# CRASH COURSE ON ARMENIA AND ARMENIANS

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**Category:** Opinions

**By Jirair Tutunjian**, Toronto, 8 October 2025

"Turkish Airlines will launch direct flights from Istanbul to Yerevan," recently reported the Turkish *Hayat* newspaper and *Public Radio of Armenia.* On the occasion *of* the airline's inaugural Istanbul-Yerevan flight, its inflight magazine, *Hava Yolari,* published the below article about Armenia and Armenians by veteran travel writer Mr. Donuz.

***Our Frenemy Armenia***

By Okeuz Donuz

Welcome to this historic flight. Istanbul to Yerevan is 1,315 K or two hours and ten minutes flying time.

The origins of the Armenian people are murky. Did they migrate from Albania or, as some Turkish scholars say, they are Phrygians who left their homeland and migrated east to what is known nowadays as Armenia? Despite its ancient age, Armenia became independent only in 1918. But it soon decided to merge into the Soviet Union. When the latter disintegrated, Armenians declared independence.

Armenians and Turks have a long and mutually beneficial history: Turkish Armenians have, for hundreds of years, benefited from the liberal policies of the Ottoman sultans. For one thing, they were allowed to practice their infidel (*gavoor* in Turkish) religion. When you travel in Eastern Turkey and in the Hatay province, you will see their churches which have been damaged by earthquakes.

There have been many Turkish Armenians. One of the most famous, if not the most famous is Madame Matild Manukyan of Istanbul who, for six consecutive years, was the highest-tax paying citizen of Turkey. How did she amass her incredible wealth? She was a madam, a brothel owner. She owned 37 brothels, 500 apartments, 70 business centers, 200 houses in the resort town of Yalova, three hotels in Antalya, 10 villas in Northern Cyprus, a fleet of 228 taxis, a brand-new Rolls-Royce, and three Mercedes and BMW vehicles, plus a yacht. Her fabulous wealth—rooted in an immoral business—illustrates innate Turkish generosity, liberalism, and tolerance of *gavoor* citizens.

Soon you will land at Yerevan's international airport. It's a little architectural gem whose name I will not try to spell because it is perhaps 25-letters long.

**CHURCHES**: Armenia is famous for its churches. In a country of fewer than 3 million people, there are 4,000 churches and monasteries. Pull out your pocket calculator and find out how many believers are there per church.

The profligacy of the churches is ironic because fate—another word for Allah—has not been kind to Armenians.

**REPUBLIC SQUARE**: Another Armenia attraction is the Republic Square. It's the center of Yerevan.

Built during the Communist regime, it has a brutalist architecture. It also look like a toy town because of the pink stones used to build the square. The most famous building of the square is an American hotel.

--**Datev Monastery**. To reach the 10th century religious center, one has to ride the cable car. Armenians say that it's the longest in the world. It was built by Austrians.

--**Echmiadzin**. Supposedly, the religious center of Armenians, it was designed by Massih…Christ. It's the "Vatican" of the Armenian Church but not as impressive as the center of world Catholicism. Armenians say it's the oldest church in the world.

--**Khor Virab**. Yet another church. The founder of the Armenian Church was imprisoned in the church's crypt for more than a dozen years. A visit to Khor Virab is a chancy because close to it is the **Medzamor nuclear center** which provides a high percentage of Armenia's electricity.

**MUSEUMS and ART GALLERIES**: Armenian Genocide Memorial. This, too, has an interminable name. It's a depressing place with gory and unverified photos of the supposed victims of a long ago attacks by tribal Kurds.

--**Cafessian Centre for the Arts**. The founder's name (Cafessian) means cage in Turkish, testifying to the Turkish origins of the American art entrepreneur.

**CUISINE**: To be kind, Armenian cuisine is unimaginative and can be illustrated by one word: "korovadz." It's basically large chunks of burned flesh. In recent years, Lebanese and Syrian Armenians, who have immigrated to Armenia, have enriched Armenia's cuisine by introducing such Turkish dishes as *lahmajoun, hariseh, taboulleh, pilav aboor, and madznaboor*. While the cuisine is basic, Armenia's brandy and wine are excellent. According to Armenia's tourism promotion department, wine was invented in Armenia. Neighboring Georgia makes the same claim. Armenians also claim to have invented yogourt and pakhlavah.

**TOURIST SITES**: The Cascade is a pointless spectacle of endless steps in Yerevan. If you are over sixty, don't attempt to climb it. The steps are punctuated by modern art by Armenians and foreigners.

**SHOPPING**: **Vernisage in Yerevan**, is a glorified flea market despite its fancy French name. It's a fun place where you can buy everything from fluffy Siberian hats to old Bibles. Many of the goods in Yerevan stores are imported from Turkey. However, nothing matches Armenia's dried fruits…apples, apricots, pears, and plums.

**TRIVIA**: All Armenian last names end with "yan" or "ian." Armenians have maintained this bizarre custom for centuries. One could say it's unimaginative while another could say it reflects Armenian consistency.

Well, that's it for now. I hope you will a happy stay in this stamp-size country. It's not Switzerland. But

what is?

# Comments

**Vahakn** – 2025-11-23 12:05:59
Better late than never. Back in 2020, Nikol Pashinyan was interviewed by BBC's Steven Sackur (HARDtalk). The host was arrogant, ignorant, and insulting. When Keghart published an article about the interview, more than 5,000 people criticized assassin Sackur's ambush. I am happy to inform those critics that HARDtalk shut down earlier this year.

**Vatché P.** – 2025-11-19 10:19:41
The content of this article for the in-flight magazine for Turkish Airlines, written by Okeuz Donuz (I would probably write that as Ókúz - nearest translation being 'silly' (dmbo) in Armenian). The article contains some not so hidden malice and mockery about Armenia and Armenians for the Turkish visitor. Notwithstanding, the mention that the Syrian and the Lebanese immigrants have introduced Turkish food into Armenia such as Lahmajoun, Tabbouleh etc. which are anything but Turkish - the names themselves being in Arabic- to replace the burnt-out Armenian khorovadz? It would have been a lot more friendly to have mentioned that some of our own Armenian foods have actually got Turkish names and that goes back to our history of Western Armenia - such as Manti, Kófté, kebab, basturma to mention but a few. That would have been a more amicable article to this newborn Turkey-Armenia relationship, albeit in the area of tourism.