

IPSO Travel Opportunities

STUDY ABROAD IN ARMENIA 2007

**International Business & Relations
Armenia and The Caucasus
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Armenia, a landlocked country in Eurasia, became the destination of four University of Georgia students and four students from non-UGA institutions - Fordham University in New York, Ramapo College in New Jersey, University of Minnesota, and Texas A&M University - during the Maymester 2007. The students represented a wide range of majors - agricultural communications, international business and accounting, economics and history, and social work - who blended together to explore the culture, history, economy, international relations, and politics of this strategic country in the Caucasus Mountains bordering Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.



The Norvank Monastery, a 13th century center of religious learning

The State Agrarian University of Armenia (SAUA) in Yerevan was the host institution for the three-week program of special presentations at the World Bank, U.S. Embassy, United Nations Development Program, and the Center for Agribusiness and Rural Development and field trips to economic development projects, historical and religious sites, and volunteer service with Habitat for Humanity Armenia. The program was designed to expose students to the rich culture and history of Armenia.



Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, was an ideal location to explore the culture, history and economic challenges facing a dynamic country in transition to a democratic and market oriented economy.



The International Center for Agribusiness Research and Education, a U.S. supported educational center attracting the top students at the State Agrarian University of Armenia, was a host for the study abroad students.



Dr. Dan Dunn, technical advisor, explained the history and pedagogical philosophy of the Agribusiness Teaching Center.



Nekeisha Randall, UGA agricultural communications major, and Diana Grigoryan, math major from Texas A&M, taste apple juice at the Center for Agribusiness & Rural Development (CARD), an NGO focusing on value added agricultural projects.

Students with Armenian heritage discovered the land of their grandparents and the warm hospitality of today's Armenia. As one student noted, "Growing up, the word Armenian seemed like a foreign term to other children. I remember almost being embarrassed to say I was half Armenian because no one really knew where or what Armenia was. However, as I began to learn more about the rich culture of the country through my grandparents I only wanted to expand my knowledge . . . and be immersed within the vastness of the culture." This study abroad course was designed to let students discover this ancient country in transition from seventy-one years of central planning to a democratic and market oriented society.

Other students had similar expectations for their study abroad experience: "I am half Armenian by ethnicity, yet I have never traveled to the country itself. During this program, I will finally be able to visit the land of my ancestors, living and breathing within the confines of my homeland." "As a student with a specialization in International Business, I will definitely benefit from such face-to-face communication with the people and economy of Armenia, as well as through study in the language of the area. I am most interested to observe the transitioning economy and how different businesses are adapting and expanding." "I want to be given the chance to be exposed to the geo-political and economic realities of post-Soviet Union."

Personal Reflections on the Study Abroad Experience

"Traveling to Armenia was an experience that positively reshaped my way of thinking and opened my eyes to newly found possibilities and experiences. Having the opportunity to immerse myself into a culture that I originally knew little about was not only beneficial in an educational sense, but it was also a worthwhile adventure that helped me grow personally. The knowledge that was gained from all of the hands-on activities helped broaden my existing understanding of agriculture tremendously, especially agriculture on the global level and how it compares to the agricultural industry that I am familiar with in America."

"This trip taught me about modern Armenia, agribusiness, historic Armenia, geopolitical issues in the Southern Caucasus, cultural differences, and a myriad of other things. It also inspired me to participate in service/development projects in other countries. I greatly enjoyed studying in Armenia and I wanted to thank you for leading such a thought-provoking and unique experience. I was amazed at how much I learned in such a short time. This trip offered much needed introspection for me as well."



Armen Harutyunyan, marketing specialist at CARD, rewards Colin Moorhead and Mathieu Van Asten with a box of Armenia chocolates after the juice tasting experience.



Dining at the Caucasus Restaurant was an exciting opportunity for students to experience local traditional cuisine and culture.



The World Bank country director for Armenia provided a comprehensive review of the Bank's role in Armenia's transition to a market oriented economy.



Students were able to view one of the World Bank's development projects in rural Armenia. The Bank financed a flood control spillway at an irrigation dam which was designed to release excess water during spring rains.



Alisha Santoorjian and Jeannette Laudicina talk with local officials about the World Bank project.



Students visited the U.S. Embassy for an overview on U.S. policies in the Caucasus such support for democratic institutions and USAID development initiatives.



Local markets were an ideal place to absorb local culture and learn about traditional cuisine.



Strawberries were in season and available in the market and from street vendors.



Nekeisha Randall, a UGA agricultural communications major, was excited to learn about agro-tourism at a local winery in the Ararat Valley.



Jeanette Laudicina, a social work major from Ramapo College, was excited about the goat breeding project in rural Armenia which was a CARD supported development project.



The Norvank Monastery, a 13th century center of religious learning, was a great place to discover Armenia history.



The appearance of the local priest in the doorway of St. Astvatsatsin church became a fortuitous opportunity to learn about the unique history of this religious center.



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Service learning was a key objective of the study abroad class in Armenia.



Students spent a day volunteering with Habitat for Humanity Armenia working on a half-built house for the Haroyan family in Khor Virap village, Ararat region, where students used bucket brigades carry lava rock insulation to the ceiling.



Students felt a sense of accomplishment helping the Haroyan family complete their home.



Volunteering for a day with Habitat for Humanity Armenia is a cross-cultural experience the students will never forget.



Habitat for Humanity Armenia service learning



In transition economies, wild herbs and vegetables are part of the food supply. While the Artashat Cannery specializes in canning tomatoes and other products in the late summer, the company also preserves wild plants that rural Armenians have been consuming for generations.



Alex Walker, UGA economics major, and Jeanette Laudicina navigate the canning floor at Artashat cannery. This was another aspect of the cultural experience in Armenia.



Sampling the preserves was one of the highlights of the students' visit to Artashat Cannery. Collin Moorhead and Nekeisha Randall enjoyed sampling the award winning products at the cannery.



A visit to the Armenian Tree Project was especially symbolic for the students with Armenian heritage. The ATP has been contributing to the revival of parks in Yerevan, greenery around churches and monastery, and income generation through reforestation in Armenia. Tigran Palazyan enthusiastically explained how the ATP started.



Nekeisha Randall photographs a rare fruit at the Armenian Tree Project. Later students planted seeds for the next generation.



Colin Moorhead and Nekeisha Randall enjoyed their boat trip on Lake Sevan.



Discussion about the environmental challenges facing Lake Sevan touched on reduced water levels, pollution from agricultural run off and building along the shoreline.



Students absorbed Armenian culture wherever they went. At the Saramej Women's Union near Spitak, an area impacted by the 1988 earthquake, a local woman instructs Alex Walker in the proper techniques for make "lavash," Armenia's traditional unleavened bread.



Alisha Santoorjian and others tried their hand at rolling out the dough in the traditional style.



Alisha Santoorjian and Diana Grigorian enjoyed their visit the Saramej Women's Organization. They were impressed by the warmth and gracious hospitality of their hosts in this rugged mountain environment.



At a picnic with the Agribusiness Teaching Center students, Richard Ohanian and Jeanette Laudicina were invited to taste traditional "barbecue."



The farewell dinner held at Old Yerevan Restaurant was another opportunity to absorb local culture and cuisine.



Students listened to traditional music and participated in traditional dancing.



A visit to Armenia would not be complete without a photo of Mt. Ararat as seen from the courtyard of the Khor Virab Monastery, a 4th century structure where St. Gregory the Illuminator was persecuted by King Trdat III who later converted to Christianity in 301 A.D.