

# LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES



## FROM YEREVAN TO MARS

THE JOURNEY OF ARMENIA'S FIRST ANALOG ASTRONAUT

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

HOW STARTUP INVESTMENT TOURS ARE BRIDGING INVESTORS AND ARMENIAN STARTUPS

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## ARMENIAN UNICORN IN THE MAKING

VIRALMANGO





# MATHEW ZEIN

## EDITOR'S LETTER

I wanted to write about topics that I'm passionate about, and what better subject than a lifestyle I've experienced for years and a country I've chosen to call 'home away from home'? Thus, Life in Armenia for Digital Nomad Families was born.

I recall planning everything quite simply, taking notes, and brainstorming potential topics. I began gathering information from local lawyers and tax experts. Additionally, I traveled to a few Armenian regions, assessing several towns as potential emerging destinations.

A lot has changed since then. In this issue, I reached out to esteemed contributors from Egypt, Germany, and the UK to share their thoughts about life in Armenia from different perspectives. This adds up to the collective knowledge base I'm building for the magazine and its readers, with the goal of positioning Armenia as a top destination for digital nomads globally.

*Mathew Zein*

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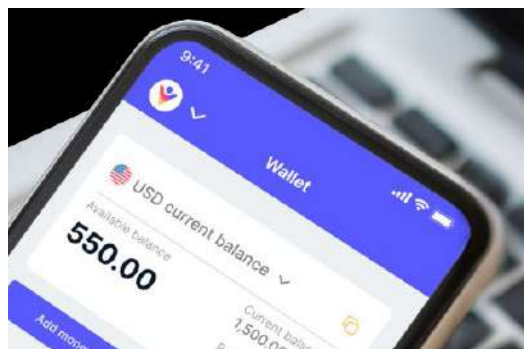
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# ARMENIAN LANGUAGE CLASSES

90 Minutes  
on Zoom



Conversation skills



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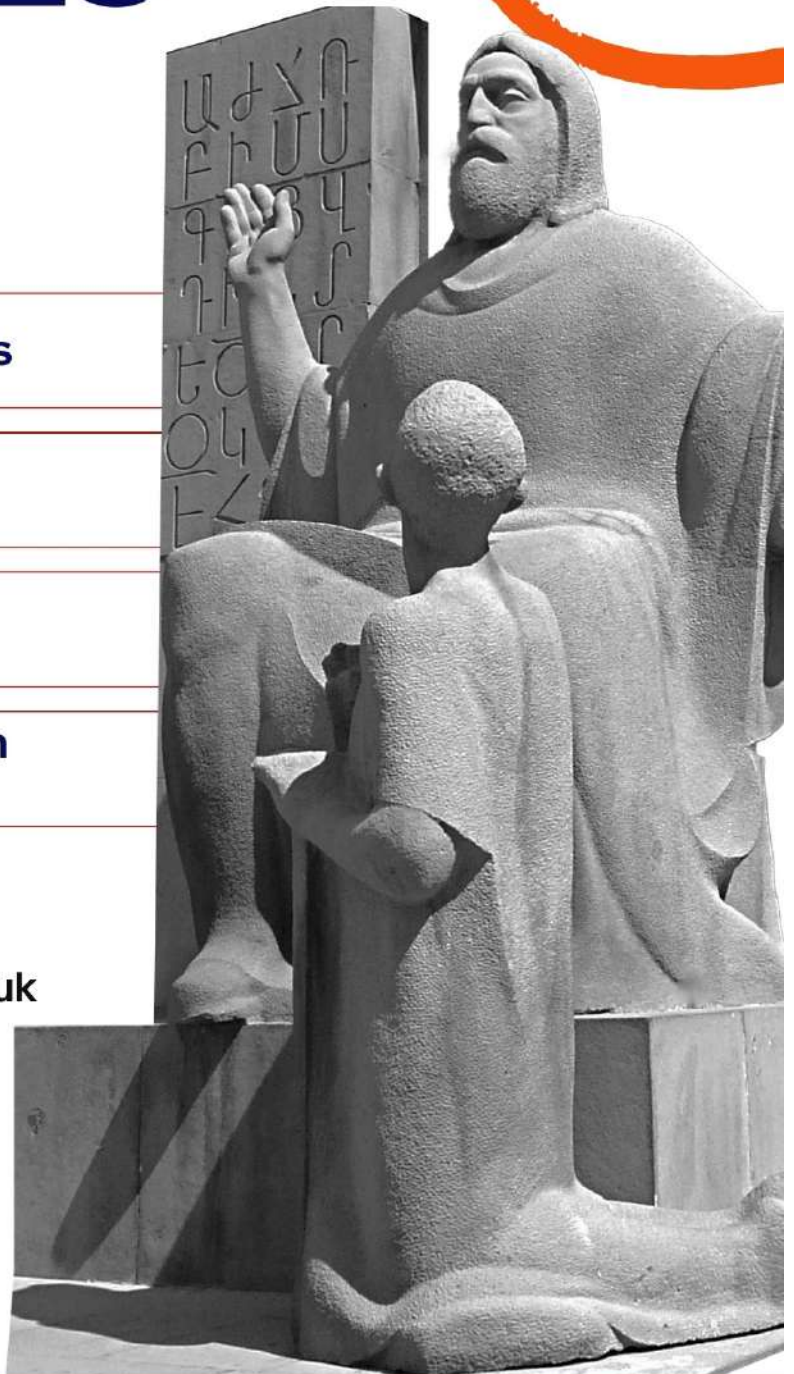
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FROM YEREVAN TO MARS

# THE JOURNEY OF ARMENIA'S FIRST ANALOG ASTRONAUT



**ANNA  
HARUTYUNYAN**

FIRST ARMENIAN ANALOG ASTRONAUT



## FROM YEREVAN TO MARS THE JOURNEY OF ARMENIA'S FIRST ANALOG ASTRONAUT

Imagine a 5-year-old girl watching Toy Story for the first time. It seems like a casual moment, right? But sometimes, a simple moment like that can become life-changing—it certainly was for me.



Hi, I'm Hanna (or Anna), the **first Armenian Analog Astronaut**. You're probably wondering, "What's an Analog Astronaut?". Well, let's start with the basics. Who are astronauts? Except for being lucky to wear a fancy suit, astronauts are typically scientists or engineers, highly trained professionals equipped with the knowledge and skills to travel into space. But why are they flying to space? Their main mission is to conduct scientific research because, as humans, our curiosity always drives us to explore space and seek answers to the biggest questions out there. Of course, especially now that we're living in this "marketing age," some astronauts are flying to space to make history or fulfill their dreams - we call them commercial astronauts. But whether commercial or not, an astronaut's most important duty is to **make their spaceflight meaningful** and contribute to advancing space research.

Now, back to analog astronauts. Analog astronauts are astronauts who perform space scientific experiments in a simulated environment. Spoiler alert: all astronauts were analog astronauts first because **being in a simulated**

**environment is a crucial step in training.** These simulations often take place in habitats, which are enclosed spaces designed to mimic the environment of a celestial body like the Moon or Mars. The temperature, humidity, and even atmospheric

pressure are controlled to be as realistic as possible. Simulated missions offer the benefit of testing early-stage experiments multiple times without spending billions of dollars or risking human lives. **Long story short, that's what I do - I'm an analog astronaut.**



Now, let me take you through how I ended up where I am right now. In 2017, I graduated from Viktor Hambardzumyan's N12 middle school. As you might know, Viktor Hambardzumyan was an Armenian astrophysicist and one of the leading astronomers of the 20th century. At school, I was a member of a programming club and started creating websites with WordPress and games with Scratch when I was 12. Eventually, I began selling my websites online, earning my first money. That's when I realized I wanted to become a programmer. In 2016, I joined TUMO Center for Creative Technologies to enhance my programming skills. During this journey, I learned various programming languages, worked as a programming workshop assistant at TUMO, contributed to real projects, and even gave a talk on JavaScript at the JS Conference Armenia in 2019, becoming the youngest female speaker at the conference.

After a few failed attempts to get into UWC Dilijan College, I enrolled in Polytech High School in 2017, where I studied engineering. That was not my best decision, but I appreciate the experience.

I graduated from high school in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The world and my life felt chaotic. Everyone around me was rushing to apply to universities to avoid "missing out,". But I decided not to apply because **COVID made me reassess everything** - how I treated myself, others, and my health. And suddenly, everything started to lose meaning for me. So, I stepped back and chose not to make any impulsive decisions. It took me two years to figure out what I wanted from life. Of course, I'm still learning and finding out my purpose but I know one thing: **Anything I do will be connected to high tech**. Although sometimes dropping everything and opening a cozy specialty coffee place with homemade pies in Dilijan sounds really good.



During my gap years, I tried thousands of things - launched startups, closed them, volunteered, organized over six tech events in Armenia, taught Python to kids, and created a YouTube channel for programming tutorials. I also worked for a few companies and startups, but I had a realization: I hated everything I was doing. I needed to **find something that made me want to wake up every morning.**



So, I sat down and started to deep dive into my childhood.

What inspired me back then? I thought about Toy Story, my favorite character, Buzz Lightyear, and how I always wanted to help him achieve his dream of flying to space. (By the way, I still have a Buzz Lightyear figurine on my desk). It hit me then - **space was my constant source of curiosity.** I

had been so busy chasing every opportunity that I never noticed the passion that had always been there. So, I decided that I'd pursue an engineering degree. I didn't want to study in Armenia, **nor did I want to leave Armenia.**



After months of research and numerous university applications, I found the perfect fit: the International University of Germany, which offered a Robotics Engineering program through a hybrid model. After preparing essays, taking exams, and sending in my documents, I applied in June 2022. And I got rejected. How ironic, right? But I wasn't ready to give up. In September 2022, I reapplied and was finally accepted after two years of waiting.





I started my studies, and at first, it was tough. After two gap years, I had forgotten everything. But a few months in, I found my rhythm again. I completed several engineering internships and programs; the biggest one so far was the NASA L'Space program. **I was a Lead Systems Engineer, leading a team of 16 engineers there.** Our team developed an orbiter for Enceladus (6th largest moon of Saturn and the 19th largest in the Solar System) designed to search for signs of life in the geysers that shoot water vapor and ice particles into space.



Another notable project was AMIDE (Alba Mons Ice-Rich Deposits Exploration), my first Mars-related project, which I built from scratch. AMIDE's goal was to investigate potential ice-rich deposits on north-facing slopes in the Alba Mons region of Mars, to analyze the subsurface ice and surrounding geological features, seek evidence of past or present habitable environments, and understand the potential for microbial life. In simple terms to find life. And **I presented my project to 500+ scientific community members** at the 2023 Life and Space Conference in Poland.



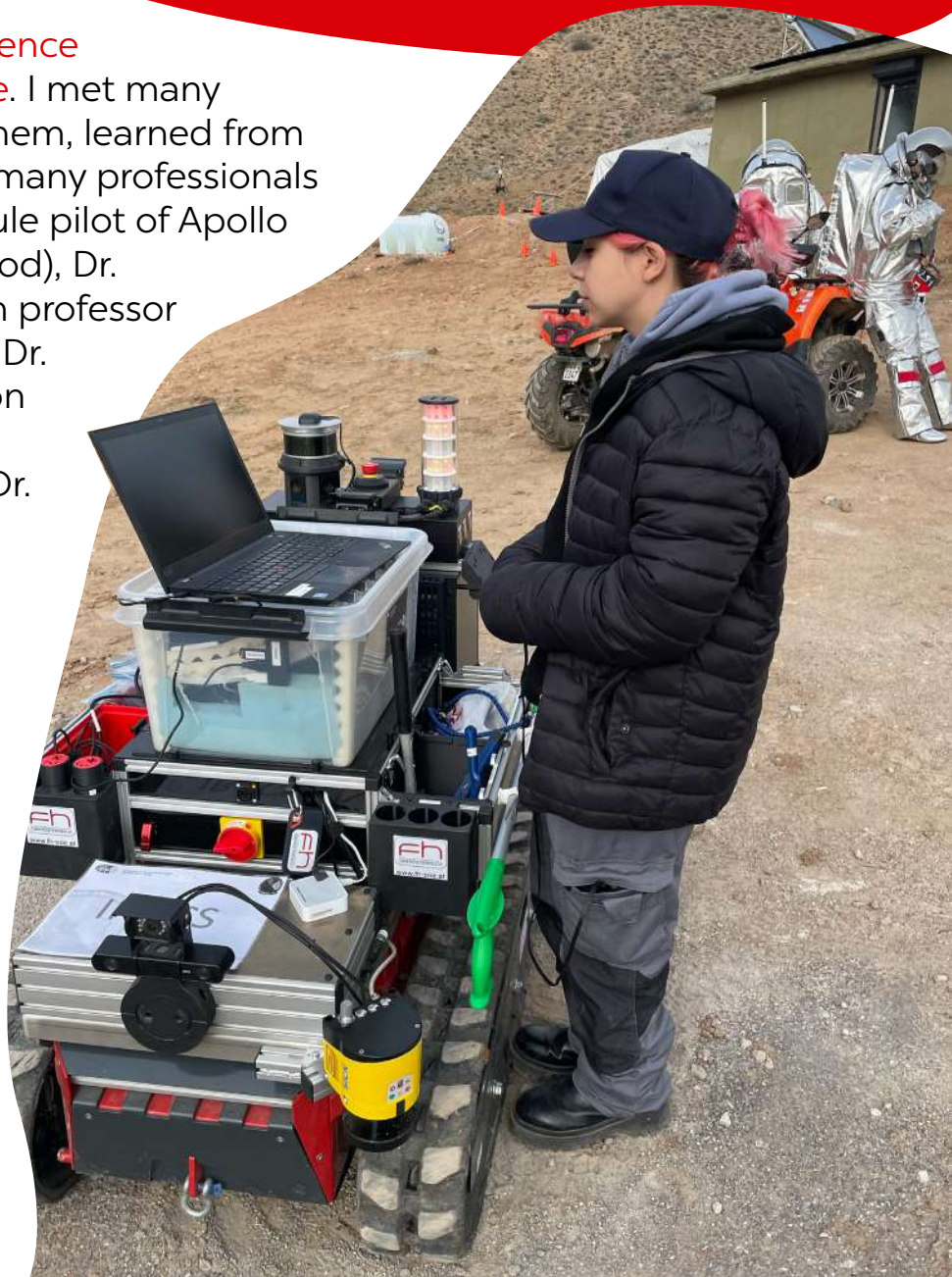




In September 2022, I had one of the most exciting experiences of my life - I became a backstage coordinator for Starmus VI in Armenia. The Starmus International Festival is an international gathering focused on celebrating astronomy, space exploration, music, art, and the natural sciences. Astronomer Dr. Garik Israelian and musician/astrophysicist Dr. Brian May found it. They decided to hold the conference in Armenia, and the topic was "50 Years on Mars: From Mars 3 and Mariner 9 to Starship". I couldn't miss that, so I got involved.

I can proudly say that **this experience was another turning point for me**. I met many amazing people, laughed with them, learned from them, and got motivated. I met many professionals like Dr. Charlie Duke (Lunar Module pilot of Apollo 16), Tony Fadel (the inventor of iPod), Dr. Emmanuelle Charpentier (French professor and researcher in microbiology), Dr. Jane Goodall (zoologist, expert on chimpanzees) and of course our rockstars Dr. Garik Israelian and Dr. Brian May.

The best memory of all is when Jim Bagian, the first Armenian astronaut, and I were having dinner at Mr.Gyros, a local Armenian fast-food restaurant, and he explained to me the basics of systems engineering. After attending STARMUS, I was inspired by all the incredible people I met there, and one of them gave me a valuable hint about what I could do next in my career.







But now, let's dive into my first analog mission: AMADEE-24, where **I served as a Ground Operation Support Team (GOST) member**. GOST is a group of trained professionals who support astronauts during missions, especially during EVAs (Extravehicular Activities) when they conduct experiments outside the habitat in spacesuits. I had heard about the Austrian Space Forum many times, and in 2023, I came across an event at TUMO titled "Why Mars? Explore with Dr. Gernot Grömer."

Dr. Gernot Grömer is the director of the Austrian space forum and is now one of my favorite people, so I got interested. On April 16th, I attended the event at TUMO, where I learned that an analog mission organized by **the Austrian Space Forum would soon take place in Armenia**. Excited, I approached Dr. Grömer after the event, asking how I could contribute and join the mission. He mentioned they had an application process, so I applied and waited. And waited. And, well, waited some more.



We started meeting with all team members from Armenia who passed those exams, and slowly, everyone was getting their mission roles. I was asked to join the Remote Science Support (RSS) and the Media teams, but I refused because **I wanted to become a GOST team member**. I was the only one from the Armenian team that didn't have any role, so I didn't go to Austria for on-site training. I lost hope that I'd ever join the mission. In January 2024, the program manager from the Armenian team sent me a message that the Austrian team had decided to **create a GOST team of Armenians and asked if I was still interested**. So, I said yes!

I'd like to thank Gaiane Hakobian, the program manager for AMADEE-24 from the Armenian side, who has also been my mentor and good friend since 2017. After all the challenges, I finally arrived in Armash village, suited up, attached my mission patches, and entered the habitat as a proud GOST member. I want to thank my AMADEE-24 family and every one of them who made me feel included and supported during the mission.

Back to the hint I was talking about. Inspired by the amazing people I met at Starmus, I took the next step in my career: **training to become an analog astronaut**. I applied to the Analog Astronaut Training Center (AATC), and after several months, I was selected for my first mission. It wasn't easy - I had to train mentally and physically every day. From the very childhood, I was physically weak. I couldn't even lift a bag of salt, so it was really hard for me to keep up. Months later, I finally had my mission date confirmed, 9 Nov 2023 - 17 Nov 2023, and it got canceled.



We rescheduled my mission to May 25 - 4 June, 2024, but my visa application was rejected. We rescheduled my mission to 20 July - 28 July 2024, and guess what? I got the visa, and everything went smoothly. Honestly, I'm truly happy with how everything turned out because, by the time I became an analog astronaut, I had **gained significantly more experience from AMADEE-24 than before.**

Now, let's get through some interesting facts from my mission as an analog astronaut. I traveled to Krakow, Poland, for a 7-day Lunar simulation, during which I experienced complete isolation from sunlight for the entire week. Our internal clock was not getting signals from the natural sunlight anymore. We also had limited food and water resources. Menu variety was limited, which can get quite tiring after 7 days. Water was rationed, and we were not able to have any showers. We used wet wipes for hygiene like astronauts do at the International Space Station (ISS). We lived in a closed environment without ventilation with high temperature and humidity. We slept in sleeping bags, doing our mission-specific experiments and tasks daily. We measured our weight, temperature, saturation, blood pressure, heart rate, and respiratory rate every two hours.



Each day, we were required to maintain journals and respond to three specific questions:

**Question 1:** Write your general feelings since waking up until you wrote the report (please include your emotions and related remarkable events during your day, your general thoughts and opinions about everything).

**Question 2:** Express things you did (detailed steps of your experiment task, gym, activities, etc.)

**Question 3:** Write briefly about what you ate (liquids, snacks, breakfast, lunch, and dinner).

This was my schedule as a space engineer. Every day, I needed to follow this schedule and create a report for our mission journal.



# SPACE ENGINEER

0:00 Wake-up, Morning Tests

1:00 Breakfast

2:00 Reports, Briefing

3:00 Sport

4:00 Sport

5:00 Experiment

6:00 Experiment

7:00 Lunch

8:00 Experiment

9:00 Experiment

10:00 Experiment

11:00 Experiment

12:00 Dinner

13:00 Reports, Briefing

14:00 Experiment

15:00 Socializing

16:00 Evening Tests, Sleep



As you have noticed, we weren't living in a normal time zone. During our time in the habitat, we adapted to a unique schedule by resetting our clocks to 00:00, living according to that time zone. We got sports bands to monitor our sleep, heart rate, exercise, and running. **We didn't have contact with the outside world**, and additionally, we were restricted from taking vitamins or medicine unless absolutely necessary. Except for the bathroom, every room was under video surveillance, including the bedroom.

I can't reveal more details at the moment, but next year, everything about our mission will be featured in a book from AATC that I'll be sharing on LinkedIn. If you're interested, let's stay connected!

The coolest fact is that **we were all female crew**, with five women participating from Poland, Mexico, Japan, France, and Armenia. Despite our diverse cultures and backgrounds, we bonded together from the very first second. I love them all so much and want to appreciate each of them and also the director of Scientific Projects and co-owner of Analog Astronaut Training Center, Dr. Agata Maria Kołodziejczyk, for believing in me, providing this opportunity and helping to make it all a reality.





The first question when we met with Agata was, why do you want to become an analog astronaut? Well, I answered her back then, and I will repeat this here for you. “I have only one goal: to **have my impact on the development of the space industry in Armenia**. And this opportunity will unlock for me new connections and resources that will help me to reach my goal. I want to create our own Armenian analog mission and train the first analog astronauts in Armenia. I want to begin simulated mission research here and **create opportunities for everyone with a passion for space exploration in Armenia**”.



Education and workforce development are absolutely crucial for Armenia's space ambitions. Armenia currently lacks specialized programs in aerospace engineering and space sciences. People are **not even considering education in Armenia for space studies**.

Creating well structured space programs in universities will be critical for developing a skilled workforce that can design, build, and manage space technologies. We can also look at creating internships and exchange programs with established space organizations in Europe or the United States to offer hands-on experience and motivate our students.



Entrepreneurship is another area in which Armenia has significant potential to thrive. While non-profit space research organizations play an essential role, if we want to attract more talent and build a sustainable workforce, we need to provide proper compensation. This will prevent skilled individuals from leaving the country or the industry in search of financial stability. But **how can we generate revenue without a viable business model?** Armenia already boasts a vibrant tech ecosystem, so why not capitalize on that innovation and expand into the space sector? There's no need to compete with other nations; instead, we can focus on our strengths by developing high-quality software solutions for space missions and sharing them with the global space community. This collaborative approach would allow us to make meaningful contributions while enabling others to benefit from our innovations.



Armenia is just beginning its journey into space, but there is an immense amount of potential that doesn't need to go to waste. Although we may not have the vast infrastructure of established European space programs, **this gives us the freedom to innovate in specific areas.** For example, satellite technology and data analytics could become major growth sectors for Armenia, especially in Earth observation, agriculture, and defense. We can also **create AI-driven satellite data analysis**, which could give Armenia a competitive edge in the global market.



Another exciting way is creating analog missions. And now, I am actively working on that. After my analog mission at AATC, I immediately began working on the Rocket Space Academy (RCA).

**This facility in Armenia will focus on analog research**, experiments, training, missions, and courses and will be open to everyone, including children. The project is currently in development, so you won't find much information on the internet. To make this goal a reality, I need a lot of support. If you've read this far, I want to reach out to you - yes, you! If you're interested in this project, **feel free to reach out or share it with your community**. Together, we can make this happen!

Recently, when I was speaking at WCIT 2024, I realized that many people aren't familiar with the concept of analog research in Armenia. I realized that founding an analog research facility in Armenia would become meaningless if I didn't fix that gap. I decided the best way to introduce people to new concepts is to make them viral. So, alongside creating RCA, **I've also launched my podcast, [Mission:Analog](#)**. The podcast is in English, but I'll work on adding Armenian subtitles. In each episode, I invite one analog astronaut to share her/his experiment and experience to show what is going on in the analog world and inspire people. Who knows - maybe the next analog astronaut is reading this right now?



Scan to check  
the podcast



INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

# HOW STARTUP INVESTMENT TOURS ARE BRIDGING INVESTORS AND ARMENIAN STARTUPS



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF





## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE HOW STARTUP INVESTMENT TOURS ARE BRIDGING INVESTORS AND ARMENIAN STARTUPS

Armenia is often overlooked on the global investment map. Despite having significant tech talent and much to offer the world, there is [a lack of awareness about the country](#) as an investment destination.

When we take a look at the recently released [Startup Investment Report for 2024](#) by [Startup Blink](#), Yerevan, the Armenian capital, [ranks 11th in Europe for the App industry](#). Examining this ranking alone speaks volumes about Armenia's boiling tech scene. When a relatively small country with nearly three million population ranks this high in Europe, it means there is huge undiscovered potential out there. According to the same report, the city's startup ecosystem is among the top 20% globally, [securing the 200th position out of 1,000](#)—a 21-spot improvement from earlier in the same year. Notably, other larger neighboring economies fall behind Armenia's ecosystem, according to the same renowned index.



Photo from the  
Investor Tour  
Formula VC  
organized in  
Yerevan in  
October  
2024

Despite considerable changes in the Armenian tech industry over the past few years, particularly since Picsart joined the unicorns club, the pace of transformation has not been fast enough to bring Armenia into the global investment spotlight. In this regard, we have to take into consideration that one very important factor hindering Armenia's potential has been **the region's complex geopolitical situation**, which has impacted the country's economy and startup ecosystem. Most investors prioritize stable economic environments, and perceptions of Armenia, often **shaped by online news rather than firsthand experience**, can negatively influence investment decisions.



Photo from the Investor Tour  
Formula VC organized in  
Yerevan in October  
2024





Among the many stakeholders in the Armenian startup ecosystem, Formula VC recognized early on that many investment opportunities were missed in the past two years due to negative online news that [didn't accurately reflect the country's daily reality](#). I still remember when I first met Grigor Hovhannisyan, General Partner at Formula VC. I asked him to describe Armenia's challenges preventing it from attracting investments, and [his answer was only one word: Positioning!](#)

The problem primarily lies not with Armenia or its tech talent but rather with [how Armenia is perceived by international investors](#) who may lack familiarity with the country. Based on conversations with foreigners and European startup investors, [Formula VC understood that Armenia is largely unknown](#). There was no way to sugarcoat that fact. As key players in the country's startup ecosystem, they had to acknowledge the problem and deal with it.

"Tell me, and I will forget; teach me, and I may remember; [involve me, and I will understand](#)." These were the exact words Sona Veziryan, director and partner at Formula VC, told me when explaining their new initiative, [Investor Tours](#), in Armenia. Rather than simply repeating the same message over and over again about how things are in Armenia and why investors have to consider its startups, the idea was to [bring investors to Yerevan to experience the country](#) firsthand. Inspired by a similar tour in Estonia, Sona recognized the potential for Armenia to attract international investors through such an initiative.



Formula VC aimed to dispel misconceptions and highlight the opportunities within Armenia's tech ecosystem rather than merely disseminating information about it through various media outlets. A primary goal of these tours is to attract foreign direct investment. When investors are exposed to the country's potential, they are more likely to allocate capital to promising startups and businesses. This influx of capital can stimulate economic growth and organically promote the country's ecosystems to foreign investor networks. Another goal was to immerse investors in Armenian culture and business to generate interest in the country in general, not just secure immediate investments.

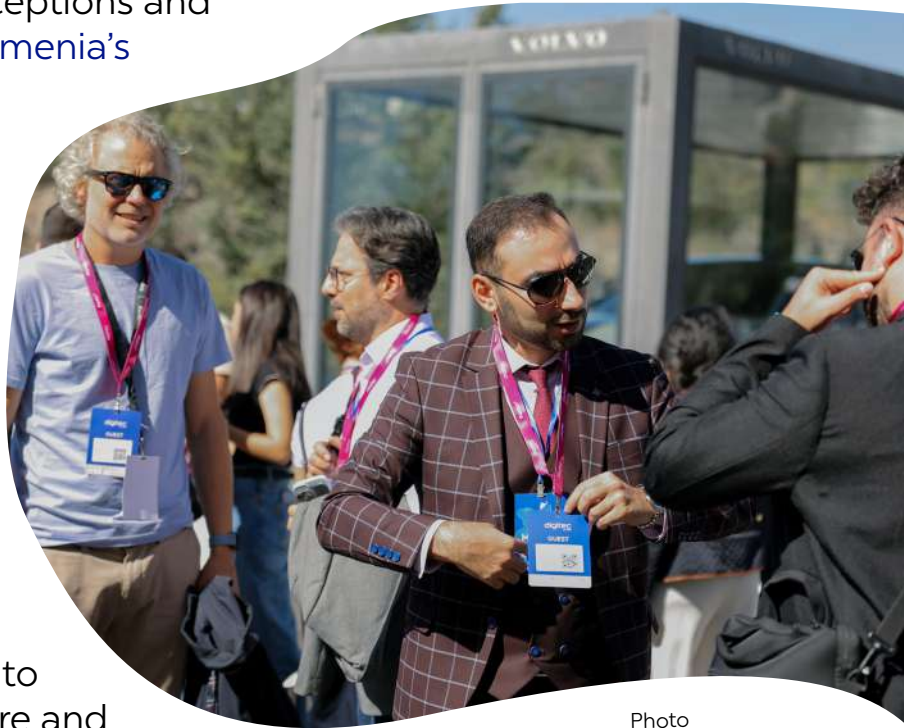


Photo  
from the Investor  
Tour Formula VC organized  
in Yerevan in October 2024

With Armenia hosting the World Congress on Innovation and Technology (WCIT) concurrently with Digitec, the region's largest annual tech event, the timing was ideal for organizing the first Investor Tour of its kind in the country. This unique opportunity allowed investors to personally assess Armenia's startup ecosystem while attending both WCIT and Digitec.

According to Formula VC, the response to the investor tour exceeded expectations. **35 participants from 12 countries**, many of whom were first-time visitors to Armenia, joined the tour, and, not surprisingly, they all had positive experiences. The foreign investors were impressed by Yerevan's developed infrastructure and vibrant lifestyle. They couldn't help but **comment on the good quality of life**, business opportunities, and technological advancements.

Formula VC planned an Investor Tour to **cover all components of the startup ecosystem**, from startup campuses to world-class tech educational institutions. They aimed to showcase Armenia's established ecosystem and how it creates founders, nurtures them, helps them grow, and connects them to international markets through **an active network in Silicon Valley and beyond**.



Foreign visitors toured successful Armenian startups, including the Armenian unicorns Picsart and ServiceTitan. They also attended a pitching session where ten Armenian startups (five pre-seed and five seed) pitched their ideas to participants.

Cultural experiences, such as visits to the Ararat Brandy Factory and vibrant and diverse dinners in the evenings showcasing developed restaurant culture in the country, added the Armenian flavor to the professional agenda. It offered a **better understanding of the Armenian** culture and business potential outside tech.

What Formula VC did in the investor tour is not a new model globally but a unique approach within the Armenian startup ecosystem investment sector. For the first time, instead of Armenians going abroad to introduce their country to potential investors, [international investors came to Armenia](#) to learn more about the country.

Photo from the Investor Tour  
Formula VC organized in  
Yerevan in October  
2024





Countries like Estonia and Singapore have successfully hosted similar investor tours for years, building connections between startups and international investors and contributing to broader economic growth beyond the tech sector. By bringing investors to a country, there's an opportunity to highlight aspects of the economy that might not be immediately apparent to locals.



Photo  
from the Investor Tour  
Formula VC organized in  
Yerevan in October 2024

Organizing the investor tour in such a short timeframe was a significant challenge. Despite the tight schedule, the Formula VC and BANA Angels team successfully executed the event within two months. For future tours, earlier planning, and global promotion will be important to attract a larger number of participants. Nevertheless, securing 35 participants under these constraints was a commendable achievement.

Photo from the Investor Tour  
Formula VC organized in  
Yerevan in October 2024





# Testimonials from Investor Tour Participants

## ANI OGANESYAN

Investor Tour Participant, Head of MBA Programs at RUDN University, and Head of UDTX.vc Project by Hop.agency

I had already witnessed the vibrant energy of the Armenian startup ecosystem through my mentorship at various events, so this tour was a chance to delve deeper. The investor tour confirmed my initial positive perception, showcasing a growing talent pool and global focus on startup solutions.

I was particularly impressed by the level of expertise in the tech sector, especially in areas like AI and Gametech. The diverse range of startups I met with, from those working on advanced robotics to innovative solutions for social impact, revealed a dynamic ecosystem that is attracting both local and global interest.

But it wasn't just the startups that impressed me. The tour also revealed the strong support structures in place, like the Tumo Center and AI9 Startup Campus. These organizations are vital in nurturing talent and fostering collaboration. The spirit of sharing knowledge and resources was truly inspiring.

The highlight was the Investor<>Startup Meetup Event at the AI9 Startup Campus. It offered a unique space for focused, direct interactions between investors and startups. The tailored networking opportunities and investment prospects made it a valuable experience. And the quality of pitches from the startups made it highly valuable as well.

”

Testimonials “

## EMMA Z. OHANIAN

Investor Tour Participant and  
Founding Partner at Y&Z Ventures

It was a privilege to join the investor tour and gain direct exposure to Armenia's growing ecosystem while connecting with like-minded investors from around the globe.

I was impressed by Armenia's development of a strong tech talent pipeline. The inclusive workspaces, extensive educational programs, and close-knit community are promising signs of building and empowering a robust tech talent pool across both men and women. Talent is the cornerstone of a thriving tech ecosystem, driving innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

# “ Testimonials ”



Photo from the Investor Tour  
Formula VC organized in Yerevan  
in October 2024



“ Armenia is very much an undiscovered gem for remote workers and digital nomads. It has a rich history and culture, lovely architecture, great food, and friendly people. The view across Yerevan to Mt Ararat is stunning.

I must confess I was a little apprehensive when I first arrived, as the Armenian language and alphabet is very different from Romanic languages, there is no Uber here, and getting mobile service requires some planning. However with a few days of help and guidance from my friends, Haig and Mathew, I was able to settle in quickly and resume working remotely.

Armenia is definitely different from Portugal and the Med, but I found that it still has an eastern Mediterranean feel. I am now looking forward to exploring more of the country, including learning more about its history, doing some hiking, and touring the wine country.”

 **Paul Vatistas**

Partner and Director  
Haig Barrett Partners, UK





DIGITAL NOMADS WITH FAMILIES

# WHY FAMILY-FRIENDLY DESTINATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR DIGITAL NOMADS



**ANDREAS  
WIL GERDES**

Co-FOUNDER OF MaNaBu MOVEMENT





## DIGITAL NOMADS WITH FAMILIES WHY FAMILY-FRIENDLY DESTINATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR DIGITAL NOMADS

The concept of the digital nomad has evolved since its inception. Initially, it was a solo journey, with individuals leveraging technology to work remotely from exotic locations. As this lifestyle gained popularity, so did the idea of sharing it with loved ones. Today, many digital nomads are **forming families and moving together** as groups, sometimes with kids, to new destinations. As a result, digital nomads are increasingly looking for family-oriented destinations because they want to **travel the world with their families** without sacrificing their careers.

[Andreas Wil Gerdes](#) is a German entrepreneur, digital nomad, and consultant based in Malta. He is known globally for his advocacy for digital nomadism and his **focus on family-oriented communities** in emerging destinations around the world. He's played a key role in architecting digital nomad ecosystems across various cities worldwide, contributing **hundreds of millions of Euros to local economies**. For this reason, I reached out to Andreas and had a very interesting call with him. We discussed the essence of a family-oriented destination and its impact on digital nomadism and **local economies and societies**.



# Playgrounds Tell All

In concept, the ideal family-oriented destination for digital nomad families blends natural beauty, cultural richness, and digital infrastructure. Such a place would offer diverse **educational and recreational opportunities for children**. At the same time, it would provide a productive environment for remote working parents, enabling them to operate without technical issues.

The first step towards creating a family-oriented destination is to **ensure it's family-friendly**. But how can you identify one most simply? According to Andreas, you only need to look at playgrounds. If you find them full of kids playing around and moving their bodies, you're probably in a family-friendly destination. On the other hand, if playgrounds are dominated by adults walking their dogs with no kids around, it **clearly indicates a problem**. Nowadays, many first-world cities are moving in this direction, with a notable absence of children in places where they should naturally be. Andreas believes this trend will soon impact **not only societies but also economies and life dynamics**, which are designed for larger populations.



“

What makes me passionate about digital nomadism? It's one of the core boosters of a better tomorrow.

ANDREAS WIL GERDES,  
KAIROS EUROPE MENTOR / CO-FOUNDER, ABC  
TELEKOM

I told Andreas that when Lana and I decided it was time to expand our family and have a child, **Armenia influenced our life-changing decision**. The country is family-friendly by all measures, including the one Andreas described. Parks and playgrounds across Yerevan city, where we've lived for the past eight years, are always full of kids. Couples in Armenia tend to have children, and **kids are generally favored and well cared for**, even by strangers. As my friend once said, “In Armenia, everyone on the street is a parent to your child.”

“

## Andreas Wil Gerdes

Most destinations are now designed in child-unfriendly or even hostile environments.”



## A Return to Our Nomadic Roots

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For some, being a digital nomad with kids is challenging and might even seem impossible to achieve. But for Andreas, challenges are a normal part of life, and they don't deter the digital nomad lifestyle. According to him, it's impossible to truly grow as a person without having children.

Andreas believes raising children is essential for **developing a healthy attitude** and perspective on life. Therefore, by choosing family-oriented digital nomad destinations, parents can create enriching environments for their children to **learn about life from life itself** while maintaining their own professional and personal pursuits.

Andreas explained in more detail how humans are **naturally inclined to nomadic lifestyles**, even with children. He pointed out that people have been traveling with children for thousands of years, and nomadic cultures have existed for millennia. Nomadism has always been **a way to share knowledge and culture**, contributing to human evolution.

This traditional way of life simply fell out of favor in recent centuries due to the rise of industrialization and formal schooling. However, with the rise of remote work and digital infrastructures, digital nomadism has seen a surge in recent years, **reclaiming its rightful place** in the lives of many professionals.



One crucial point Andreas raised was the tendency of many family-oriented destinations in developing countries to be **less prone to promoting gender-related ideologies** that are increasingly common in some Western societies. This can be less confusing for children and offers a more traditional approach to family life. In these destinations, children may be exposed to more straightforward, age-appropriate values and behaviors without the influence of **potentially confusing or controversial social trends**. This can provide a more stable and predictable environment for children to grow up in.

At this point, I couldn't help but share an important perspective I gained from my first year in Armenia about how people here **balance social conservatism with personal freedom**, providing everyone with the necessary space to live freely within certain boundaries **rooted in respect and tradition**. This is something Lana and I had been seeking for years, and we were fortunate to find it in Armenia.





# The Power of Self-Guided Learning

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Returning to our discussion about educational opportunities and learning curves in family-oriented digital nomad destinations, Andreas highlighted the superior educational value his children gained in some Balkan countries they've been to. They observed their neighbors plant vegetables in their gardens, **maximizing every square meter of space**. He believes real-life experiences, such as watching neighbors tend to plants and being invited to participate, **offer a more effective learning experience** than classroom instruction.

The daily connection to nature in simpler, emerging destinations is highly beneficial for children's development. Now, with the availability of fiber-optic cables, parents can combine remote work with a more grounded lifestyle, allowing children to **experience the best of both worlds**.

According to Andreas, two hundred years ago, the factory schooling model emerged, leading us to believe that we should send our children to large schools to **learn the same curriculum at the same pace**. Some of his children attended public or private schools, but with his youngest, he's opted for a homeschooling approach, allowing them to learn at their own pace and in a more personalized way.



## Andreas Wil Gerdes

Everyone is naturally inclined to constantly learn, relearn, and unlearn. Most forgot about it. If you're not willing to embrace lifelong learning, it's a sign of intellectual stagnation.





## Andreas Wil Gerdes

When you want to do something, you'll naturally learn about it. That's the power of child-centered education; children are inherently curious and eager to learn. The most important thing is to teach them how to learn. Once they have that skill, they'll never stop."

I wanted to clarify Andreas's stance on schooling, and his response was clear: he's not against it. If they're in an interesting location with a good local school, he wouldn't mind his children attending for 3-4 months to **experience the local learning environment**.

When I asked about the potential social drawbacks of homeschooling, he explained that children should be able to socialize with anyone, anywhere, **not just those in their neighborhood or school**. He also shared that Maria Montessori recognized this early on: children thrive on interaction with older children. Older kids enjoy teaching younger ones, and younger kids love to show off their skills. Andreas has seen it himself with his kids from different age groups.





# How Armenia Can Attract Digital Nomad Families

Andreas observes that many places today are not particularly child-friendly. He believes that countries like Macedonia, Georgia, Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Armenia, with their favorable climates, rich histories, and friendly locals, are **more welcoming to families**. These countries embrace visitors and their children.

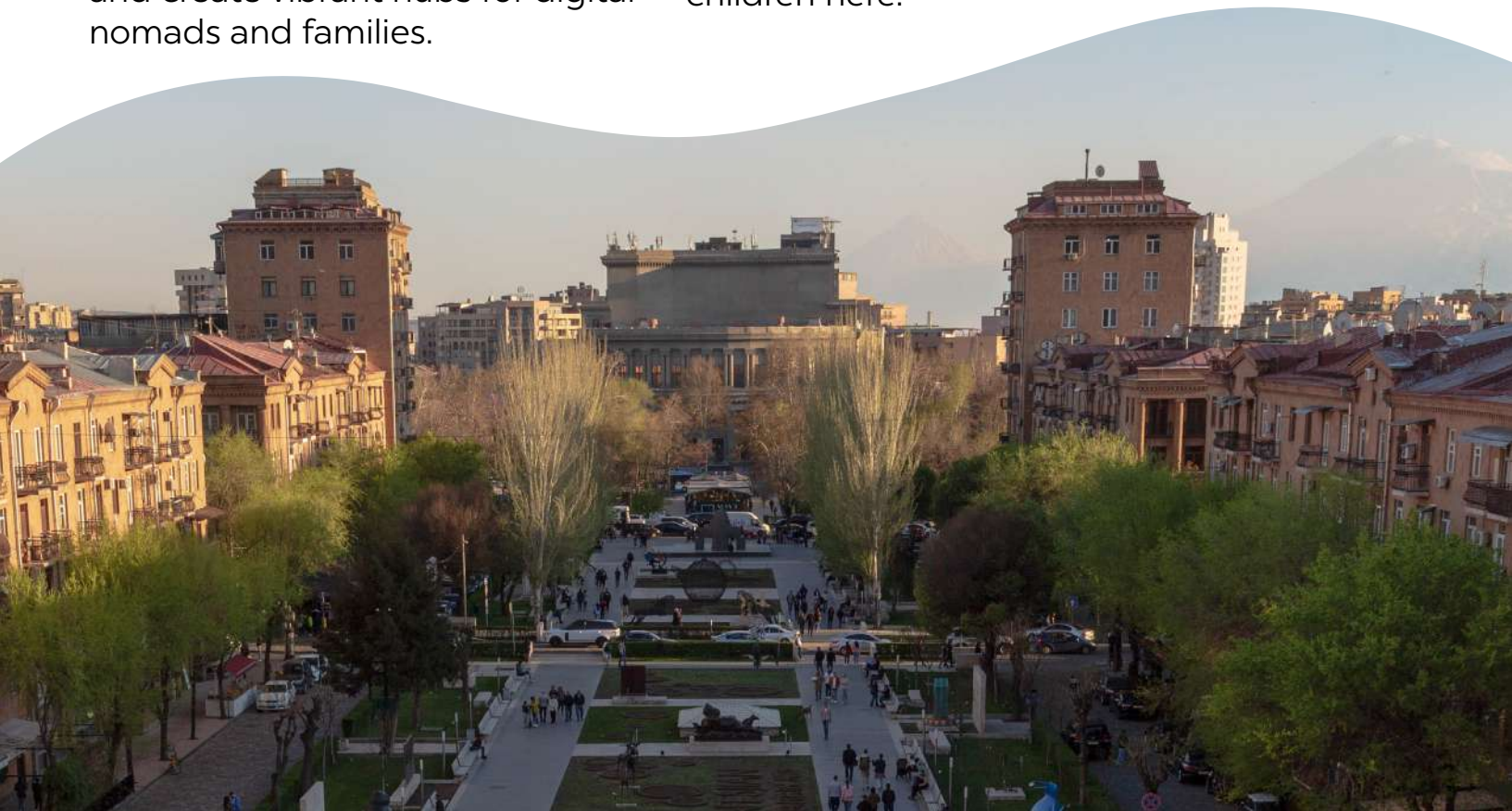
According to him, Armenia, in particular, seems to **offer a mix of factors that could attract nomad families** or those who prefer a family-oriented lifestyle. If people embrace a lifestyle focused on family values, hospitality, and cultural exchange between locals and internationals, **Armenia could attract visitors to smaller towns** and create vibrant hubs for digital nomads and families.



## Andreas Wil Gerdes

Places with Christianity as part of their history and cultural fabric will be highly attractive to digital nomad families.”

I know Armenia might not be the top digital nomad destination at the moment. In fact, the concept of **digital nomadism is gradually growing in Armenia**, but it's happening, and those who have arrived are sharing positive feedback about their experiences here. Everything Andreas described about family-oriented destinations **aligns with what I've witnessed in Armenia firsthand**, and these factors influenced my wife and me to have children here.



*Engage  
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YOUR ENGAGEMENT WITH ARMENIA

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FORUM 2024  
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# SHOWCASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT SESSION 1



**ARINA ZOHRABIAN**  
ARMENIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS



**TIM STRAIGHT**  
HOIF



**MARIE LOU PAPAZIAN**  
TUMD



**TATYANA HOVHANNISYAN**  
VIVA FOUNDATION



**VASKEN BRUDIAN**  
ARDEAN



**GAYANE MANUKYAN**  
NATIONAL NETWORK MEDIA  
PLATFORM FOUNDATION



**HRAYR BARSOUMIAN**  
OPTIMIZE CONSULTING



**TALIN BAGHDADILIAN**  
TEACH FOR ARMENIA



FORUM 2024  
NOVEMBER 23

# SHOWCASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT SESSION 2



**VARTAN MARASHLYAN**  
REPAT ARMENIA



**SEVAN KABAKIAN**  
BIRTHRIGHT ARMENIA



**SHARON CHEKIJIAN**  
TRAVELING DOCTORS



**NAZARETH SEFERIAN**  
IMPACT HUB/VIA FUND



**LILIT ODABASHIAN**  
BUY ARMENIAN



**NANOR BALABANIAN**  
HIDDEN ROAD INITIATIVE



**GEVORG POGHOSYAN**  
REARMENIA



**ARMEN KHACHIKYAN**  
ARAR FOUNDATION





EXAMINING ARMENIA'S POTENTIAL

# MY TAKEAWAYS FROM PARTICIPATING IN WCIT AND THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN YEREVAN



**AHMED  
ADEL**

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT  
GLOBAL STRATEGIST





## EXAMINING ARMENIA'S POTENTIAL MY TAKEAWAYS FROM PARTICIPATING IN WCIT AND THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN YEREVAN

I first learned about Armenia through a dear friend, [Arpi Karapetyan](#). We met at a previous conference in 2024 and had a pleasant time sharing stories. When she shared stories of her homeland, it inspired me. I immediately felt an instant cultural connection. Her descriptions of Armenia and its people made me curious to see for myself.

After a while, the opportunity finally came when I was invited to speak at the WCIT, “[The World Congress of Innovation and Technology](#),” and the “[Science of Leadership Conference](#)” in Yerevan, the capital city of Armenia. It was my first visit to this ancient land and my initial interaction with its expanding tech community. Being from a greatly ancient culture, Egypt, I found an inspiring blend of tradition and innovation in Armenia that left a lasting, indescribable impression on me!



# A Warm Welcome to Yerevan

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As my plane landed in Yerevan, I was greeted by the WOW view of Mount Ararat, which I immediately fell in love with. **What an incredible view that was!** Its snowcapped peaks rose majestically against the horizon. The air was fresh and clean, and the streets felt **alive with the simple joy of everyday life.**

It's a place where the old and new come together in a perfect blend. Walking around, I couldn't help but notice how ancient stonework and modern architecture coexisted so beautifully. It was a clear sign of **Armenia's ability to balance tradition and progress.**

Being a frequent traveler across the globe, one of the first things that stood out for me was the warmth and hospitality of the people. From the welcoming customs official at the airport to the friendly locals I met in cafes and markets, there was **a genuine openness that immediately made me feel warm and at home.** Even small gestures, like shopkeepers offering a sample of dried pomegranates and other fruits or restaurant owners sharing the history of their places, added a personal touch to my experience.







## Arpi Karapetyan's Personal Touch

Arpi was the magic behind this event. She didn't just organize things; she created an atmosphere where **everyone felt connected and welcomed**. Her genuine care and enthusiasm made it feel like more than just a conference; it was a memorable experience. Her team at "Cascade People & Business" mirrored her energy and commitment, handling the logistics with **a precision that made the entire event flow effortlessly**. They ensured that everyone felt valued and appreciated through thoughtful arrangements at the venue and customized support for each speaker.

My primary reason for visiting Armenia was to attend and speak at the 'Science of Leadership Conference' and to have the honor of being a panelist at the 'World Congress of Innovation & Technology.' These two significant events brought together industry leaders, tech enthusiasts, and innovators from diverse fields.

The **venues for both events, especially the leadership conference, were architectural icons**. The crowd was a mix of human resource professionals, startup founders, and global corporate leaders, and all were eager to discuss the latest advancements in tech. Clearly, this community was **keeping pace with global tech trends** while also shaping its own path. A sense of ambition and a hunger for innovation exceeded what I've seen in some of the more established tech hubs.

# How Storytelling and Communication Drive Success

My public speech, “Human Advantage in the Age of AI,” addressed [how storytelling can be a strategic business skill](#), especially in the evolving world of technology. I discussed how companies could use data-driven decisions to create more meaningful connections with their customers and employees and that we should embrace AI as a tool for empowerment, not a replacement. I was eager to highlight my 16 years of experience in advanced corporations and the tech industry, during which I led learning and development functions in multiple countries, developed innovative learning solutions, and established myself as a global public speaker.

The audience was pretty [much engaged](#), nodding in agreement, taking notes, and raising interesting questions and perspectives during the Q&A session. One participant asked: AI can analyze data faster and more accurately than any human; what do you think is the one human skill that will become even more valuable in the workplace? This allowed me to capitalize on how [communication is not a soft skill anymore](#); it is now a fundamental strategic business skill that will be more valuable in the age of AI.





My keynote speech at the Science and Leadership Conference was followed by an extended version for leadership titled: **“Mastering Modern Leadership in AI Time,”** which was so much needed by the audience to fulfill their curiosity about how all the inspiring thoughts highlighted in my speech can be executed on a leadership scale?! In simpler terms, many people are grappling with questions like ‘What will make us unique in an AI-driven world?’, ‘How will my job change?’, and ‘What happens if AI surpasses human capabilities?’ These concerns are **normal in our current technological transformation.**

While the conference content was impressive, the finer details truly made the event memorable. The logistics were handled flawlessly, from the seamless registration process to the efficient time management throughout the sessions. **Arpi thought about every aspect**, even the choice of local refreshments that gave the attendees a taste of Armenian cuisine.



I also noticed the audience’s enthusiasm for learning and connecting; it **seemed natural and effortless**. People weren’t just exchanging contact information; they were sharing ideas and discussing potential partnerships. This spoke volumes about the **maturity of the professional community in Armenia**. Having attended similar conferences in different countries, I can genuinely say that Armenia’s professional scene is filled with promise. The community’s passion and talent are obvious, and it’s clear that the country is making smart moves to strengthen its foundation.



# A New Chapter For Me in Armenia

My first visit to Armenia was more than just a professional opportunity; it was a chance to get to know a country on the rise truly. I've made valuable connections and developed a deep appreciation for the place and its people. *I'm already looking forward to coming back*, diving even deeper into the tech scene, and seeing how things continue to grow and change. If you're thinking about visiting, I highly recommend it. As for me, this visit is just *the beginning of a relationship I'm eager to build*, and I'm excited to see how I can keep playing a part in Armenia's journey forward.

I have to thank Mathew Zein, founder and chief editor of Life in Armenia magazine, whom I met at the WCIT conference. We shared a mutual interest in finding ways to benefit our communities. Matt gave me the opportunity to write this piece and reflect on my recent visit. I'm hopeful that our paths will cross again in the future.







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IMPRESSIONS FROM ARMENIA

# FEEDBACK FROM A UK TECH BLOGGER AFTER SPENDING A WEEK IN YEREVAN



**GREGORY  
TIDANIAN**

ELECTRONICS AND SOFTWARE  
ENGINEER





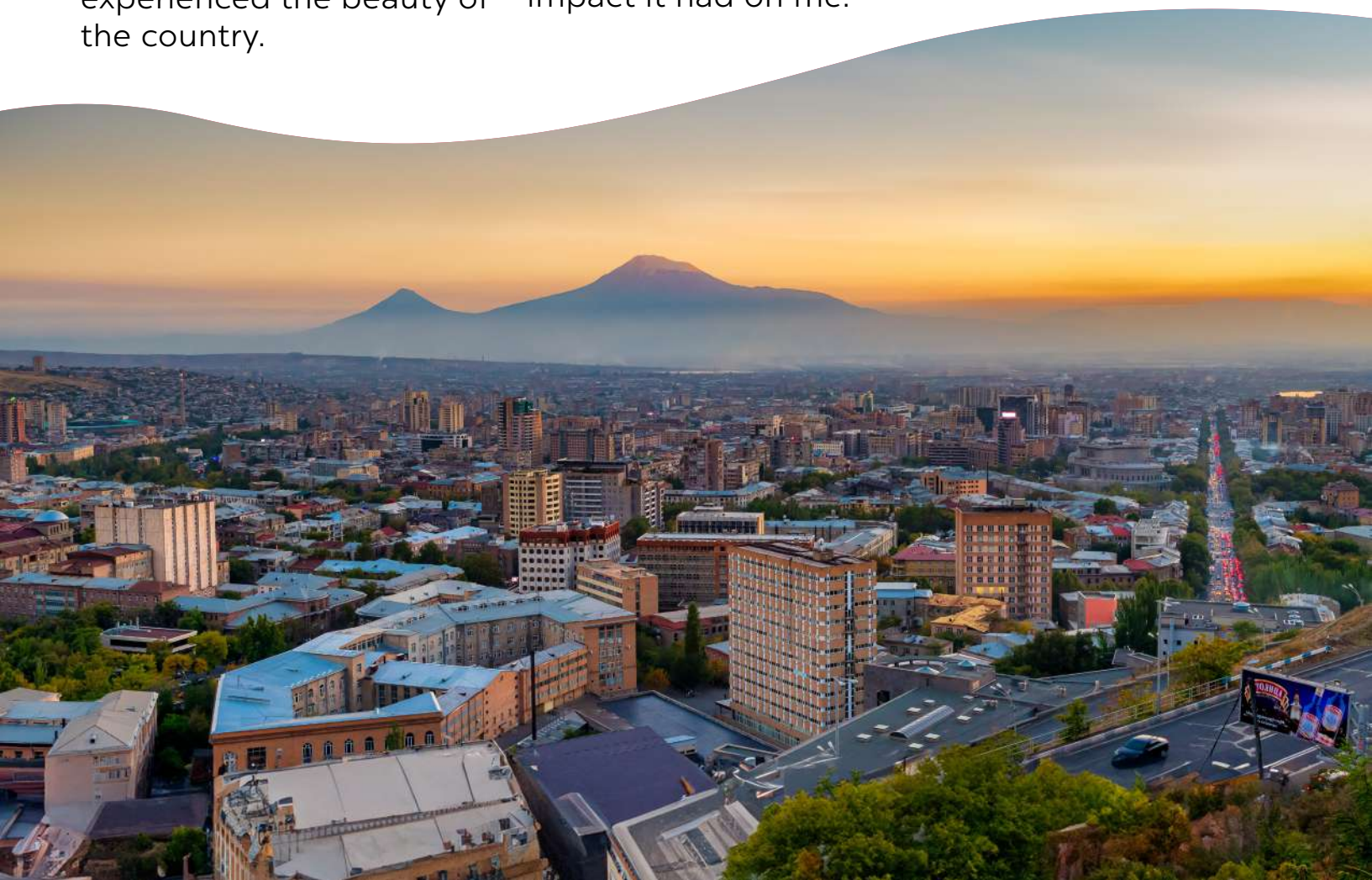
## IMPRESSIONS FROM ARMENIA FEEDBACK FROM A UK TECH BLOGGER AFTER SPENDING A WEEK IN YEREVAN

My visit to Armenia this October was only my second, and it was the most special trip of my life.

The first time I visited my ancestral homeland was 13 years ago, and as a 15-year-old British-born Armenian, I was blown away. It was also my Cypriot-born parents' first trip to Armenia, and we stayed with our cousin Sylvie in Yerevan, visited Sevan and Dilijan, and experienced the beauty of the country.

Back then, in 2011, we felt particularly charmed by everyone we interacted with. Fast forward to 2024, and my uncle Haig strongly recommended I come to Armenia with him to attend a series of technology conferences and exhibitions he had been to before with his company, Haig Barrett Partners.

I regularly have conversations with other British Armenians about the technology industry and various professional opportunities in Armenia, so I jumped at the opportunity to visit my ancestral homeland again as well as to talk to founders, business owners, and professionals based there. As fond as my memories were from my first trip, I was not expecting my most recent to have the impact it had on me.





## New First Impressions

I arrived in Armenia two days before the World Congress on Innovation and Technology began so that I could make my trip more than just work and properly experience Yerevan, where I was staying.

I immediately felt a difference from my last trip. Ordering a taxi on Yandex Go felt effortless, and there was a clear stopping area at the airport, making negotiating with taxi drivers a thing of the past.

I was dropped off at the Holiday Inn, which was recently developed and located right by Republic Square. Everything from the room's cleanliness to the staff's hospitality was immaculate.

Within my first few hours in Yerevan, I was immediately struck by something that everyone who has visited Armenia speaks highly of and has remained the same since my trip in 2011—**how hospitable and kind the people in Armenia are**. Everyone treats you like family, and learning about people's lives in Armenia always puts a smile on my face.



The kindness extends to people from several walks of life. On my second day, I bumped into some of the staff of one of Yerevan's professional football clubs, Noah FC, which later this year will be playing Chelsea in London in the European competition, the Conference League. Their humility was refreshing as they gracefully thanked me for wishing them well in what may be their most high-profile game in November.

During my trip, **I felt a unique type of diversity**, where several Armenians who either grew up in the diaspora or in Artsakh had moved to Armenia - some for obviously tragic circumstances and others with different motivators. I spoke to Armenians from Syria, Lebanon, Artsakh, Iran, Dubai, France, and America; all deeply loved their ancestral homeland. As someone with a passion for languages, **I loved hearing the mix of the Western and Eastern dialects** and being able to practice my spoken and written Armenian myself.

## Cafes and Restaurants

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With more Armenians moving to Armenia, various industries have changed. One of the most noticeable for me was the **increase in Syrian and Lebanese Armenian restaurants**, whose food and service (like those of the previously existing restaurants) were incredible. Some notable mentions of the restaurants I tried were Nor Aleppo, Baron, Byblos, and Zeytuna.

The cafe culture was also amazing and something I definitely miss since being back in London. It was made even more enjoyable when we would meet with others who were in town for the conferences, some who were born and raised in Armenia and others who are part of the Armenian diaspora and repatriated to grow their businesses in Armenia.



During my downtime in the days leading up to the tech events, I loved **drinking Armenian coffee in different cafes** and at the Marriott hotel's outdoor seating area overlooking Republic Square. It was not uncommon for us to recognize people from our trip walking past who would come over and catch up with us. The staff at cafes and restaurants were always a pleasure to chat with and would go above and beyond to answer my questions about ingredients for foods as a vegan.



## Technology

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The reason I came to Armenia on the dates I did was to attend a series of conferences and exhibitions called Digitec and the World Congress of Information and Technology (WCIT). I love attending technology events as they bring people together and celebrate new ideas as well as existing big companies.

## Digitec

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The events began with the first day of Digitec, during which **84 startups stood at stands and presented their technologies** to those interested in learning, collaborating, or investing.

What I found different from Digitec compared to other exhibitions I've been to was the **vast diversity of ideas and industries**. From smart prostheses and astronaut food to social media platforms and education technology, there was always something fun to learn about.

The companies presenting at Digitec **were not limited to early-stage startups**, either. For example, Krisp is a huge company with its primary team in Armenia. Its product acts as a smart layer between meetings and note-taking.

As this article already mentioned, it was refreshing to speak to so many kind and enthusiastic people at Digitec. The founders of Cosmofood.ai were even kind enough to let me sample some food that they are developing for astronauts.

That evening, the opening day of events was capped off with a series of performances at the Republic Square from the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra followed by Jason Derulo.

As well as my time at Digitec, I attended WCIT which featured more fireside talks and panel discussions. All of them were great and several high-profile Armenians spoke to share their wisdom in their domains of expertise.

Some highlights for me included Rev Lebedian, who is a Vice President at NVIDIA leading Omniverse & Simulation Technology discussing the next wave of AI and what it means for hardware. It was great hearing Rev speak and learn about how he was one of the pioneers in bringing NVIDIA's research center to Armenia.

Noubar Afeyan, co-founder of Moderna spoke in a fireside chat alongside Garo Armen Chairman and CEO of Agenus about the implications of AI and he drew an interesting comparison between our societies pursuit of knowledge through AI and God's warning to Adam and Eve about eating from the tree of knowledge.

What I found most insightful from WCIT was David Yang's talk on AI - the half-Chinese, half-Armenian entrepreneur who was not only articulate but spoke with charisma and enthusiasm. He gave a clear call to action for **how Armenia can get ahead in the wave of AI**, highlighting the importance of data in AI development and how Armenia can create the world's first "AI City".





# Technology Opportunities

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I have read several times online that there is a growing opportunity for people to move to Armenia and for those already in Armenia to start or grow their businesses.

My trip allowed me to talk to people building their visions in Armenia firsthand and **understand on a deeper level what advantages they have.**

As well as the obvious cost of living advantages to other parts of the world, the community culture of Armenia gives all entrepreneurs a major advantage.

People in Armenia are passionate about giving their country the advantages it needs in the modern tech world, and as a result, **there is a huge culture of helping each other in**

**their journey.** Armenia also offers teenagers with free education from the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies. It was clear from interacting with founders of all ages on my trip what impact the high-quality grass-roots level of education has on professionals.

As great as it is for people to feel a desire to help Armenia, it was great to see so many Armenian companies already **providing such great value to the global economy.**

Examples include companies like The Crowd Funding Formula (TCF) and Prelaunch, whom I met in January of this year at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in

Las Vegas. Before my trip, I contacted them, and they kindly **invited me to their office for coffee and to tell me more** about the work they were doing.

I have already heard from other companies in the UK who work with them how great they are as professionals, but hearing more about the scale of their client base was a brilliant experience. TCF and Prelaunch collaborate regularly and work to validate products, providing founders with valuable metrics and insights before product launches. Their high-profile customers include Keychron, who recently launched a successful mechanical keyboard product.



## Will I Come Back?

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My trip may have been my second and first in over a decade, but **it will certainly not be my last**. There has never been a country that has made me feel quite as at home as Armenia, which a lot of people may think is purely down to my heritage; however, **non-Armenians living in Armenia will convince them otherwise**.

It is clear there is a culture of collaboration and goodwill, driven by **a shared sense of purpose and authentic love for one another**. That culture is shared amongst all aspects of life, not just professionally but personally too.

I recommend that anyone even slightly curious about Armenia, whether or not they are originally Armenian, strongly consider going - **the only downside is leaving!**

If you have any questions about my trip, feel free to reach out at [LinkedIn](#). The QR code below will take you to my newsletter, "Build and Beyond," where I discuss my technology startup philosophy.



The link can also be found at [gregtidanian.substack.com](mailto:gregtidanian@substack.com)




# TECH EVENTS



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|                  |  |   |   |
|------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>NOV 1</b>     | AI bootcamp for businesses by Hyperion   |       |    |
| <b>NOV 1</b>     | "Smart robots" Armrobotics competition by UATE   |       |    |
| <b>NOV 2</b>     | BioML Hackathon by AUA   |       |    |
| <b>NOV 3</b>     | Project management award and conference by PMI Armeni  |     |   |
| <b>NOV 5</b>     | Cybersecurity and secure digital future by ArmIGF  |   |  |
| <b>NOV 7</b>     | Groktalk AI: RAG systems by Gröksmith.   |   |  |
| <b>NOV 8</b>     | TON Hackathon  |   |  |
| <b>NOV 14</b>    | Microelectronics International forum by UEICT  |   |  |
| <b>NOV 15</b>    | Silicon Mountains by UEICT   |   |  |
| <b>NOV 15-16</b> | Leading agile business by Change consulting  |   |  |
| <b>NOV 18-19</b> | Business Promotion Innovation Day in Tsaghkadzor with The Switzerland-Armenia Chamber of Commerce by ICC Armenia |   |  |
| <b>NOV 27</b>    | Startup Huddle by EPIC (will be published soon)  |   |  |

WHY ARMENIAN IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

# HOW DIGITAL NOMADS CAN QUICKLY PICK UP THE LOCAL LANGUAGE



**MARIANA  
PAPAZIAN**

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS  
MANAGER AT THE ARMENIAN INSTITUTE





## WHY ARMENIAN IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK HOW DIGITAL NOMADS CAN QUICKLY PICK UP THE LOCAL LANGUAGE

Moving to a new country is tough, especially when the language is different and the alphabet looks like a puzzle. However, learning the language **brings you closer to its people and culture**, helping you understand what matters most in their society.

Through language, you start to pick up on the values, traditions, and humor that shape everyday life in Armenia. From understanding the warmth behind common greetings to appreciating the rich cultural expressions in Armenian proverbs and sayings, you'll **begin to see the world from a local perspective**. Additionally, communicating in Armenian makes everyday tasks like shopping, dining out, and using public transportation more efficient and enjoyable. If you plan to work with local businesses or freelancers, knowing Armenian can give you a competitive edge and open doors to new collaborations.



Իմացրո՞ւ որո՞նք խմանալ գրքու խորոյն  
ճանաչել գիմարտութիւն էլ գիմարտ  
Իմացրո՞ւ որո՞նք խմանալ գրքու խորոյն



# What's Interesting in Armenian?

Here are some interesting facts about Armenian that might motivate you to consider starting to learn the language:

Armenian has its unique alphabet, which **Mesrop Mashtots invented in the 5th century AD**. It's one of the world's oldest alphabets still in use.

Armenian is phonetic, meaning **each letter represents a sound**, so you're not dealing with silent letters or confusing rules.

Armenian is often described as a musical language with a unique rhythm and intonation.

Armenian uses its own unique alphabet, but **it has 36 letters, compared to 26 in English**.

Armenian has the **same subject-verb-object word order as English**. Its verb conjugation is also less complex than in some other languages.

There are **different dialects of Armenian**, with Eastern and Western Armenian being the two main branches.

**Armenian is a gender-neutral language**, so you won't need to worry about gendered words—though it can be a surprise when you hear about someone's "friend" and have no clue about their gender until you actually meet them!

Even just learning the basics can make a big difference. **Simple conversations with locals will get you plenty of smiles and encouragement**, and you'll feel a little more at home. Trust me, taxi drivers love it when you speak Armenian, and you'll thank yourself for learning how to ask them to drive slower! And if you're ever stuck in Yerevan traffic at rush hour, decoding billboard letters is always a good game.





# The Armenian Institute

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The Armenian Institute's online classes can help make the experience of learning Armenian enjoyable and meaningful. With a team of international teachers passionate about Armenian, we **understand the struggles and joys of learning this language.**



## Ellie M

A German who lived in Armenia and has now moved to Albania with her Armenian husband

Gagik's gentle humor and positivity create a welcoming environment. He's always willing to explain word origins, reinforce vocabulary, and provide insights into Armenian culture, history, and everyday life."



## Rod G

A British- Armenian who volunteered in Armenia

Lessons are well-structured, usually focusing on specific topics. The main emphasis is on speaking and listening, but reading and writing are also essential to engage in the course fully. Gagik, our instructor, offers opportunities for practice during class and assigns homework for those who have time."

We have so many success stories—from non-Armenians who fell in love with the country to those who became researchers or wanted to connect more deeply with Armenian partners. Our online classes are built to meet you where you are. Meeting others on the same journey can help keep you motivated, and you can share tips and tricks along the way.



# “Magazine Feedback”



**H.C.**

I was catching up on the last two issues of Life in Armenia and wanted to say they were so good ❤️ The impactful stories about social enterprises, mental health initiatives, accessible travel apps, and sustainable travel, and personal experiences of people who moved to live in Armenia and simply stories about interesting people/businesses.

Thoroughly enjoyed reading it. My son woke up and thought I was not at home because I was sitting quietly for more than two hours and reading 😊 Monopoly ordered, a donation to City of Smile made and received lots of positive energy.



OVERCOMING URBAN CHALLENGES IN YEREVAN - PART 1

# THE QUEST FOR BIODIVERSITY IN YEREVAN'S PUBLIC PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

in



**VAHRAM  
ELAGOZ**

ADJUNCT LECTURER





## OVERCOMING URBAN CHALLENGES IN YEREVAN - PART 1

### THE QUEST FOR BIODIVERSITY IN YEREVAN'S PUBLIC PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

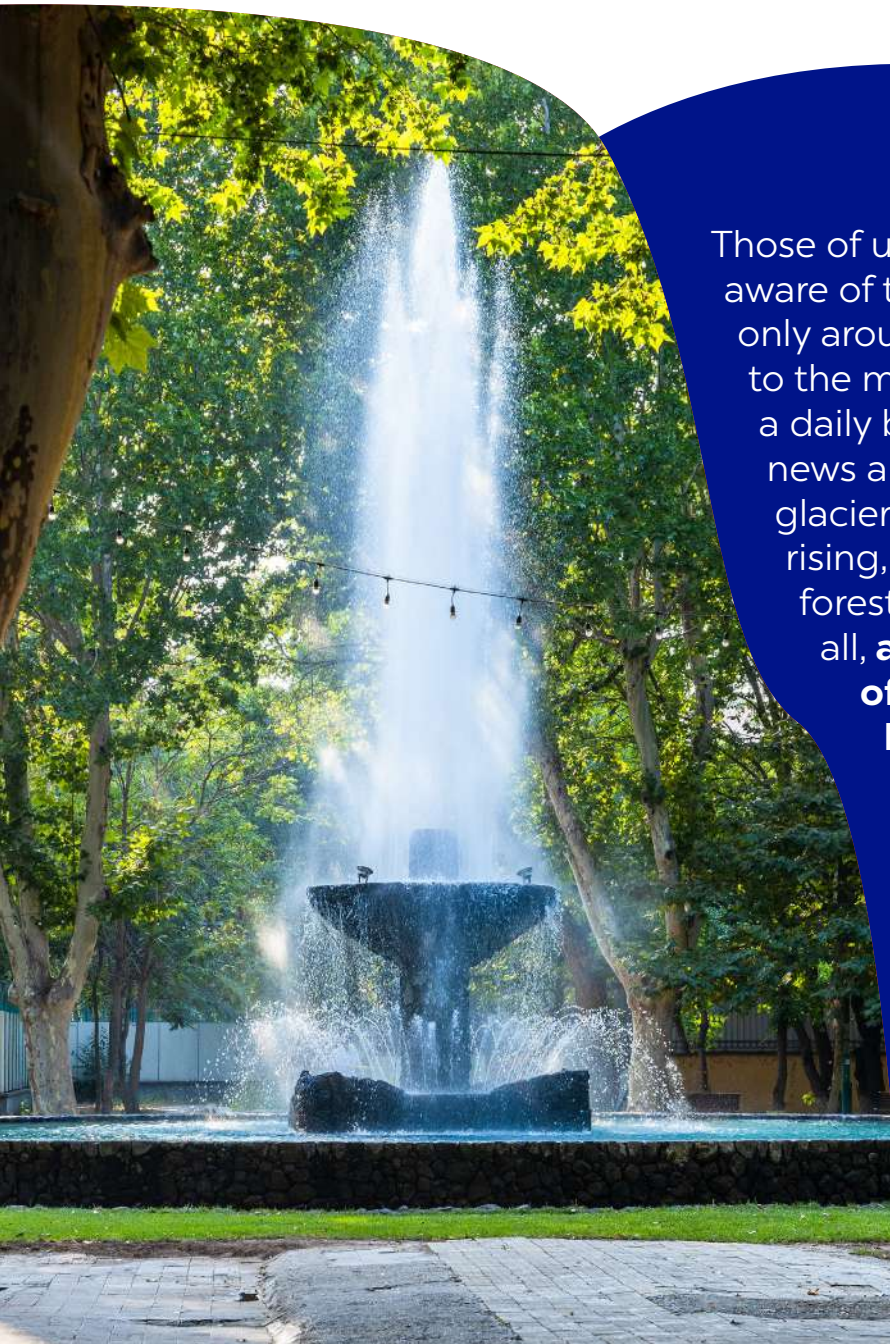
Biodiversity in urban green spaces is a topic very close to my heart, and I have wanted to write about it for a while. The question was to find an engaging way to present the subject to readers, making sure they wouldn't flip the page after the first paragraph. It then dawned upon me that using some of [my favorite public parks of Yerevan as examples to work on](#) –including my own recollections and impressions of the time I spent in Yerevan- I might keep the interest of Life in Armenia readers alive to the bitter end. And here we go!

Public parks and green spaces are part of any sizable urban setting, offering respite to its residents. They add color to a weekend outing or offer a quiet corner to wind down and relax during a break or at the end of a long workday. One may seek the shade of a tree, the warming sensation of the sun, or available expanses for group activities. A forlorn bench, forgotten in a secluded corner with an open invitation to sit and forget everything: what a bliss! If fortunate enough, add to this the chirping of birds or the sound of a light breeze gently meandering through the leaves above, helping to tune out the persistent tumult of city streets. They are much-needed oases in urban settings, [where we come as close to nature as possible](#).





Public parks as open space areas were first made available for recreation in the 19th century due to industrialization. Cities growing at a faster pace than before necessitated the creation of parks and green spaces for the **well-being of people moving to cities from rural areas in search of work**. While early designers of public parks found inspiration in palace gardens with formal settings of bygone eras, often incorporating ornate features and displays of exotic flora, requiring maintenance in environments alien to them, today's expectations from urban green spaces are somewhat different than in the past similar to museums, libraries or even zoos. While still incorporating some of the formal structures, they have to be easily accessible, offer certain amenities, and, more importantly, be multifunctional, satisfying the needs of a diverse public with differing interests.



Those of us with a keen eye are now fairly aware of the state of the natural world not only around us but in the wider world thanks to the mass media and the internet. On a daily basis, we are bombarded with news about yet another natural disaster: glaciers disappearing, temperatures rising, extended spells of droughts, forests burning, and perhaps worst of all, **a long list of species at the brink of extinction**, in other words, **loss of biodiversity**. Slowly, we realize the dangers biodiversity loss poses and also begin to feel a certain degree of responsibility, perhaps some collective guilt, too? But how do we counter these losses? More importantly, **what is the relevance of biodiversity for those of us living in cities?** Does or should it have any bearing on how we lead our lives?

# Public Parks in Yerevan

Yerevan is blessed with several public parks and gardens, thanks to the genius of a great visionary, Alexander Tamanyan (1878-1936), the neoclassical architect and great urban planner who incorporated several parks and green spaces into his master plan for Yerevan (Երեւանի հատակագիծը) – dating back to 1920s- for the benefit of all Yerevantsis. A series of parks and shaded avenues and boulevards not only provide space for enjoyment and relaxation but also, thanks to his unique design and correct placement of those open spaces, [allow the flow of cooling winds from the surrounding hills into the city](#) during hot summer months.

Without a doubt, and as a manifestation of the time's ideological understanding, Tamanyan designed these parks to benefit all citizens. Privatizing all or parts of them was not what he envisioned; it simply would not have occurred to him! I will refer to some of the negative aspects of privatization later in my series of articles.

Between the time of my arrival in Yerevan in August 2019 and my departure in July 2021, whenever I had some spare time, I would be out and about, exploring the city streets, some of which were prominent, others less so. Narrow alleyways, courtyards hidden behind grand façades, and [backstreets were of greater interest to me than large boulevards or avenues.](#)

A view shared by many today is that even the tiniest changes we make to the way we behave will have a positive impact on biodiversity. But in order to realize its value, we should be able to define biodiversity. It is, in short, **the variety of all living things and the way they interact with each other** – however insignificant in appearance at first glance. The fact of the matter is the richer the variety of living things within a green space –be it a small backyard or a large public park- the higher the resilience, that is, the capacity of a system to withstand the negative impacts caused by various factors, sadly more often than not by the irresponsible actions of its beneficiaries, namely us humans. But I will keep elaborating on the ‘sadly’ part later on.



Mother and child behind the main entrance of the abandoned maternity ward



During these walks, I would regularly visit parts of the Circular Park, the English Garden, the Children's Park, and the Missak Manouchian Park, all more or less within walking distance from where I lived. [They were unique in many ways](#), and despite some visible neglect, they have great potential to meet the demands and needs of today's urban dwellers.

Some of these parks even offered a variety of interesting, sometimes unique, or even quirky, features. As time passed and I continued with my excursions, [I began to witness small but visible signs of improvements](#), thanks to the tireless efforts of a few visionary individuals within the municipal administration in charge of parks and green spaces despite immense financial strains. However, they were, at least while I still called Yerevan home, not enough to make a dent in the dereliction I observed with frustration. Allow me to share with you some of my observations and thoughts as I strolled through them.

## The Missak Manouchian Park

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While strictly speaking, it is not a park but rather a square, and certainly not on top of any list of biodiversity hotspots in town, [The Missak Manouchian Park is nevertheless my favorite](#) for an altogether different reason: in a manner of speaking, I was drawn here, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, to meditate. At the heart of the city, surrounded by Aram, Pavstos Buzand, Yeznik Koghbatsi Streets and Mesrop Mashtots Avenue, it houses some well-established shade trees, mainly field elm or small-leaved elm (*Ulmus minor*), interspersed with a couple of black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), English oak (*Quercus robur*), and recent plantings of conifers.



For reasons unknown to me, the park is also [home to some fruit trees, most notably apricots and apples](#), right across from the Italian-Armenian Cultural Center. I would usually arrive here just in time for my morning treats, consisting of a cup of black Armenian coffee and a prepacked raisin bun called pulki, that I used to purchase from a small corner shop located next to the long-abandoned old maternity hospital for a mere 150 AMD! I readily admit I am [a person who enjoys simple things](#).

I would then pick the most shaded bench facing the old maternity hospital and enjoy my treats, invariably sharing my raisin bun with one persistent crow that would immediately perch on the trash bin next to the bench, knowingly staring at my face, or some of the mostly senior dogs who made the park their home. I really didn't care about the competition as I enjoyed their company. Invariably present were also some elderly men who had taken the responsibility of maintaining the park upon themselves, [always with a smile on their faces, ready to crack a joke](#). I want to believe they were retired residents from nearby apartment buildings. I appreciated their determination to keep this busy square clean and presentable.

As I sipped my coffee, I admired the ornate façade of the abandoned old maternity ward that stood proudly in front of me, quietly telling me the stories from a glorious past. I called this place my outdoor altar: **The perfect place for meditation during the crisp early morning hours**. I would often pretend to be a city planner with great powers at my disposal, converting this building NOT into yet another money-making 'exclusive' residence complex with the faux air of an old building. Instead, with the help of a magic wand and my imaginary authority, I would restore the building to its former glory, turning it into much-needed flats with affordable rents for people of all ages: retirees, students, and young couples. My reveries were never long-lasting, though. The impatient cawing of crows around me would invariably wake me up, and after saying my goodbyes to the elderly volunteers, I would head back home.



Coffee and pulki



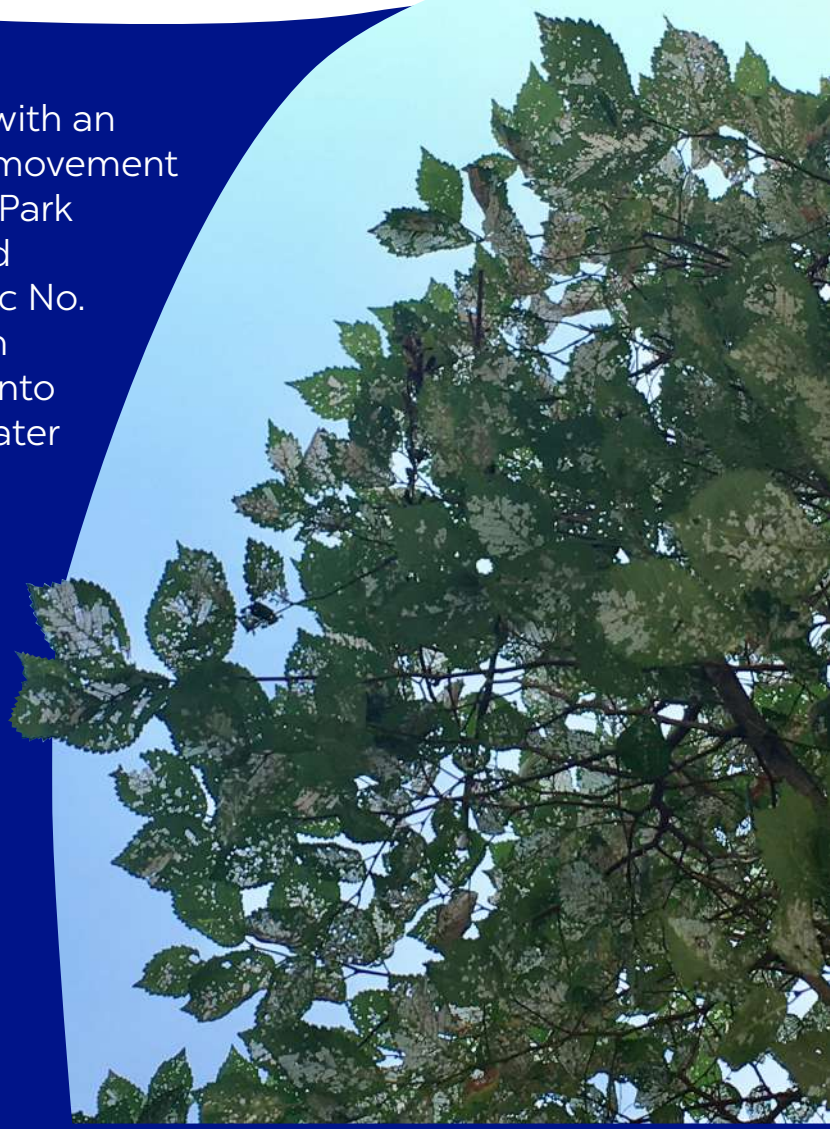


The entrance to the old maternity ward

As I wrote earlier, this park is not a hotbed of biodiversity. It was, however, an excellent place for any aspiring entomologist to observe and assess the incredible damage caused by the elm-leaf beetle (*Xanthogaleruca luteola*), turning each leaf into much sought-after Belgian lace. While the trees somehow managed to push new leaves fairly late in the season in order to compensate for the losses

they suffered, it was nearly not enough to accumulate enough nutrients for vigorous growth the following season and withstand repeated assaults. This pest sadly affects all elm trees throughout the city. In the concluding remarks at the end of Part 3 of my essay I will try to address some of the causes of this and other difficulties the trees of Yerevan are exposed to.

I would like to end this part of my essay with an upbeat note: actually, a success story. A movement that came to be known as the Mashtots Park Movement, initiated by civic activists and several doctors from the nearby Polyclinic No. 2 and Yerevan State Medical University in 2012, saved the park from being turned into a 'trade zone' with kiosks. The park was later named after Missak Manouchian (1906-1944), a French Resistance hero who, along with his wife Mélinée (1913-1989) were entombed in the Panthéon in February of this year. The interested reader will, in Part 2 of my essay, learn about the positive impacts of intentional or, as was the case in the Circular Park in Yerevan, unintentional, albeit temporary, 'neglect' on biodiversity in urban green spaces and be as surprised as I was upon witnessing the miraculous changes I observed.





ARMENIAN UNICORN IN THE MAKING

# VIRALMANGO



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



**REM  
DARBINYAN**

CO-FOUNDER  
OF VIRALMANGO

INTERVIEWING





## ARMENIAN UNICORN IN THE MAKING VIRALMANGO

Last month, I visited [virmango](#)'s office in Yerevan to meet one of the co-founders, [Rem Darbinyan](#), and learn more about his startup and **what brought him from the US back to Armenia** a few years ago despite his successful business in the US and established lifestyle.

It was a joy touring the company because Rem created a truly employee-centric office space in Armenia. The company offers different “perks” to **enhance staff well-being and productivity**. There was a massage room with a dedicated specialist providing massages around the clock. A shower room allowed employees to freshen up, while a few sleeping spaces were available for often-needed naps. The entertainment room offered different activities, from small casino games like roulette to table tennis and video games. Most importantly, **the Armenian specialty, a spacious kitchen!**

As he walked me around the offices, I couldn't help but notice a photo of a young lady in different rooms—on the fridge in the kitchen, on the marker board in the meeting room, and elsewhere. I assumed it was a staff member, perhaps the employee of the month. Curious, I asked Rem about it and learned **an interesting story behind that photo**.

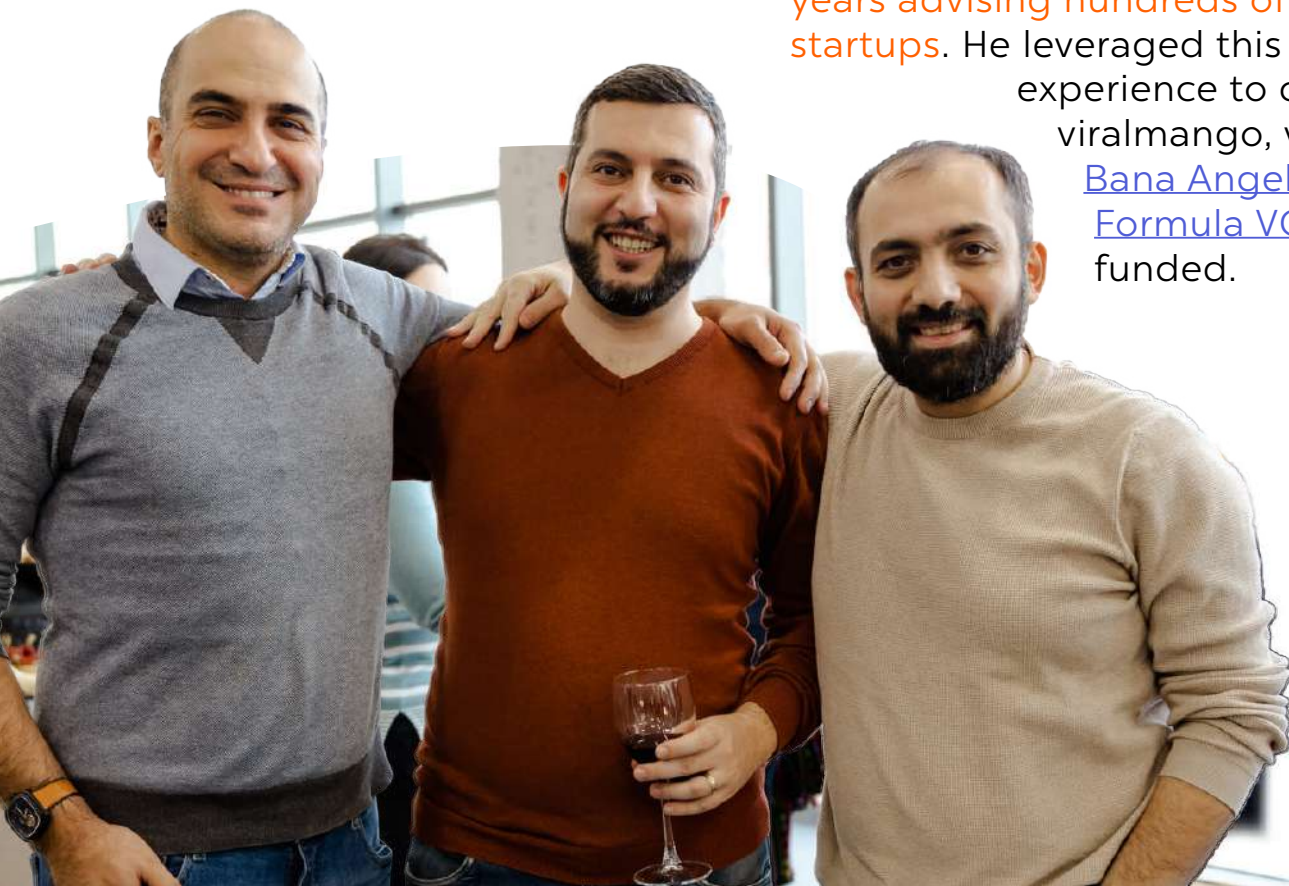


He told me that viralmango created an AI-generated persona of a young female influencer who aims to leverage her social media network for influence and profit. This persona was **designed to resonate with their target audience** and develop a comprehensive life story. They wanted to foster the illusion that this persona was integral to the team, interacting with them daily.

At this point, **I wanted to learn more about viralmango** and what their platform does. Rem explained that influencers typically avoid social media platforms like LinkedIn because it doesn't align with their needs. However, **they still require a platform to network**, connect with peers, and attract potential clients. He recognized this gap and created viralmango, **a social network tailored for influencers**.

This platform allows them to showcase their brand collaborations, highlight their achievements, and display relevant metrics to impress potential clients. Currently, **viralmango has over 45,000 active influencers** who collectively reach over 4 billion users across various social media platforms.

As an angel investor, a jury member in many startup competitions, and a venture capitalist, Rem has **spent years advising hundreds of Armenian startups**. He leveraged this extensive experience to co-found viralmango, which [Bana Angels](#) and [Formula VC](#) funded.







## Grigor Hovhannisyan

Co-Founder of Formula VC

Rem's extensive background and expertise were pivotal in our decision-making process. His ability to assemble a highly capable team has put us on a promising path to capitalize on influencer marketing."

Rem also explained that viralmango utilizes an AI tool they developed in-house via his other company, [SmartClick](#), to analyze videos and photos, generating over 30 metrics to **validate and evaluate an influencer's impact on their audience**. By the time we met, his company, SmartClick, had already analyzed the data of **over 350 million influencers worldwide**. This tool helps combat fraud and enables businesses to identify authentic influencers who align with their brand. Currently, viralmango's analytics tool **covers Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube**, aggregating data from across these platforms.

On a personal level, I asked Rem why he decided to move back to Yerevan. His answer wasn't surprising as he mentioned the **safety aspect of Yerevan for children to grow up confidently** on their own without having to worry about every step they take. For this reason, after living in the US for the past 15 years, he moved back to Armenia, where he now enjoys **a professional and purposeful lifestyle**.



## Sona Veziryan

Director of BANA Angels and  
Partner at Formula VC

The influencer marketing field is experiencing rapid growth, and based on projections, it will surpass other types of marketing processes. Following this trend, viralmango is in a very interesting position to take advantage of this industry. The strong background and experience of the team was a critical factor in the decision-making process."



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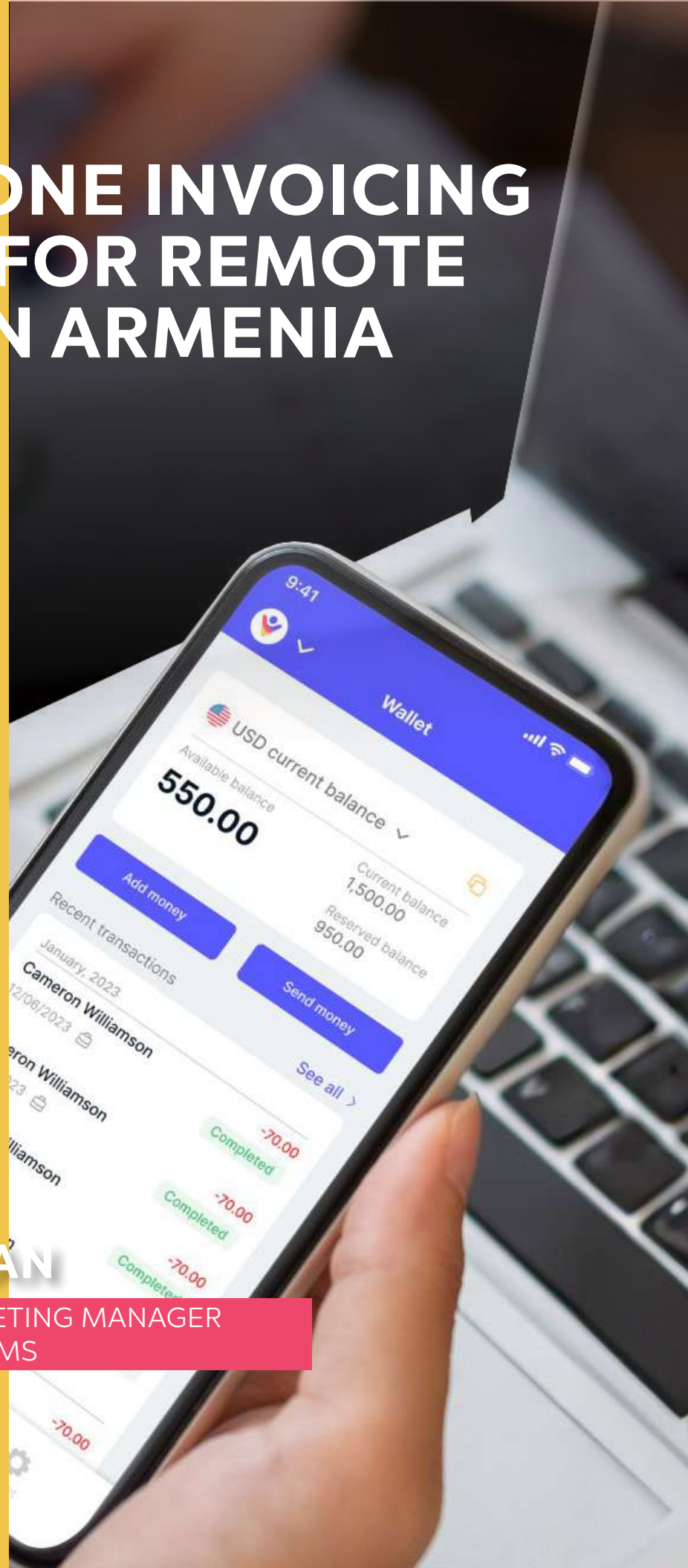
FROM INVOICE TO PAYMENT

# AN ALL-IN-ONE INVOICING PLATFORM FOR REMOTE WORKERS IN ARMENIA



**ANI  
SAFARYAN**

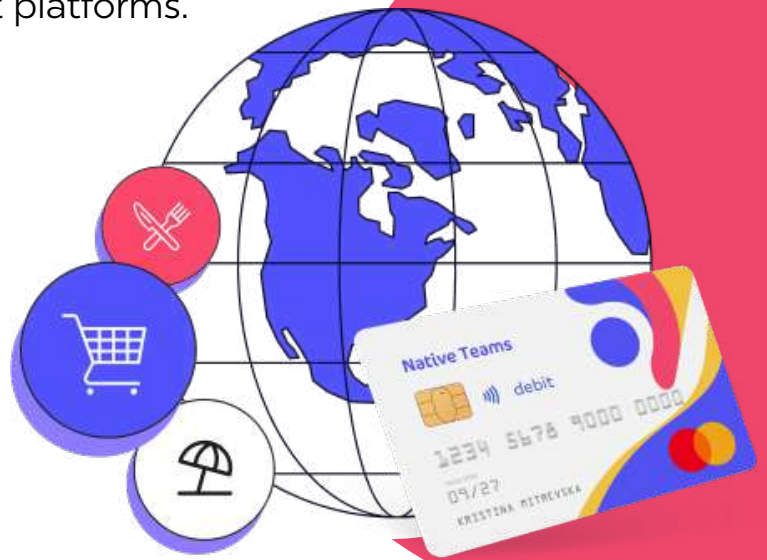
DIGITAL MARKETING MANAGER  
AT NATIVE TEAMS



## FROM INVOICE TO PAYMENT AN ALL-IN-ONE INVOICING PLATFORM FOR REMOTE WORKERS IN ARMENIA

While Armenia is becoming a growing hub for freelancers and remote workers, invoicing and global payments remain challenging. One of the main obstacles is the lack of widespread adoption of international invoicing and payment platforms.

Many freelancers and remote workers in Armenia still **rely on traditional banking methods**, which can be time-consuming, costly, and prone to currency exchange fees. This makes it difficult to efficiently manage cross-border transactions and receive payments from clients in different countries. Additionally, the **limited availability of international payment gateways**, such as PayPal, poses another challenge.







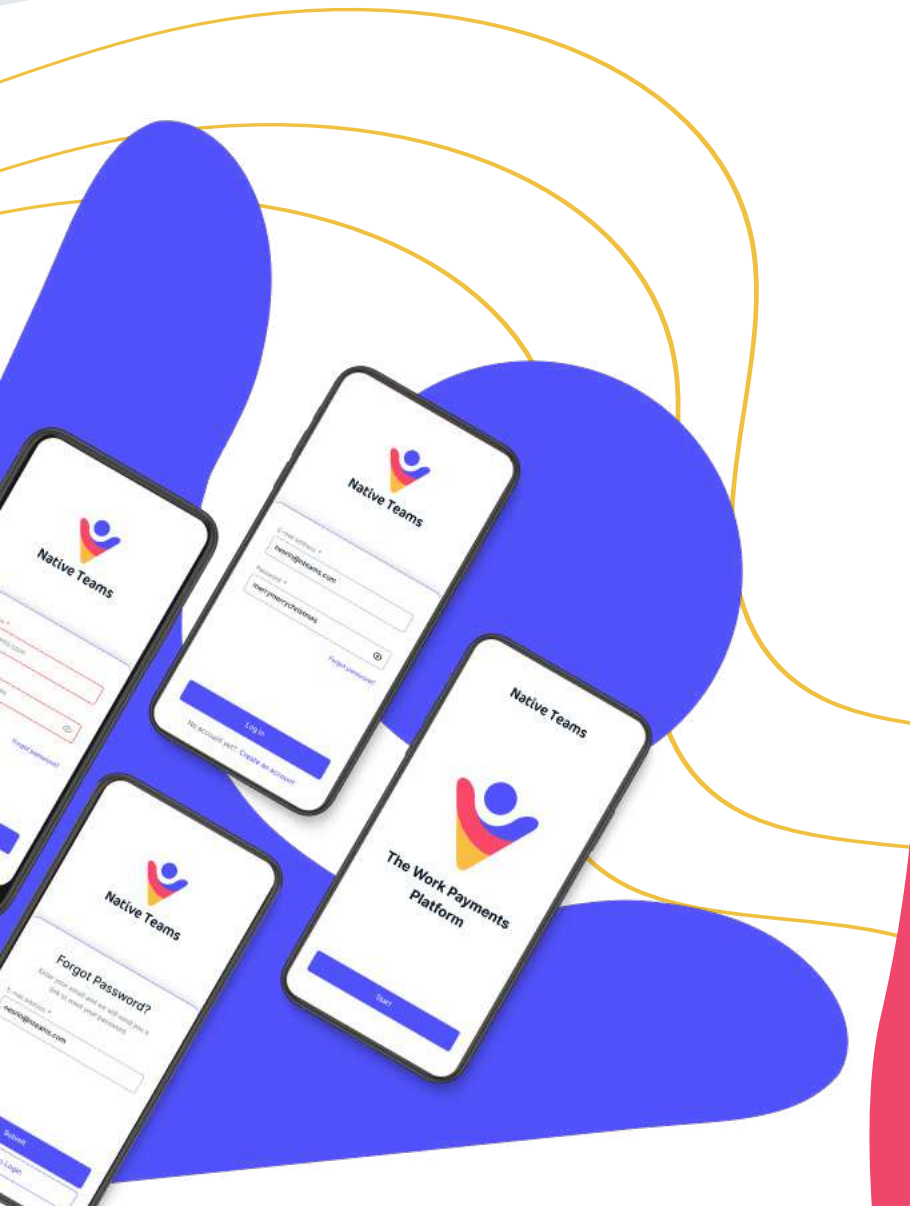
This highlights the need for a more streamlined solution to ease financial stress and simplify the payment process for Armenian freelancers.

[Native Teams](#) is a platform that simplifies international payments for freelancers.

It **enables freelancers to easily create and send professional invoices** to clients, securely process international payments, track and manage work-related expenses, and gain valuable financial insights through tools that monitor income and expenses. One important advantage for Native Teams is **having an office in Yerevan with a diverse team** covering various departments.

## Introducing Native Teams

Native Teams, the leading global payments platform, provides Armenian freelancers an all-in-one solution for invoicing and collecting payments. The platform allows freelancers to **invoice clients without setting up a company** or worrying about compliance with local labor and tax laws. In addition, the payment platform supports multiple currencies, making the entire process, from invoice creation to payment collection, convenient, simple, and free from hidden fees.



# Invoicing with Native Teams

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With the Native Teams platform, Armenian freelancers can invoice their global clients with a few simple clicks:

**Step 1:** To get started, users must create an account by providing basic information such as their name, email address, and payment details.

**Step 2:** After registering with the platform, you can access the invoicing system directly from your Native Teams wallet. The invoice creation process is simple - fill in client details, add the list of provided services, set the amount, and assign a due date to the payment.

**Step 3:** Once the invoice is ready, you can send it to your clients with just a click. The invoice will be issued through Native Teams' legal entity in Armenia, making your clients legally obligated to submit the payment.

**Step 4:** After receiving your invoice, your clients can submit the payment in the currency of their choice using multiple payment methods, including credit cards and bank transfers.

**Step 5:** Once your invoice is paid, you will receive your payment directly into your Native Teams wallet. The wallet provides multiple fund management options, allowing you to keep your earnings in your wallet, convert them into another currency without the typical conversion fees, or instantly withdraw them to your Armenian bank account.

**Step 6:** Once you receive your payment, you can easily mark the invoice as paid, track unpaid invoices, and send payment reminders.

## Tax Compliance for Freelancers in Armenia

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Tax obligations can be a huge headache for freelancers, **especially when managed without expert assistance.** This no longer has to be the case, as Native Teams provides a simplified solution to stay compliant with Armenia's tax laws.

Native Teams' all-in-one system enables you to mark your work expenses and **generate detailed documentation for tax reporting**, ensuring compliance while minimizing the time and effort required for administrative tasks. And plus, every user can enjoy ongoing support from a local expert team, whether for invoicing, receiving payments, or tax reporting and compliance.





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# CREDITS AND SPECIAL THANKS



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Track



SPECIAL THANKS TO THE TOURISM  
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AND VIDEOS) TO USE IN THE MAGAZINE.

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# LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

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