



Nagorno-Karabakh

POPULATION: 150,000 | 📞0479 | AREA 10,700 SQ KM

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Best Historic Sites

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Best Places to Stay

- » Saro B&B (p274)
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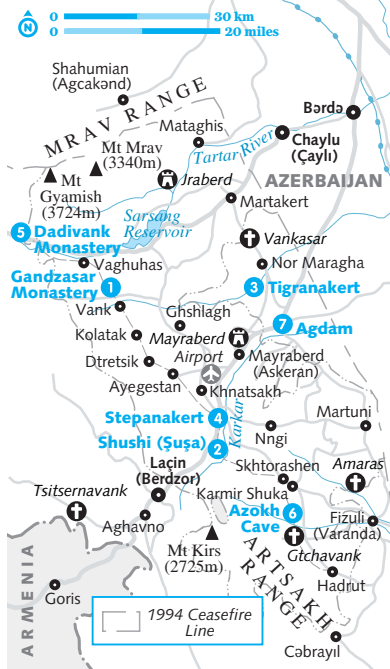
Why Go?

Nagorno-Karabakh is an enigma wrapped up inside the South Caucasus. It is a self-declared republic recognised by no one. It is Armenian culture on land claimed by Azerbaijan. Even the name is something of a mystery, being made up from words of three different languages: *nagorno* means mountainous in Russian, *kara* means black in Turkish and *bakh* means garden in Persian. To confuse things further, the locals refer to their region as Artsakh.

While there exist many questions about Nagorno-Karabakh and its political status, the beauty and cultural richness of this remote mountain landscape are undeniable. The Karabakh War left deep psychological and physical scars on the people and their landscape but the Karabakhtis are moving on, rebuilding their land stone by stone. Travel here is still an adventure, involving special permits and military-occupied no-go zones, but rapidly improving infrastructure means better hotels, restaurants and facilities in the main tourist areas. Karabakhti hospitality makes wading through the challenges a joy, even in difficult times.

When to Go

Nagorno-Karabakh is just one mountain range over from Syunik province in Armenia, so you can expect similar weather to what you'll experience in Goris. An excellent time to visit is the 9 May Victory Day, which also marks the Day of Liberation in Shushi. You'll see lots of military hardware paraded on the streets and an evening concert. Book accommodation ahead of time as rooms are in short supply. Summer and early autumn (June to September) are the best times for hiking. Spring (March to mid-May) is often wet and foggy.



Nagorno-Karabakh Highlights

- 1 Visit the **Gandzasar Monastery** (p276): excellent Armenian architecture with rich friezes and magnificent detail.
- 2 Wander around the lovely hilltop town of **Shushi** (p273), Karabakh's cultural capital with revitalised museums, churches and historic sites.
- 3 Explore the ancient remains of **Tigranakert** (p275) one of the four cities built by Tigran the Great, now home to an excellent new museum.
- 4 Eat, drink and be merry in **Stepanakert** (p270), home to a surprisingly good choice of hotels, restaurants and bars.
- 5 Wind your way through Karabakh's rugged landscape to reach little-visited **Dadivank Monastery** (p276), an overgrown masterpiece on the edge of Kelbajar.
- 6 Travel south of Stepanakert to explore the remarkable **Azokh Cave** (p275), with tunnels and six chambers.
- 7 Contemplate the tragedy of **Agdam** (p275), a city ravaged by the Karabakh War, located on the still sensitive frontline.

Stepanakert

☎0479 / POP 55,000

Stepanakert, Karabakh's capital, stands above the Karkar River, surrounded by a typical landscape of forest, pasture and fields backed by craggy mountains. The city is not much different from a typical Armenian town, though it does have a bit more vibrancy. There are lively local arts and music scenes, modern shopping malls are popping up and cafés and restaurants, some surprisingly sleek, are often busy. A lot of reconstruction has occurred since the end of the war and it's hard to believe that it was under siege not long ago. A military presence is still evident but this doesn't impede your movements around the city.

Sights

[FREE] Artsakh State Museum MUSEUM
(4 David Sasuntsi Poghots; ☎9am-5pm Tue-Sun)
Rich in local artefacts, this contains particularly interesting displays on the Karabakh War, including homemade weapons used in the crushing early days of the fighting.

[FREE] Museum of Fallen Soldiers MUSEUM
(btwn N Stepanyan & Vazgen Sarksyian Poghots; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat) This stunning museum honours those men who died in battle during the 1990-94 war with Azerbaijan. The walls are lined with photographs of soldiers killed in action and there are displays of weaponry and other memorabilia. The entrance to the museum is in the back of a white building that stands on Vazgen Sarksyian Poghots. The door is slightly hidden by trees but the cannons and other military hardware outside act as a landmark. On the north side of the same courtyard (behind a pink building) is the **Museum of Missing Soldiers** (admission free; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat), which is similar to the Fallen Soldiers museum, but just one room instead of three.

Amusement Park AMUSEMENT PARK
(☎May-Sep) For something a little more light-hearted, this has rides and live music on warm summer nights.

Papik Tatik MONUMENT
On the outskirts of the town towards Mayraber (Askeran) is the tuff statue of a bearded elder and a woman with a veil. It is named 'We are our mountains', their stony gaze embodying the indomitable local spirit.

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