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was knowledgeable about history, art, architecture, politics and everything else relating to Turkey. He navigated us around large tour groups so we never felt we were part of a mob. Although he packed a lot into each day's schedule, we never felt rushed.

We flew Turkish Airlines business class from New York to Istanbul and can highly recommend them. The modern, clean plane had individual "pods" in business class with fold-flat beds. Food and service were extremely good.

CHARLES W. SCHELKE
Philadelphia, PA

Turkey with

Treasures Not just about ancient cities and monuments but also on the ethnic/cultural background of each place visited, our three-week tour "Eastern Turkey & the Black Sea" was a memorable experience. My husband, Tom, and I traveled with Umit Dogan, owner of Treasures of Travel (Edmonds, WA; 800/572-0526, www.treasuresoftravel.com), May 6-26, 2010. The land price was \$3,600 each.

Umit is extremely knowledgeable about Turkey, both past and present, plus he is charming, kind and just plain fun to be with. The pace of the tour was such that we could "stop and smell the roses."



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We enjoyed the people we met and the delicious food. The topography was stunning, from desert to mountains to the beautiful Black Sea.

PEGGY ROBINSON
Centennial, CO

Caucasus with

MIR I took an extraordinary tour, "Treasures of the Trans-Caucasus: Classic Survey of Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia," with MIR Corp. (Seattle, WA; 800/424-7289, www.mircorp.com), May 4-18, 2010. The trip cost \$6,395, land, and visas for Armenia and Azerbaijan added \$246. (US citizens do not need a visa to enter Georgia.)

Our 13-person group began the tour in Baku, Azerbaijan, on the Caspian coast. At the end of an important oil pipeline, Baku is the center of the Caspian oil industry. South of Baku, we visited the Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, where there are petroglyphs from 5,000 to 40,000 years old.

In Sheki we visited mosques, mausoleums and markets, listened to Azeri music as we dined in a caravanserai, and spoke with three Peace Corps volunteers working in Azerbaijan.

We traveled toward Georgia, one of the first countries to adopt the Christian faith (in the early fourth century). As we climbed higher into the snow-covered Caucasus Mountains, the stunning views became more dramatic.

In Gurjaani, we experienced traditional Georgian hospitality at a wine tasting, where the *tamada* (toastmaster) raised a glass to health, world peace and safe travels. Folk singers enhanced our enjoyment of an abundant feast.

In addition to showing us Tbilisi, the cave town Uplistsikhe, the Gudauri ski resort and Gori (Stalin's hometown), MIR arranged a private concert at the home-turned-museum of Georgian artist Elene Akhvlediani (1898-1975).

Another highlight was the David Gareja monastery, considered the

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most remarkable of all of Georgia's ancient sites. A highly revered figure in the country, Gareja was a sixth-century monk who spread the Word of Christianity.

Armenia was our next stop. This is a thriving, fascinating country of ancient monasteries and forts that contrast with its delightful modern capital, Yerevan, with its open-air cafés, numerous fountains and interesting museums. Yerevan is the cultural, economic and political heart of Armenia, and of the three capital cities we visited it was my favorite.

Although Mt. Ararat is in Turkey, it is visible from Yerevan and is an absolutely awesome sight.

A "must see" in Yerevan is the Armenian Genocide Memorial & Museum, commemorating the agony of the 1915-1922 genocide. The "eternal flame" monument is very moving.

In Ejmiatsin, Etchmiadzin Cathedral is the Holy See of the

Georgian Orthodox Church, and among the relics on display there are, purportedly, a piece of Noah's Ark and the spearhead that pierced Christ's side on the cross.

MIR arranged for us to attend a private concert at the Temple of Garni, built to honor Helios, the Roman sun god. At fourth-century Geghard monastery, we saw the cave church and the many *khachkars*, stone slabs carved with crosses and other religious symbols.

An outing to Lake Sevan



Three friendly locals in Sheki, Azerbaijan. Photo: Whitmer

included stops at the fascinating monasteries Goshavank and Sevanavank. The view overlooking the lake was breathtaking, especially after climbing the many steps to the church at the top.

Gracious people and great food are some of the highlights I'll remember from this gem of a



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Travelers' Intercom

tour. Hotels were first class. I was impressed by MIR's knowledgeable local guides, and the MIR tour leader who was with us for the entire trip, Martin Klimenta, was absolutely outstanding. We were fortunate to have him. I'll definitely consider MIR for future travels.

KATHRYN WHITMER
Bellingham, WA

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Memorable

Morocco At this time of unrest in several North African countries, I found no reason for concern at any time during my two weeks in Morocco, March 12-25, 2011. The weather was very comfortable and the fields were green with crops. The High Atlas Mountains were beautiful with snow and vistas of the country.

The souks in Fez, Meknes and Marrakesh and the camel ride at sunset in the sand dunes were highlights.

The tour was with Odysseys Unlimited (Newton, MA; 888/370-6765, www.odysseys-unlimited.com), and the cost, including round-trip airfare (New York-Casablanca) was \$4,800, plus I paid a single supplement of \$1,500.

The unique feature of this tour, and important to some people — the bus had a toilet, the only such bus in the country. I verified this with a friend who was traveling there at the same time with one of the most high-end tour companies.

It was not an option on our tour, but a couple of tour members talked our guide and many of us into attending the Chez Ali Fantasia folk groups and horse show on the outskirts of Marrakesh. A total flop, I felt — very contrived and not worth the \$70 each. Our guide had warned us it was touristy.

BARBARA McINTOSH
Roseville, CA

concorde
travel consultants

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CEMAC for Cameroon

I have a recommendation for a great company for off-the-beaten-track travel in Africa. In June '10 I took a private, independent tour of Cameroon from CEMAC Tours (Box 4877 Douala, Cameroon; phone +237 75 61 94 86 or 97 92 70 23, <http://cemactours.com>).

These days were part of a longer FIT trip, so I don't know what I paid for their services, but I want to commend the company and its Director General, Muhamadu Danteni Musa. He made it his business to come to the hotel the first day to introduce himself and the guide and driver. During my stay, he arranged interesting tours, in a spotless car, to Buea and Limbe.

He also worked tirelessly to sort out two problems I had, one with the hotel and one with a local African airline. Much to my surprise (and delight), he insisted on coming with me to the airport to ensure that I had no problem with my onward flight.

Clearly, this company believes that once you book with them, you are their responsibility from entry to exit of the country. . . and they really take this responsibility very seriously. I cannot recommend them highly enough.

JEAN PALMEGIANO
Newark, NJ