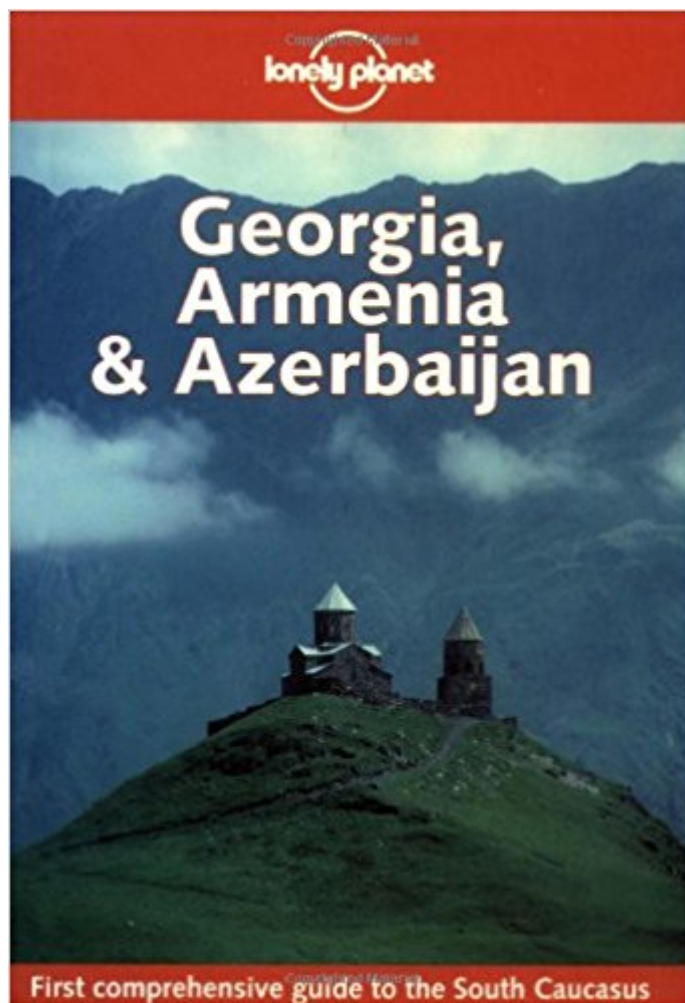


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Lonely Planet Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan



Synopsis

This comprehensive guide to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan covers mountaineering, skiing, watersports and birdwatching. A guide to the Armenian, Azeri, Georgian and Russian languages is also included.

Book Information

Series: Lonely Planet Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan

Paperback: 426 pages

Publisher: Lonely Planet Publications (August 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0864426801

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Average Customer Review: 2.2 out of 5 stars 20 customer reviews

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Customer Reviews

As usual the guidebook standard is set by Lonely Planet-- Outside

Lonely Planet's new "Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan" is the definitive guide to this unexplored area and is filled with historical and political facts, useful predeparture information, a handy reference of important phrases and authoritative advice on how to stay healthy and safe. Whether you're trekking in the mountains or enjoying traditional wine-soaked hospitality, this guide offers essential inside information on a region still refreshingly free of tourist culture; special activities section for trekkers, climbers and skiers; advice on areas of conflict and other safety issues; tips on getting visas, crossing borders and changing money; language guide for Georgian, Armenian and Azeri; 40 detailed maps

It was sadly out of date; newer version, which I perused, didn't seem a whole lot better. I visited these countries in May 2012, and the guide was only useful for some historical facts, which, really, could be obtained elsewhere.

I tend to be a fairly big fan of Lonely Planet's style of travel guidebooks - I've used them for travels many times, simply because I like the way they're structured and enjoy all the background information that accompanies their guidebooks. Unfortunately, there are a few duds that slip through the cracks, and this one is unquestionably one of the big ones. Granted, this is a guidebook to one of the most rapidly changing areas of the world when it comes to tourism and travel, but this book doesn't even seem like it was ever in synch with the reality in the South Caucasus. The Azerbaijan section is basically satisfactory, but hardly overwhelming. Sadly, that's the best can be said, as the other two sections are very much lacking. While the Georgia one is sloppy and not at all geared towards what a traveler really needs or wants, the Armenian section is downright awful, with a glaring lack of practical information and even basic facts. Maps go from fuzzy and confusing to completely unreliable, and restaurant listings often lack any sort of notion of prices (or are repeatedly geared for people hardly on a shoestring budget). Sometimes author recommendations are even non-existent - like the 'most recommended restaurant' in Batumi, which seems to have been bulldozed. The author for the Georgian section speaks of a gradually developing agro-tourism and homestay industry in the country, but somehow doesn't bother researching it almost at all (although you get plenty of listings for defunct Soviet hotels!). Illogically, sections on towns and other areas never include the names in Armenian and Georgian (apart from a few in an inadequate glossary in the back of the book), leaving you clueless as to what they'd be unless you spent a long time actually learning the national alphabets thoroughly. And, why throw the individual countries' history sections together into one general, regional history, especially given the unique backgrounds of each people? So much more depth could have been added to the book, but one gets the impression that the authors were racing towards a publishing deadline (especially the one for Armenia!). There's supposedly an update in the works, and it is much needed. For now though, check out instead the Trailblazer guide to Azerbaijan (*much* better coverage, even in the small section on Georgia) and the Rediscovering Armenia book, which is available either in country or on the internet - both of these actually do justice to the region.

I have always been a great admirer and user of Lonely Planet guidebooks, but this time they really produced a rather poor work. On one side I can't blame them, as the region is hard to get to know, and this probably remains the best guidebook about it anyway. On the other hand, lots of data are simply wrong, for which I can see no reasonable excuse. For example, the guidebook says that there are daily flights between Tbilisi and Yerevan, while there have been no scheduled flights since

the collapse of the USSR in 1989 ! And contrary to what is written, KLM, Northwest or Alitalia have never flown to Yerevan. The guidebook says that there are buses from Armenia to Turkey, and on the very same page it also says that it is impossible to get from Armenia to Turkey except via Georgia... Overall, there is very little this guidebook can tell you on how to get around within the region. The guidebook gives plenty of information on hotels in Tbilisi which are supposedly good, while they are now filled by refugees (surely an interesting and touching thing to see, but not where you might wish to stay). The major internet caf   they recommend in Tbilisi does not exist. Many addresses are simply wrong (either old or non-existent). The book makes a lot of fuss about the corruption and unclear regulations of Armenian and other border officials, which is not the case (for example in Armenia you CAN get a visa at any border for 25 \$ which is valid for 3 days, and when you leave you pay 3 \$ for each day you oversayed your visa) - no corruption, no problems. The book gives lots of concerns about safety and other issues which are unnecessary, and especially in its Armenia section it seems to be biasedly 'anti-local' (something one would never expect from a guidebook). Overall, it seems poorly researched and not always well written. The chapter on Nagorno-Karabakh is ridiculously short (4 pages), not to mention the one on Abkhazia (less than two pages !). Nevertheless, some information is indeed useful and sometimes even correct, and you are better off taking this guide with you to the region, rather than being without it. Just take its advice with a lot of caution, and don't take any of its data for granted.

I think Lonely Planet hurt its reputation with this one-- I was hoodwinked into buying it just because of the Lonely Planet name. What a mistake! Facts are wrong. Phone numbers and addresses are wrong. Information is scattered all over. And I discovered a lot of omissions of important sites for Georgia and Armenia. As a result it was very frustrating trying to use it when I was there in April (2002) and I ended up just giving up and leaving it behind in my hotel. A lot of times there's contradictory facts and you just don't know which one is true! Fortunately I had two other books with me about Georgia and Armenia. For travel to Georgia I would instead recommend "Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus." I have continued to refer to it even after returning home from my trip and it is in my permanent collection. It's also a very good introduction to Georgia. In Armenia I prefer "Edge of Time: Traveling in Armenia and Karabagh." This book is also worth holding onto even after your trip is over. It's a very good introduction to Armenia and the photographs were very well done. I didn't go to Azerbaijan and Karabagh so I don't know if Lonely Planet did a better job for those locations.

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