

**Karabakh**  
*a hidden treasure*



**Stepanakert**  
The Capital of Artsakh



**MOUNTAINOUS  
KARABAKH**



# Stepanakert

The Capital of Artsakh



STEPANAKERT



**Stepanakert** (pop. 60,000), the administrative capital of Mountainous Karabakh, is a shining example of the resiliency and victorious spirit of the people who have inhabited this historic land for centuries. Stepanakert is a beautiful modern capital with plenty of historical and cultural sites to visit and friendly locals who will happily show you around.

The first settlement in what is now Stepanakert was founded between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC, though little is known of these early inhabitants or their culture. In the Middle Ages, Karabakh's modern capital was named *Vararakhn* (derived from "rapid creek" in Armenian), after a spring that ran through its center.

In the 19th century, **Artsakh** (Karabakh's historic name) was made a part of the Russian Empire and Stepanakert entered a new phase in its history. By 1847, it was commonly known by its unofficial name, *Shtab* ("headquarters" in Russian) and by the end of the 19th century, it had become a small city with schools, Armenian and Russian churches, public buildings and hotels, with a mostly Armenian and Russian population.

The modern city was founded after the forming of the Soviet Union. It was renamed Stepanakert in 1923, in honor of Stepan Shahumyan the renowned Communist Leader of the Baku Supreme Council (1917-1918). During Soviet times, Stepanakert became the capital of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region. The city had large industrial enterprises, cultural centers, and academic centers. Preservation and enhancement of cultural traditions and education have always been values held high by the people of Stepanakert.

During Karabakh's war of independence (1988-1994), Stepanakert suffered immense damage from Azeri bombardment, especially in 1992, when the town of Shoushi was used as an artillery firebase. However, since the 1994 ceasefire, Stepanakert, now the capital of the Mountainous Karabakh, has undergone a great deal of restoration, and is currently undergoing an economic and cultural rebirth.

Fringed on all sides by **mountain chains** and **thick forests**, Stepanakert is an ideal place to relax year-round. Its natural beauty is expressed differently during each of the four seasons. Weather is mild in the spring and warm and sunny, with cool breezy nights in the summer. Stepanakert enjoys a crisp, golden fall and a cool, relatively mild, white winter.

At the heart of Stepanakert lies **Veratzenound (Renaissance) Square**, flanked by the Presidential Palace, the National Assembly, the Government Building and the Youth Palace.





*Stepanakert is an ideal  
place to relax year-round.*



**RIGHT**

The **Presidential Palace** is located in the heart of Renaissance Square with its open gardens, symbolizing the peaceful atmosphere of the city.



**LEFT**

**Renaissance Square** is where most of the population gathers to celebrate traditional and national holidays such as Independence Day.

*A picturesque set of stairs takes you from Renaissance Square to Lovers' Lane...*



**ABOVE**

**The theater** is an extension of the Khandamiryan Theater in Shushi, which dates back to the early 19th century.

#### LEFT

The statue of **Stepan Shahumyan** stands tall in the center of the city as a reminder of this renowned revolutionary of the Caucasus Region. Shahumyan was also the founder and editor of several journals and newspapers.



## THE CITY I

A picturesque set of stairs takes you from Renaissance Square to **Lovers' Lane**. This well-lit path, embellished with unusual plants and wildlife, has a natural air of romance; a favorite for locals and tourists alike. Outdoor concerts and theatrical performances are also a common sight in this area. **Bekor Ashot Park**, named after a famous freedom fighter, Ashot Ghulyan, is also a favorite destination for locals and tourists alike.

Stepanakert's main street, **Azatomartikneri (Freedom Fighters) Street** is lined with modern residential buildings, supermarkets, shops and boutiques. While strolling down the street and browsing the shops, you will be sure to encounter the friendly hospitality of Stepanakert's locals.







One of the city's most alluring sites is the **central market (shouka, in Armenian)**, where you'll find fresh local produce, spices, meats, even household items and clothing. Be sure to try *jinkyalov hatz* – a thin, doughy bread pocket filled with healthy greens – a local specialty prepared before your eyes in the market. The sights, smells, colors, and clamor of Stepanakert's central market will entice you, giving you a feel for the eastern charm and flavor of Karabakh.

THE MARKET |



**RIGHT**

Be sure to shop around with your best negotiating skills in the market, and try a glass of homemade red wine and fresh *jinkyalov hats*.

**LEFT**

This memorial dedicated to the 22,000 Karabakhtsis who gave their lives for their country, which is found at the entrance of the city, was built in 1975.





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STATE MUSEUM OF  
HISTORY AND  
REGIONAL STUDIES  
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#### RIGHT

The State Museum of History and Regional Studies, founded in 1932, is one of Artsakh's principal centers of traditional art. Valuable items are on display at the museum, from the Stone Age to modern times, including carpets, rugs, household items, textile machinery, precious 18th century jewelry, needles, laceworks and axes. Among the most noteworthy artifacts in the museum's collection are silver coins imprinted with the face of Tigran the Great.



One of the city's most notable sites is the memorial and graveyard dedicated to fallen soldiers, which *Karabakhtsis* (Karabakh locals) call **yekhpayrakan gerezman** (the brotherhood cemetery). The earliest graves in this cemetery are from World War II, but for locals, it is most closely associated with the martyrs of the Karabakh conflict. Rows and rows of graves commemorate the brave men and women who gave their lives for their motherland. In the cemetery, there are also memorials dedicated to the innocent victims of the Sumgait massacres and the Gyumri earthquake of 1988, as well as Artur Mkrtychyan. He was one of the founders of Mountainous Karabakh who later became the first president of the republic on January 6, 1992. He died tragically on April 14 of that same year.

To learn more about the history of Stepanakert and Karabakh as a whole, visit the **Artsakh State Museum of Local Lore** on Sasountsi David Street, where precious artifacts help paint a vivid picture of centuries past in this ancient land. When strolling around Stepanakert,

The renowned statue, “**We, and our mountains**”, is the creation of Karabakh-born sculptor, Sargis Baghdasaryan, and architect, Yuri Hakopyan. Chiseled from distinctive red tuff stone, it depicts an elderly couple in traditional Karabakh costume.



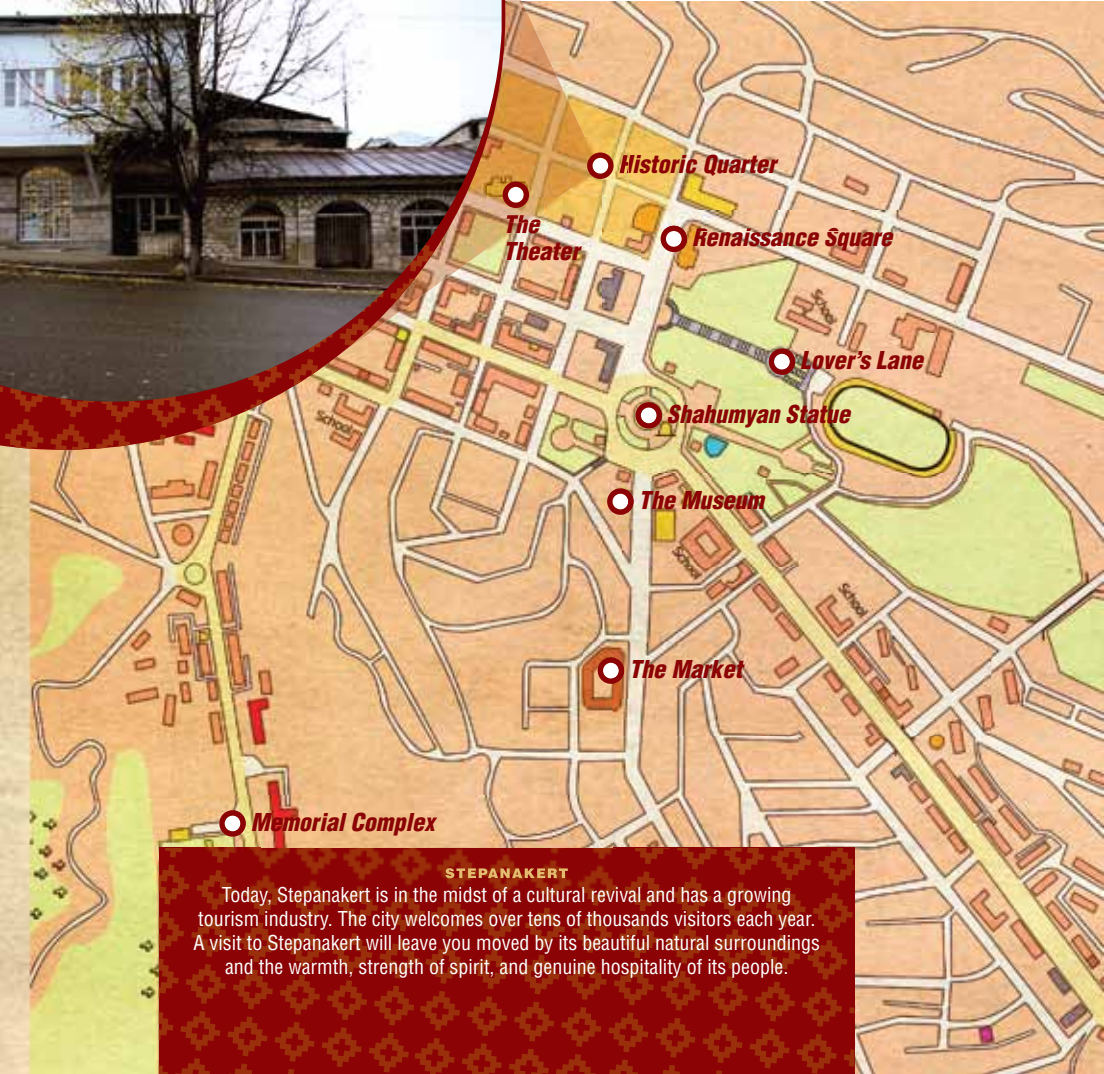




be sure to check out **Mazi Bridge**, a 17th century stone bridge, and the recently built **Sourb Hakob (St. Jacob) Church**. Finally, no visit to Stepanakert is complete without a stop by the renowned monument and national symbol of Karabakh, **We, and Our Mountains**. The statue, also known as *Papik-Tatik* (Grandpa-Grandma), portrays the faces of an old couple dressed in traditional Artsakh attire, hewn from volcanic tuff rock. It symbolizes the inextricable bond between Karabakhtsis and their land, their inexhaustible will, and their dedication to family values and respect toward the elderly. Interestingly, Karabakhtsis are known for their longevity, with the longest life expectancy in the region, which is an attribute to their light-heartedness and easy-going lifestyle.

***It symbolizes the inextricable bond between Karabakhtsis and their land...***





**Historic Quarter**

**The Theater**

**Renaissance Square**

**Lover's Lane**

**Shahumyan Statue**

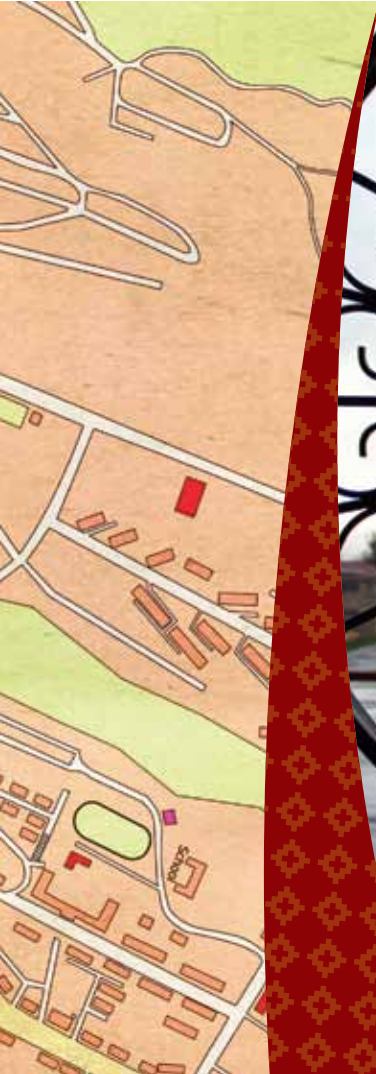
**The Museum**

**The Market**

**Memorial Complex**

**STEPANAKERT**

Today, Stepanakert is in the midst of a cultural revival and has a growing tourism industry. The city welcomes over tens of thousands visitors each year. A visit to Stepanakert will leave you moved by its beautiful natural surroundings and the warmth, strength of spirit, and genuine hospitality of its people.



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## **MOUNTAINOUS KARABAKH**

Government Tourism Department

Stepanakert, Hov. Toumanyany ave, 63

+ 374 47 94 91 72

[info@tourismboard.nk.am](mailto:info@tourismboard.nk.am)

[www.visitkarabakh.net](http://www.visitkarabakh.net)