

Bible Marathon in Armenia, 4–16 October 2026

Here we go! Full of excitement and anticipation, we begin our journey with a night flight to Yerevan. Over the next seven days, we plan to explore the country before supporting the 'T. W.' congregation at the Bible Marathon.

Country and People

Armenia is a landlocked country, bordered by Turkey to the west, Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east and Iraq to the south. Armenia is almost as big as Switzerland, but has only about a third of the population, of whom about a third live in the capital, Yerevan.

As the cradle of Christianity and a former Soviet republic, Armenia has a rich historical background. Soviet history has left its mark – not only in the many monuments honouring notable figures or fallen soldiers, but also in old, half-ruined houses, unfinished buildings, and people who, to our minds, seem rather unfriendly.

We didn't always manage to coax a smile out of a grumpy person. But it was always worth a try! It was quite a different story with the little wooden crosses that Werner and Regula had brought with them and gave away on many occasions to taxi drivers, shop assistants or waiters. These little crosses were received with great pleasure and, not infrequently, with a heartfelt 'thank you'. Even though Armenia is aware of its biblical roots, much of its culture is rooted in religion and tradition. And yet: the Christian faith plays a role, and God's blessing, associated with the wooden crosses, was rejected only once – by a Muslim.



Between 1894 and 1896, the Armenians were systematically exterminated by the Ottoman Empire. Around 1.5 million Armenians were killed in this genocide. The memorial in Yerevan commemorates the pogrom, which to this day is not recognised by all nations. The long-standing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh ended in 2024 with the official dissolution of the Republic of Artsakh. As a result, over 100,000 Karabakh Armenians fled to Armenia.

During our visit to 'Diaconia's' 'Lighthouse', we saw photographs and heard stories of families who arrived in Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh with nothing and are living in the most destitute conditions. 'Diaconia' helps the poorest of the poor with food parcels, by repairing houses, installing toilets ... and with the Word of God. The 'Diaconia's "Lighthouse" is, we were told, funded entirely by Switzerland.

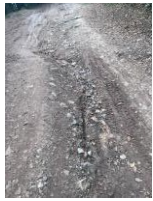


Another project funded entirely by Switzerland is the 'YMCA' in Spitak.

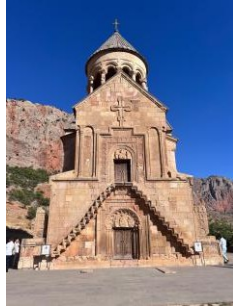
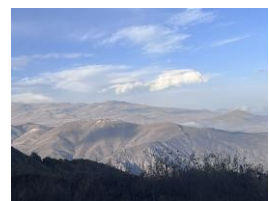
Since 2001, there has been a formal partnership between Cevi Zurich and the YMCA in Spitak. Here, children can attend start school can attend nursery and play, learn and develop under loving supervision. The youth and Community Centre also offers sports activities, tutoring, support for families, camps and much more.

The clear, Bible-based ethos in Spitak is not only evident from the posters on the walls, but can also be felt in the atmosphere. A young woman gave us a very warm tour, answered our many questions and, at the end, invited us to join the director for coffee and cake. Deeply delighted and moved by the warmth, friendliness and hospitality, we moved on.

The vast expanses in the north are breathtaking, and Mount Ararat is so close to the west!



As far as the eye can see, steppe-like landscapes, flocks of sheep here and there, a few horses and nothing else, simply nothing, apart from nature!... and a gravel... road... full of potholes! It's hard to believe there can be so many potholes in a road. The two Werners bumped their way round one pothole, only to drive straight into the next one – we were shaken and jolted about – yet everyone was in high spirits! Of course, in Armenia – but even on these, the rule applies: keep your eyes peeled, the next pothole is bound to come!



And of course there was so much more! The gigantic cauliflowers and the giant carrots, the vast potato fields and the potatoes that all had to be , the 5,752-metre-long cable car ride on the world's longest continuous reversible cable car, the almost deserted village on the border with Azerbaijan, the Armenian Apostolic churches ... and, last but not least, Armenian coffee.

The Bible Marathon – the reason for our trip!

On Sunday evening, full of anticipation, we set off for the church and the service. Of course, we left in good time – but somehow the taxi didn't quite take us to the right place – so we, who are always punctual and reliable, arrived quite a while late, just in time for the end of the worship session. A bit embarrassing for us, but we were there!

The international congregation is led by J. and C. van H. They answered God's call in 2017 and moved from South Africa to Armenia with their two sons. The vibrant congregation has been in existence since 2022 and is attended by Iranians in exile, Syrians, Armenians, Americans...

We immediately sensed and experienced that we are one family in the body of Christ. We were welcomed with such warmth and trust – bear in mind that we had arrived late , that Werner W. was allowed to give his input shortly after our arrival, and that the pastor only knew him from the emails he'd sent beforehand.

We'd been able to see via the link that the Bible reading list had filled up. We were a little surprised to see the same name listed for several hours. We wondered whether someone had made a mistake or felt overwhelmed when signing up. Later, we were told that it was a family who had signed up to read with their children.

It was striking how many primary school pupils and teenagers took part in the reading.

No one turned up exactly on time for their booked slot; no, everyone was there much earlier, opening their Bibles and beginning to read quietly to themselves. Others simply came to listen, in the hope of being able to read as well – even in the middle of the night.

Although the Bible marathon was initiated by Werner and Regula, from the very start it took on a dynamic that swept through the whole congregation – everyone wanted to be part of it, not to miss a thing! God's presence and work were there!

As the reading was taking place in around fourteen different languages, it was impossible to estimate how many hours the reading would take. The joint conclusion was to be on Thursday evening at 7.00 pm with a communal reading of Revelation 22 in each person's own language, followed by a resounding collective 'AMEN'. By Thursday lunchtime, however, the marathon had already reached

Revelation 22. Instead of resting and waiting for the evening, we simply started again at Matthew and read through the New Testament once more.

The joint conclusion then took place as announced, with a resounding, joyful 'AMEN'!

Two brief testimonies from the many testimonies about Bible reading:

A young woman was determined to come back and read again in the middle of the night. However, her parents had forbidden her to do so for reasons of her safety. Nevertheless, the young woman rang a

friend, who came to collect her, and she slipped out of the house. When she arrived to read, she began with Ephesians 6:1: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.'

Another young man read a Bible passage and wanted to read it again. He spoke to God about his wish. On his second reading of the New Testament, he came precisely to the same passage again.

The family, who had signed up to read with their children for several hours, and we had the opportunity to meet them in person. The American couple, the Lees, have 10 children, two of whom are in the USA and married. God called the family to Armenia, and they set out in faith with eight of their children. They now lead the house of prayer.



A taxi driver asked us what we were doing here in Armenia. 'Reading the Bible,' was the answer. 'Don't we have a Bible in our own country that we could read?' he asked, astonished and with a smile on his face.

But we can do it!

Brigitte Baumgartner