջարաններ / ճամբարներ** are between the defunct reservoir and the village of Hankavan. They include the Hankavan Sanitarium and mineral springs. The springs are reputed to have great medicinal properties, as well as being free from chemical additives.

Overnight

Hankavan Sanatorium named after J. Shmavonyan, Hankavan Village (tel. 0223-20296, 091-41-72-47), has DBL rooms with hot water (some rooms), TV, telephone in lobby. Rooms without spa treatments (includes 4 meals) at 7000 AMD per person. Treatment is 5500 AMD.

Eleonara Hangestian Tun, has basic rooms and access to the springs. 4000 AMD for room and board.

Hankavan Aroghcharan - Հանքավանի առողջարան, Left bank (tel. 0223-94227, 091-76-51-44, 010-54-21-10, in USA +818-994-7571, ask for Andy) is run by the indomitable Nerses of New Jersey, either the craziest American-Armenian in Hankavan or a genius hedging his bets. Slowly renovating the place

(which still has much faded glory about it), he has a clear vision for the place, if not the investment to carry it out yet. He has added some funky touches, and welcomes visitors and customers alike to sample the mineral waters. There is one cottage with decent facilities (two rooms) for 20,000 AMD and the rooms in the large sanitarium with rooms at 9000/10,000 AMD per person. Fees include meals and mineral springs.

Camping is possible at Hankavan Sanitarium and in the forests); **Springs** are along the river.

☞ From Hankavan Sanitarium turnoff, continue NW on the (H28) for about 3 km to the bridge into central **HANKAVAN** (40.63497 x 44.48512) 🏠 📶 🗺

✂ **HANKAVAN - ՀԱՆՔԱՎԱՆ** ▲ (till 1935 Bash Aparan, elev. 1966m, pop. 1597) is noted first for the mineral springs that flow abundantly to the south, forming the basis for a burgeoning sanitarium industry in the Soviet period.



Before that, the area was populated almost exclusively by Greek refugees from the 1828 Greek genocide during the Turko-Russian war, and before that, by French who were seeking their fortunes in the river streams and hillsides, mining for gold. One gold mine is still in operation at Meghradzor. Most importantly, though, Hankavan is known as one of the last (dwindling) communities of **Greeks** in Armenia.

The village stretches for 1.6 kilometers along the meandering river. It is nestled between dry hills on the road side and lush forests on the opposite

side. As you round a bend, you begin to dip down to the village. The houses are striking for their careful masonry and touches of white paint, remnants of careful white-washing years ago. Once on the beaten sanitarium and pensionat path, Hankavan has quickly escaped into a time capsule. The center is very small. Two long stone buildings, in white stucco.



Before you are in the village itself, you can see a church and **graveyard** below you to the left. The **church** was built by Greeks who escaped the 1827 genocide. Graves date back to that early time. All around you are Greek homes and gardens. Originally 7 families immigrated to this village, a number that grew to a thriving village of 250 families. What remains are about 50 families who trace their ancestry to the Greek mainland.

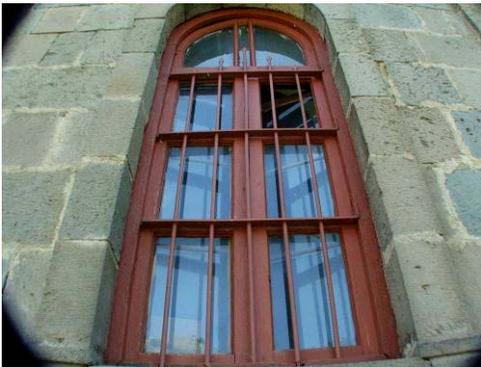


The church and churchyard are laid out along the river, the church overlooking the river from a rise

in the land. It is oblong and squat, made from carefully hewn blocks of stone. A neighbor came out of her home while we were gazing at the strong, fierce design, and told us the church was now used by both Greeks and Armenians. Most of the gravestones were Greek, showing their Orthodox cross with a slanting cross piece pointing to heaven, sans etched photographs of the interned common on Armenian gravestones. There is Greek writing on the face of the gravestones: Dmitri, Nicholai, Constantinos.

The Greek villagers have mostly left, taking the brass ring in the European Union suddenly open to them in 1991, though a few remain. Those who have immigrated have a difficult time adjusting to Greece, beginning from their language. Armenian Greeks speak Pontic, the dialect of Homer and Plato, nothing like the Hellenistic dialect spoken by modern Greeks. It would be rather like stumbling upon Grigor Magistros or Movses Khorenatsi and trying to speak modern Armenian to their classical Grabar. Not much to grab onto.

Those who remain are friendly and hospitable, welcoming passersby to sit a spell, spend some time, eat and stay overnight in their tidy (if rustic) digs.



Hiking trails

The **Lusagiugh trail** is also an off-road vehicle run, following rocky paths and trace mountains paths over the mountains. Following the asphalt road to its end, there is a gate to a defunct pensionat awaiting investment. Skirting past that there is a mountain road that switchbacks and winds around Mt. Davakar (2781.6 m) for about 12

km to Lusagiugh. This road passes over breathtaking views (and heart stopping cliff edges and gorges) and is not for the faint of heart. About half way along it passes through a mountain camp once used by the Pioneers. Season rains may cause rock slides, be sure to ask before you leave, lest you return unhappy. Hiking it may need a local guide and definitely a great sense of direction.

The **Vanadzor trail** takes off from the North edge of the village, following the N fork of the Yerkarget (Zanga Miskhana) River to the top of the Pambak range, over Mt. Maimekh (3081.4 m) then down to Vanadzor. This 19 km hike also needs a guide or excellent skills.

Overnight

There are two pensionats above Hankavan, the working *Student Pensionat* (no contact, walk in and see if there is space, 2000+ AMD) and a *closed Ararat Pensionat* at the end of the road, surrounded by high forests. Good camping and hiking. The forests still hold small populations of bear, fox and wolves.

Camping is possible in the forests and near the village (ask first); **Overnight** in village home (rustic, 4000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** are in the village and along the river.

➔ END OF TRIP 4



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS ▲

Rick Ney (author) first came to Armenia in 1992 to work at the American University of Armenia. In 1993 he began his work in humanitarian aid and development for USAID-funded projects at the Armenian Assembly of America and Fund for Democracy and Development, the latter as Caucasus Region Director. This morphed into writing about Armenia for various publications, which became the first English language complete guide to Armenia in 1996 (online) and 1998 (CD-ROM). It has since become an online resource, visited by more than 24 million unique visitors (www.TACentral.com and www.TourArmenia.info). Rick is passionate about Armenia's deep history, amazing ecology, and making the country accessible for independent travelers, whom he believes will be the basis of Armenia's entry into the open world. In 2000 he began dividing his time between Armenia and caring for a parent in Texas, both of which he considers the richest experiences of his life.

Rafael Torossian (research, maps, and graphics) has been collaborating with Rick on TourArmenia since 1996, providing some much needed reality checks and commentary along the way. In his other life Rafael designs flash sequences, ads, graphics and web sites for TWRI, for a variety of sites and content management projects. In a previous life Rafi was a field and track athlete, setting the All Armenia record (still unbroken) for the 60 meter dash, then as Assistant to the Minister for Sports, serving (surviving) 6 ministers, before meeting Rick, when they worked together on several humanitarian aid projects managed by the Armenian Assembly of America and Fund for Democracy and Development. In a world where engineers are taxi drivers, Rafi became the finance manager for these projects, creating the first multi-denomination accounting system for USAID projects in the Caucasus, tracking currency that inflated at one time 150% per day. Rafi is an Honored Coach of the Republic of Armenia and lives in Yerevan, a proud Yerevantsi who did not leave during the dark years of 1991-1995.

Bella Karapetian (Editing, Translations, Russian Edition) first met Rick in 1993 when she came to

the American University and worked in his office as Faculty services Manager and Special Events Coordinator. There she had the chance to use her remarkable patience and good humor with wide-eyed professors wanting to know where the nearest shopping mall was (God give us patience and a good dose of Pantalgin). She then worked at the World Food Program in Armenia as administrator and Program Officer. In her previous life Bella worked with International architects at ArmStateDesign Institute as an information program assistant and translator. She is currently Executive Director of the NGO Historic Armenian Houses. History and architecture are her true loves and she has traveled to China, Thailand, Malaysia, Italy, Germany, and Lebanon and throughout the former Soviet Union. Bella tops this off by maintaining her membership in the World Esperanto Association. *Saluton!*

Thanks to: (Region): Ashot Levonian for his information on hiking and caving tours in Tavush, to Boris Gasparyan for detailed info and critique of the prehistoric material; (General): to Tigran Nazarian and Christine Karapetian for their insightful comments, advice, trips into the wilderness and challenging ideas; to Gagik Gurjian from the Ministry for Historical Preservation, who has been showing me the intricacies of Armenia's cultural monuments and their influences since 1992, leading me to some of the most amazing places and events I have been, as well as to the large vat of killer Voskevaz wine in his garden; to Stepan Ter-Margaryan & the folks at the Institutes of History and Archeology branches of the National Academy for their help on pointing me to original sources and exhaustive original information on destinations; to Sam Stepanian for his eternal support; to Arminco, Grisha Saghian and Vahan Yerkanian for their support, the creation of the first edition on CD, link ups and links to culture and more. To ArmeniaNow.com for giving me the chance to share this material to their world. And to R and L. TMB.

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