



A.G.B.U. Manoogian School Visit to Armenia

Since 2008, the A.G.B.U. Alex & Marie Manoogian School of Southfield, MI, has been making pilgrimages to the homeland every two years. Led by High School Principal Dr. Hosesep Torossian and accompanied by Armenian teachers Anahit and Dickran Toumajan, the 27 students had an unforgettable experience touring the capital Yerevan and the countryside. The hospitable Ani Plaza Hotel became home for the students for the ten-day duration of their trip. The itinerary began with a visit to the Martyrs' Monument, where the students placed flowers and recited the Lord's Prayer in memory of the 1,500,000 victims of the Armenian Genocide, and concluded with a visit to Yerablur, where heroes of the Karabagh War have found their final resting place. The Yerevan portion of the trip included stops at the Matenadaran (Repository of ancient manuscripts and printed books), the Mother Armenia Monument and Military Museum, the epic hero David of Sassoun statue in front of the central train station, and the Vernisage (Flea Market).

A highlight of the tour of Yerevan was the ultra-



modern TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, a free after-school program which accommodates hundreds of Armenian teenagers every day. Workshops introduce kids to animation, video game development, digital media, and web development, all necessary to compete in the global marketplace. The Manoogian School students were particularly intrigued by the Robotics program at TUMO, because they themselves are members of a competitive Robotics team back home. Another highlight was the visit to the Nork Children's Center, where a concert of song, dance and acrobatics, performed by young and talented student artists, dazzled the Manoogian School students, inspiring them to get up onto the stage and join the dancers in a medley of Armenian dances. The group also paid a visit to the A.G.B.U. Center in Yerevan, where the students heard a brief presentation by a grandmaster about Armenian chess champions of the world and about the integration of chess as an integral part of the Armenian school curriculum. Chess enthusiasts anywhere in the world can take chess classes through the A.G.B.U.-supported Armenian Virtual College based in Yerevan. Later, the students visited the brand new, state-of-the-art A.G.B.U. building being constructed in the heart of Yerevan. The first Sunday in Armenia was spent in Etchmiadzin, the holiest place of Armenian Christendom in the world, where the students paid homage at the gravesite of the school's unparalleled benefactors, Alex and Marie Manoogian, and visited the Manoogian Museum, while the second Sunday (Palm Sunday) found the students at the



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This trip to Armenia has been the most memorable for me. Going with friends and classmates has created infinite memories that will last a lifetime. My most favorite place we visited was the Nork Children's Center. Seeing all the young talent brought tears to my eyes. After their performance, we went on stage and danced with them. The world's longest air-tram was also a highlight of this trip, as many of us conquered our fear and traveled 11 minutes over a thousand foot deep gorge to reach the most beautiful Tatev Monastery. (Grace Torossian - 12th Grade)

Visit to Armenia

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church in Oshakan, where St. Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet, is buried. The group also visited Sardarapat, the battlefield where Armenians fought valiantly during the Genocide and were able to at least preserve Eastern Armenia, the current-day Republic of Armenia, one-tenth the size of the historic homeland. The students performed a victory dance right on the battlefield.

There was an overnight stay in Goris with a side trip to the mountainous village of Khndsoresk where the 18th century general Mkhitar Sparapet is buried and where Jojvogh Gamoorch (Suspension Bridge) allows you to cross a breathtakingly deep gorge on the Vorotan river to the 5,000 once-inhabited caves (the last resident left in 1970)! On the way, the students visited Noravank Monastery, climbing the harrowingly



narrow steps to the unique second-storey chapel. On the way back from Goris to Yerevan, the students boarded the longest cable car in the world to get to Tatev Monastery, a jewel of Armenian architecture. Another side trip took the students to pre-historic Zorats Karer, older than Stonehenge.

All the students withstood the cold temperatures on the ski lift at Tsaghkadsor, while some even braved the freezing waters of Lake Sevan. Everyone descended the narrow ladder to pay respects to St. Gregory the Illuminator, who for years was confined to a deep abyss (Khor Virap) but miraculously survived before emerging, converting the pagan Armenian king to Christianity, and becoming the first Catholicos (Universal

Patriarch) of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The journey also took the students to the first century pagan temple of Garni (restored in the 1970s) and the medieval Geghard Monastery (carved into the face of a mountain).

After years of studying the Armenian language, literature, history, and culture, the students were able to see, hear, and feel the presence and vitality of Armenia and to understand the commitment of brain, brawn, and spirit to ensure the continuity of the Armenian homeland for present and future generations to come.

Special guests accompanying the group were veteran photographer Michelle Andonian and talented young composer Alexandra Dubois who are preparing a “Hope Dies Last” project for the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in 2015.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank school benefactors Louise Manoogian Simone, Richard Manoogian, Masco Corporation, the A.G.B.U. Central Board of Directors, and countless other donors who believe in the inestimable value of this experience for students to visit the ancestral homeland. (See list on page 4)

For me, it was the best trip I've ever been a part of. It was very nice to have fun times with our friends, teachers, and our favorite principal. The highlight of the trip was visiting the Armenian Genocide Memorial Center and paying our respects to the 1.5 million innocent Armenian victims who perished.
(Viken Yeranossian – 12th Grade)



My favorite place to go in Armenia was Noravank. To me, this church felt the oldest and most beautiful. I also liked the fact that there were little trails behind the church that ran up the side of the mountain. Every time that I thought I had reached the end of the trail, I saw a faint line zigzagging up the mountain. At the end of the trail was a small cave, which led to a ledge overlooking the valley that we drove through to get to the church. There was thunder echoing by the time I got to the top, which was pretty cool too. The whole experience made me feel like a real Armenian... until it started raining.
(Ethan Stepanian – 12th Grade)

Tatev, Tattoos, and Lahmajoun

Normally, you would not associate one with the other; that is unless you are traveling with 27 students for ten days to Armenia. Imagine lighting candles and saying prayers at Etchmiadzin, the oldest church in the world, or taking a ride above the mountains, in a cable car hanging from the world's longest cable, and arriving at Tatev, one of the oldest universities in the world.

With every day, Armenian history took on a deeper meaning because we were there, standing on the very ground of the first nation, ever, to recognize Christianity as a state religion. This was one big family on the road, supporting each other during reflective moments at the Genocide Memorial, and experiencing a sobering realization that many of the Karabagh soldiers buried in the Yerablur Cemetery were the same age as the students.

An arc of emotions; this was a trip that went from humbling realities to spontaneous dancing, from Lahmajoun to Pizza Hut, from a cool ski lift to an icy dip in Lake Sevan. Students had Armenian crosses freshly tattooed on their arms, just as they are on the walls of hundreds of churches – a permanent symbol of pilgrimage.

When we caught a glimpse of our mountain, a voice from the back of the bus called out, “Baron, how did we lose Mt. Ararat?”

“Well, after the Genocide of 1915, we lost most of our land, and in 1918, we lost our mountain. We hope to never give up the dream of recovering it; if not in our lifetime, then some day,” their Principal, Dr. Torossian responded, with his voice trailing off, “some day.”

It was the same thing that my Grandmother had told me when I was young and had asked her the same question; “not during my lifetime, but some day.”

First, second, and now third generation...still waiting, still hoping, never giving up.

Michelle Andonian – Professional Photo-Journalist

A Historic Meeting



U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Heffern meets with high school students of the A.G.B.U. Alex & Marie Manoogian School of Southfield, Michigan

Inspired by watching the Honorable United States Ambassador John Heffern's participation in a "flash mob" on the chic Northern Boulevard in Yerevan, A.G.B.U. Alex & Marie Manoogian School High School Principal Dr. Hosep Torossian took the initiative of writing the Ambassador, requesting a meeting with Manoogian School students during its biennial visit to Armenia. On April 14, 2014, to the great delight of all concerned, the Ambassador graciously accepted and warmly greeted the students and accompanying faculty at the attractive U.S. Embassy, by Lake Yerevan. Ambassador Heffern, in his affable manner, made everyone feel at home. Though he hails from the State of Missouri, the Ambassador talked about his fondness for the State of Michigan,

having graduated from Michigan State University on his way to a distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign Service. It's worth mentioning that five of the 2014 Manoogian School graduates have been offered the opportunity to matriculate at MSU.

High School Principal Torossian presented the Ambassador, who is most definitely a Spartan basketball and football (2014 Rose Bowl champion) fan, with a MSU cap and cup, and a Manoogian School sweatshirt. He also gave the Ambassador a copy of A Legacy of Armenian Treasures from the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum in Southfield, MI. Dr. Torossian thanked



Ambassador Heffern for taking time from his busy schedule to meet with the eager Manoogian School students; a group picture was taken for posterity. This was a unique experience which the students will never forget. Kudos to Ambassador Heffern and the entire U.S. Embassy staff in Yerevan.

The Armenia trip gave me a new outlook on the world. First of all, I had never been in Armenia, so visiting the country left me with a great respect for their culture and way of life. I was surprised to see Yerevan as a modern, advanced city with good people, beautiful roads, and many places of interest to visit. Outside of the city, people seemed to be living poorly in rural areas of Armenia. This wasn't a big surprise for me, since I have seen such places in Ukraine, as well. Overall, Armenia reminded me of Ukraine, though with far more rural areas. However, the people of Armenia seemed friendlier. In conclusion, if I had another chance to travel to Armenia, I would seize the opportunity and visit this beautiful country once again. (Myroslav Grygorkiv – 12th Grade)

For two weeks, I had to adjust to a completely new world. I flew, with a group of friends, all the way to the other side of the world, to a beautiful country called Armenia. The food, the sites, the people, everything was so different. That's what made it so amazing! Visiting the motherland never felt so good. I got to spend it with people I never thought I'd get along with. We became a family. I think that was the best part of this trip, just being so attached to these people I spent day and night with. I don't think I regret anything, taking full advantage of every minute I was there. It just felt so surreal! I just couldn't believe that I was in the land of my ancestors, where they grew up, ate, slept, and went to school. It is so remarkable that I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for this resilient nation's existence. Because I was so attached to this amazing country, I got a tattoo to always remind me where I came from, to always remain humble, and to just enjoy life. Because that's what Armenia's made of...love, joy, and happiness. I will be sure to visit this breathtaking country again.

Armenia has not seen the last of
Anita Shebat. (11th Grade)



My journey to Armenia was a life-changing experience. The moment we landed in our beautiful homeland, I knew it was going to be an amazing adventure. Being able to see all the majestic mountains and churches was indescribable. My top five favorite places that we visited were Etchmiadzin, Khor Virap, Lake Sevan, Dzidzernagapert, St. Krikor Loosavorich Church. All the places we visited were breathtaking, but something about those five places made me even happier to be an Armenian than I was before. The last two days that we were in Armenia made me actually believe that we were in our homeland because we finally got to see Mt. Ararat. The view wasn't as clear as we wanted it to be, but we were lucky enough to see it. If I was told to pack my bags and go back to Armenia, I would do so in a heartbeat. It was an amazing experience to have with my second family.

(Arlin Calukyan – 11th Grade)



This trip to Armenia was mind-blowing.

The scenery and the experience were amazing. For me, I take it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience because I don't plan on going back, though it would be nice to be able to. The highlight of Armenia was our visit to Tatev Monastery. Pictures cannot even describe how beautiful it was over there. I also enjoyed the night life in Yerevan. It seemed like the city was always up and running with excitement. I guess I could say that I really miss it.

(Aram Inofak – 11th Grade)



As soon as the plane landed in Armenia, I felt as if I had reached home. The Armenia trip brought out my happiest feelings. My favorite memory was when we went to the Nork Children's Center where the students put on a show for us. The passion those kids had towards their heritage and country had me in tears. Another favorite moment was when we went to Geghard Monastery. It was so peaceful and beautiful, I didn't want to leave. Overall, this trip made me realize how proud I am to come from such a magnificent and majestic country.

(Natalie Arslanian – 11th Grade)



My trip to Armenia was nothing like I had imagined. From beautiful mountains to gorgeous monuments, the experience was one I'll never forget. As each day passed, I was more and more eager to find what magnificent place we were going to visit the next day. The fact that I was there with my second family made it all the more special. My favorite places were the churches. I loved seeing the different style of architecture at every church. My overall experience was amazing, and I would love to go back some day. (Alana Salmu – 12th Grade)



The Armenia trip touched the hearts of everyone. I was impressed by this little country and how beautiful it is! Especially impressive were the people who treated us with respect everywhere we went. We visited many important places, so important in the history of the Armenian nation. Our staff members were so knowledgeable about the places we visited that they would tell us the history of events right on the bus.

(Yuriy Ishchuk – 12th Grade)

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