

# LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

MARCH, 10<sup>TH</sup> 2026 | NO. 35 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

## FINDING THE HIDDEN ONE IN ARMENIAN MOUNTAINS

A WALK THROUGH CENTURIES-OLD VINES IN VAYOTS DZOR

## TURNING DILIJAN INTO A 365-DAY NOMAD CAPITAL

WHY DIGITAL NOMADS AND GLOBAL CHEFS ARE MOVING TO THE MOUNTAINS

## REIMAGINING HIGH SCHOOLS IN ARMENIA

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## TRADITIONAL ARMENIAN LIFESTYLE

WHEN "SUSTAINABILITY" WAS JUST CALLED "LIFE"



# MATHEW ZEIN

## EDITOR'S LETTER

Despite the current regional situation, Armenia remains a peaceful home where you can still feel a sense of simple joy on every street corner; however, I have kept this issue intentionally lighthearted, offering a gentle reminder of the experiences that define life here, rather than diving into the heavier topics of the day.

The world is moving fast, and Life in Armenia is keeping pace. We are currently preparing to expand our reach across all social media platforms, bringing you our stories through both video and a new podcast series. My goal is for remote workers everywhere to truly feel the essence of what I share in these pages.

Soon, our recorded interviews and visual content will serve as the perfect window into that reality. The reality of life in Armenia, for remote workers and digital nomad families.

*Mathew Zein*



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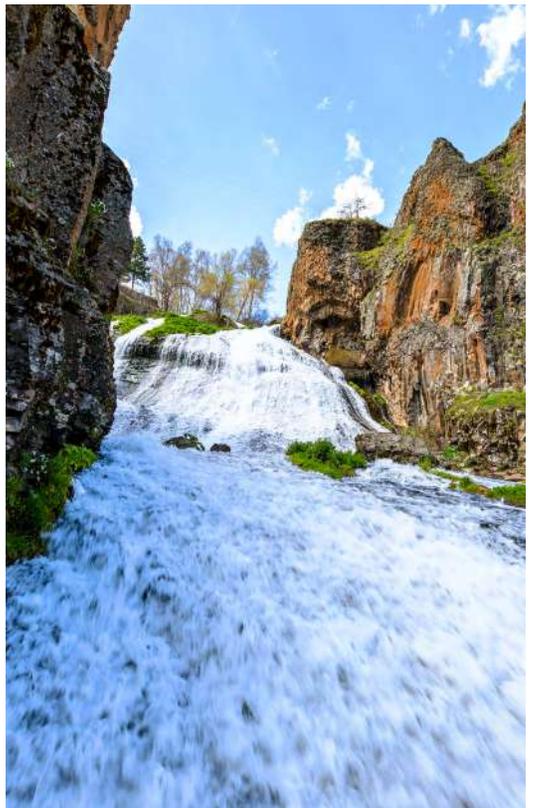
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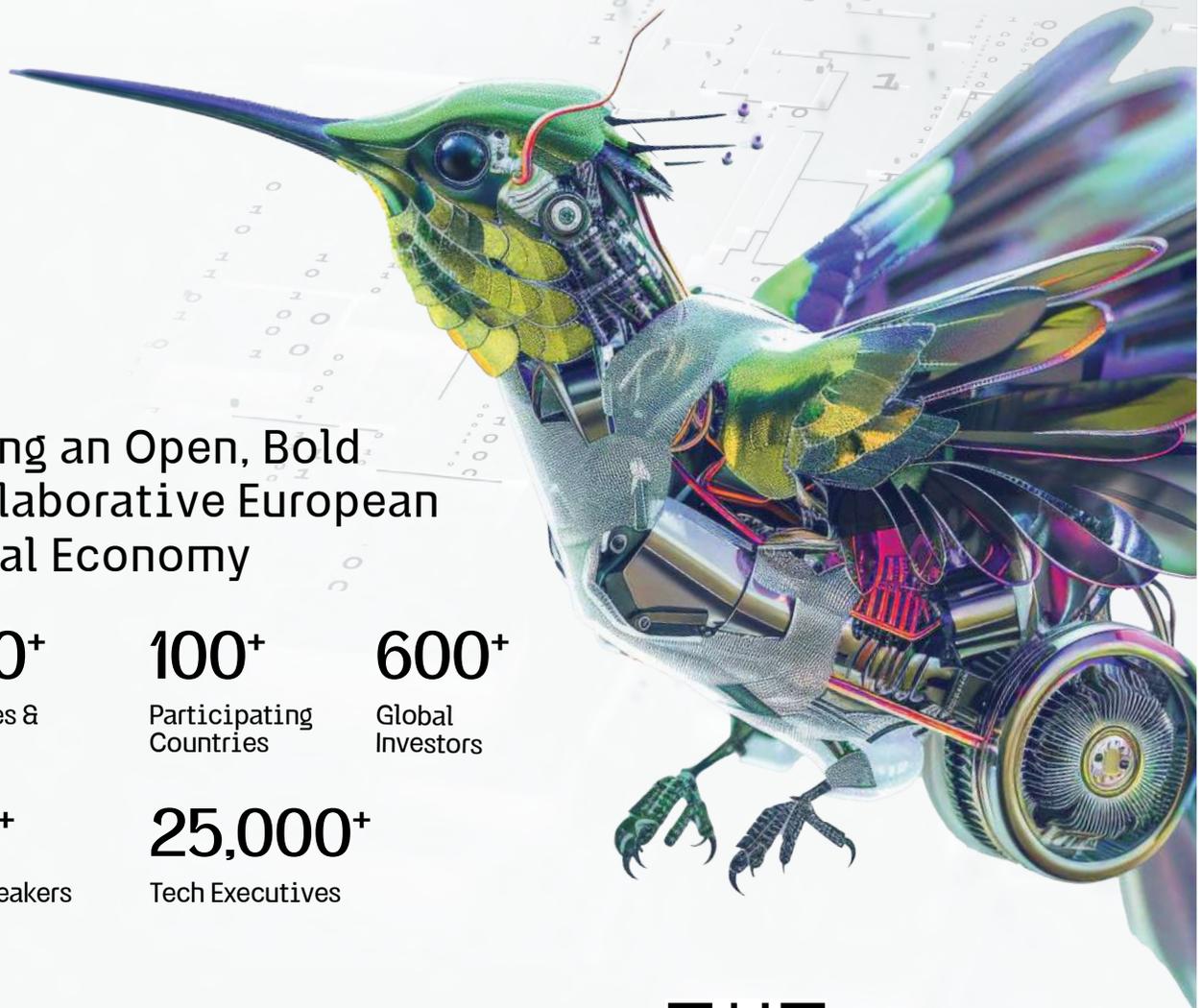
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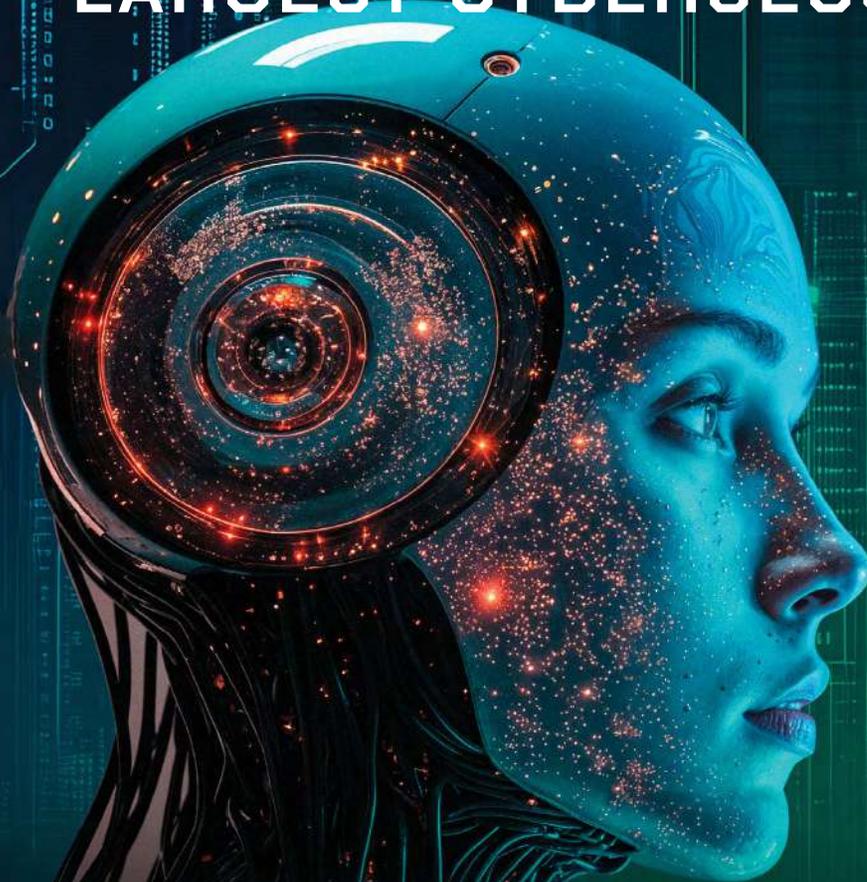


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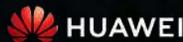
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FINDING THE HIDDEN ONE IN ARMENIAN MOUNTAINS

# A WALK THROUGH CENTURIES-OLD VINES IN VAYOTS DZOR

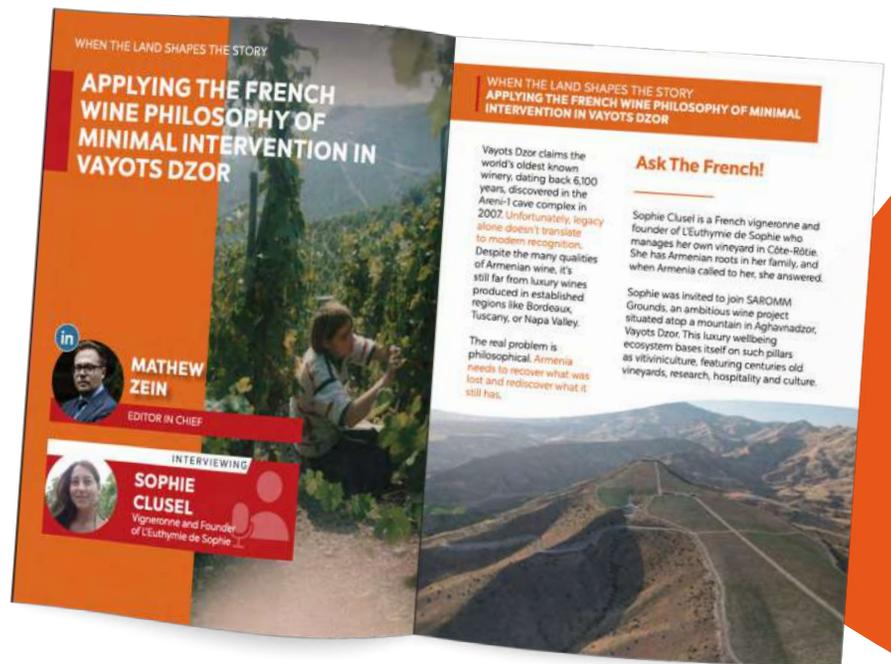


**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

## FINDING THE HIDDEN ONE IN ARMENIAN MOUNTAINS A WALK THROUGH CENTURIES-OLD VINES IN VAYOTS DZOR

In my previous article, I sat down with Sophie Clusel, a French vigneronne from Côte-Rôtie, and explored the philosophy behind what she calls the hidden “one” in winemaking; the idea that nature itself is the invisible ingredient that separates soulful wine from technical wine. That conversation was rich. But conversations only go so far. Last week, I got to walk the vineyard with her, to stand in a vineyard that’s been producing wine for longer than most civilizations have existed.



Joined by Anoush Iskandaryan, the CEO of SAROMM Grounds, the luxury wellbeing project that brought Sophie to Armenia, we climbed into the centuries-old vine plots above Aghavnadzor in Vayots Dzor. What I saw changed the way I think about land, care, and what it really means to build something of value.



# Meet the Grandmas

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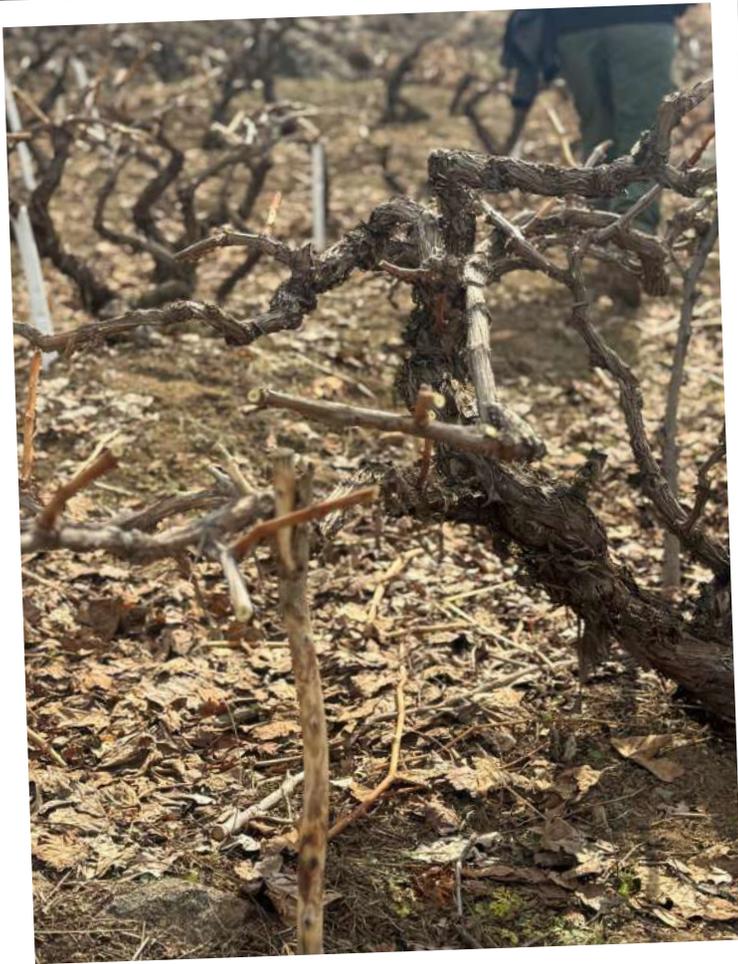
Sophie doesn't talk about old vines, let alone centuries-old vines, the way most people in the wine industry do. **She even calls them "the grandmas"**

She walked me to some of the oldest plants on the plot and sat on the ground beside them as if sitting with her own grandmother. The trunks were thick and gnarled, weathered by altitudes and seasons beyond count. But they were alive. Strong. Still producing fruit after centuries.

She showed me how productive these grandma vines still are, how much fruit they're capable of yielding. She told me how she could easily push them to produce far more. The vines have the strength for it. But that's not the point.

The recommendation, she explained, is to produce less. Lower yields. Higher concentration. More character in every grape. **This is how you make wine that's worth remembering, not wine that's simply worth selling.**





One of the first things Sophie did when she started working these plots was pull out the plastic stake holders supporting the grandma vines. She's replacing every single one with wood.

It seems like a small thing. It's not. She explained how plastic doesn't belong in a vineyard that's survived for centuries without it. It degrades. It leaches. It interrupts the relationship between the vine and its environment. Wooden stakes, on the other hand, are part of the same ecosystem. They hold the vine without alienating it from the soil it grows in.

This is what the hidden "one" looks like in practice. It's not a grand theory. It's a woman on her knees in the dirt, pulling out plastic and replacing it with something that belongs. Every choice either invites nature closer or pushes it further away. Sophie chooses to invite it in, and luckily, she was invited to Armenia but a project that believes in her vision.



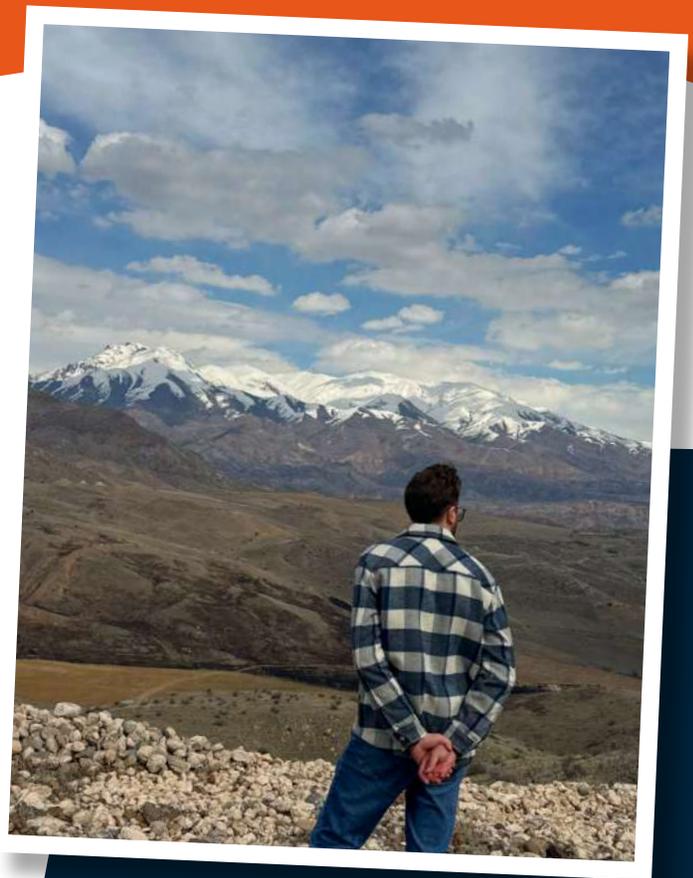
# The Fruit Trees Stay

As we walked further through the vineyard, I noticed fruit trees scattered among the vines; apricot, pomegranate, others I couldn't immediately identify. In conventional viticulture, these would typically be removed. They compete for water. They shade the canopy. They're "inefficient." However, **Sophie said she's keeping every one of them.**

She explained that these trees bring biodiversity to the vineyard. They attract insects, birds, and microorganisms that **create a richer, more balanced ecosystem around the vines.** And that ecosystem, in turn, influences the wine. The fruit trees contribute to the terroir, not directly, but through the life they bring. **New nature around the vines means new complexity, new layers, new flavors in the glass.**

The environment shapes the outcome. Remove the ecosystem, and you remove the very thing that makes the wine unique. She's preserving an entire ecosystem. The soil, the surrounding vegetation, the altitude, the wind patterns, the insects, the natural water flow; she treats all of it as one connected system. You don't optimize one part at the expense of the whole. **You protect the whole, and the wine takes care of itself.**

Anoush, who invited me in the first place and introduced me to Sophie, walked beside us through much of the tour, and I could see what SAROMM Grounds is building here. **It's a project that treats the mountain itself as the foundation;** wine, wellness, research, hospitality, all rooted in the same land. The philosophy Sophie brings from Côte-Rôtie fits naturally into that vision because both are built on the same idea: **Respect what Armenia has to offer.**



No matter your industry, be it wine or something else, always ask yourself: **in whatever you're building, are you letting the hidden "one" do its work? Or are you too busy optimizing to notice it's already there?**



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TURNING DILIJAN INTO A -365DAY NOMAD CAPITAL

# WHY DIGITAL NOMADS AND GLOBAL CHEFS ARE MOVING TO THE MOUNTAINS



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



## TURNING DILIJAN INTO A -365DAY NOMAD CAPITAL WHY DIGITAL NOMADS AND GLOBAL CHEFS ARE MOVING TO THE MOUNTAINS

I keep coming back to Dilijan. Not because anyone asks me to, but because something about this town won't let go. Every time I make the drive from Yerevan, ninety minutes through mountain passes until the forests swallow the road, I feel the same thing. This place has everything it needs to be special. The air alone is worth the trip. The cost of living is a fraction of what you'd pay anywhere in Europe. Armenia is one of the safest countries in the world. And Dilijan sits at the crossroads of it all.

Armenia already ranked 18th on the Global Digital Nomad Index in 2024. Many nationalities can stay up to 180 days visa-free. The remote work culture has been growing, especially in Yerevan. But Dilijan has always been the quieter promise, the place remote workers discover and fall in love with, only to realize there's no proper coworking space, no professional hub, nowhere designed specifically for the way they work. Although several cafes there are fine with people working on laptops, this has nothing to do with coworking! It's only good if you have an email to send or a call to take, and that's it.





Things are about to change very soon. Something has been in the works for a while, and it's almost ready. Last year, I was invited by the Green Rock Foundation and Green Rock to tour their \$160 million project sites, including Villa #3, which was still a construction site back then.

Villa #3 is a 4-story purpose-built community hub and coworking space, designed as part of Green Rock's larger multifunctional complex in Dilijan. It's set to open in 2026. It's a professional workspace that **blends Dilijan's character with the kind of contemporary functionality that remote workers actually need**, the kind of space that says, this town takes you seriously, stay a while.



Villa #3 is the bridge between what Yerevan and Dilijan has to offer remote workers, the thing that lets you choose the mountains without giving up the workspace. That's the piece I've been waiting for. That's the missing piece. Dilijan has nature, affordability, safety, and the location. **What it hasn't had is a signal to the global remote work community that this is a real destination**, not just a beautiful detour. Hopefully, Villa #3 will be the first signal.





Now, forget everything I said about tech nomads and let me tell you a little secret: Dilijan isn't just becoming attractive to the laptop crowd. It's also becoming a launchpad for something I've been watching closely: [the rise of nomad chefs](#). I interview chefs every day on my podcast in Miami, and it's clear the new generation of culinary professionals doesn't want the 80-hour weeks in someone else's kitchen, climbing a ladder in one city, hoping to open their own place someday. [They want to move. Cook in different countries. Run pop-ups. Build a career that travels with them.](#)

APICIUS Armenia right here in Dilijan gives them a starting point. Launched by the Green Rock Foundation as well, in partnership with APICIUS Florence, it's a full international

hospitality school offering the same Italian curriculum, the same instructors, and the same globally recognized certification at €4,000 per academic year.



Students can complete the program in Dilijan or do their second year in Florence. They graduate with credentials that work across Europe and the United States, and they do it from a place where the cost of living means they're not buried in debt before they've cooked their first professional meal. You can read more about this culinary school in the January 2026 issue of Life in Armenia.

I'm writing this piece because I'm happy to see The Green Rock Foundation thinking about this small city in a way I haven't seen anyone else think about it. They're building the conditions for two entirely different communities to call Dilijan home: digital nomads and nomad chefs. This is what it looks like when a town stops waiting for visitors and starts building for residents.

The mountains were always here. Now, so is everything else.





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REIMAGINING HIGH SCHOOLS IN ARMENIA

# INSIDE THE SPECIALIZED LEARNING MODEL OF ACT COLLEGE



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



**AMALYA  
YEGHOYAN**

Executive Director of GITC  
and CEO of ACT College

INTERVIEWING



## REIMAGINING HIGH SCHOOLS IN ARMENIA INSIDE THE SPECIALIZED LEARNING MODEL OF ACT COLLEGE

I've spent a lot of time in Armenia over the years, reporting on tech, tourism, education, and the quiet reinvention of a country that's often underestimated. Among the many initiatives I've covered, one of the most promising is [ACT College](#), the Armenian Creative Technologies College, which opened its doors in August 2025.

ACT is Armenia's first state-licensed vocational college focused on technology and the creative industries. It sits in Parakar, Armavir Province, about a twenty-minute drive from Yerevan. The college was born from a partnership between [GITC](#) (the Gyumri Information Technologies Center), the [Fund for Armenian Relief \(FAR\)](#), and the Armenian government. The campus itself was built thanks to philanthropists Nshan and Aida Karayans, and it bears their name. A few months ago, I was invited by ACT's CEO and GITC Executive Director, [Amalya Yeghoyan](#), to tour the campus, learn about the educational model.

To understand why ACT matters, you have to understand the change it brings. Armenia's traditional education path follows a typical structure: twelve years of compulsory schooling, then a choice between vocational programs and university. The vocational route, inherited from the Soviet era, has long been seen as the backup plan, the option for students who didn't quite make the cut.



ACT College offers three core departments, Computer Science, Digital Art, and Engineering & Manufacturing, and **provides an alternative path for students starting in the 10th grade.** Instead of the standard high school track, students at ACT pursue a three-year intensive curriculum that fulfills their national secondary education requirements while simultaneously earning professional certifications. **By the time they graduate at 18, they hold both a high school diploma and the practical, job-ready skills necessary to enter the workforce immediately.**



Photo taken from the music classroom at Act College



This doesn't come at the expense of a university education. ACT graduates remain fully eligible for higher education. What ACT gives them is a choice: enter the workforce early, work while they study, or pursue a degree knowing they already have a professional foundation.

**It's education designed backward from the job market.** As ACT's CEO Amalya Yeghoyan put it in a live interview at the New York Stock Exchange, Armenia already has a growing ecosystem of tech companies and startups, and the demand for skilled young professionals is high, not just for now, but for the long term. ACT is built to meet that demand, and in doing so, it's redefining what vocational education can mean in Armenia.

Photo taken from the art classroom at ACT College

ACT is building proof of concept for an entirely different way to think about post-secondary education in Armenia. If this model works, and the early signs suggest it will, **it can be studied, adapted, and replicated across the country, even in public schools.** The structure is modular enough to scale and specific enough to stay relevant.

It is also worth mentioning that ACT College is fully automated, including its reporting systems, students profiles and progress, parent communication, and physical infrastructure, such as doors and the cafeteria.

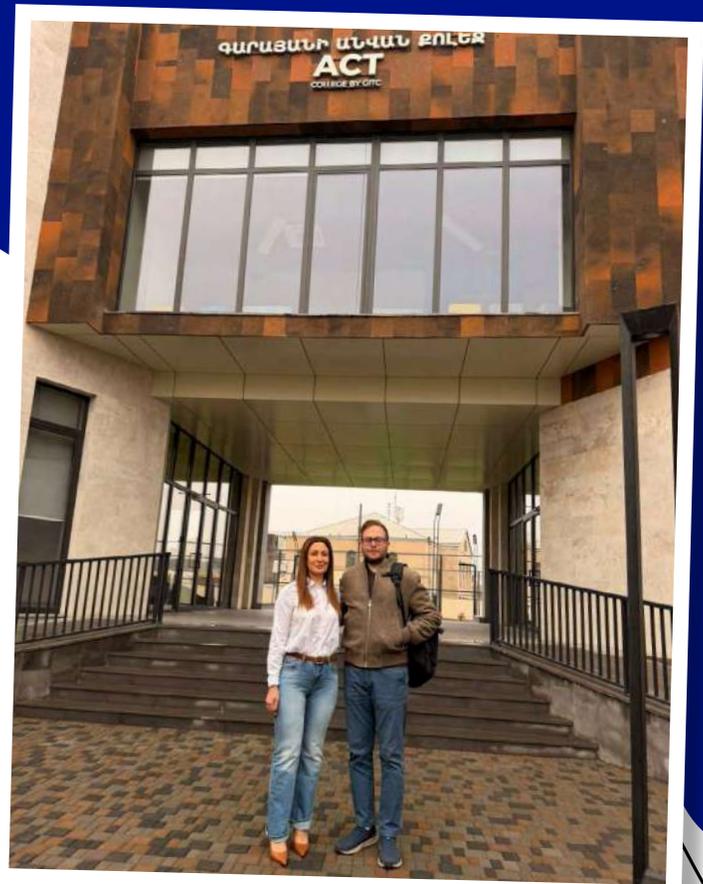


# No Shortcuts in Education

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While touring the campus, I had the chance to meet some of the teachers and have long discussions about their curriculum and teaching methods.

In the Computer Science department, students start with the basics of algorithms, with the architecture of how software actually works from the ground up. **They learn to build before they learn to prompt.** By the time they get to AI and machine learning, they understand what's happening under the hood.



Together with Amalya Yeghoyan,  
CEO at ACT College and GITC  
Executive Director



Photo taken from my  
interview with 10th grade  
students at ACT College

The Digital Art department follows the same logic. Students don't start with Midjourney or Photoshop. **They start with a canvas and actual colors.** They learn composition, light, form, the fundamentals that have defined visual art for centuries. Only after they've built that muscle do they move into digital tools. And when they eventually reach AI-assisted design, **they're learning to be artists who happen to use technology, not the other way around.**

Engineering & Manufacturing follows the same principle. The hands-on work comes first. The tools serve the understanding, not the reverse.



Photo taken from one of the computer labs at ACT College

## Apple Academy Comes to Parkar

For a school that just opened its doors to its first class, the list of international partnerships is almost improbable. **They bring curriculum, certification, access, and employability.** That's an actual pipeline to global careers.

I'll start with the most recent milestone, **bringing the Apple Developer Academy to Armenia.** Students who graduate from ACT with high honors have the opportunity to travel to the United States and study at an Apple Developer Academy. This gives high school students a powerful reason to excel and give their absolute best.

Another partnership is with Columbia University. ACT has formalized a collaboration that includes joint programs, exchange opportunities, and curriculum development. **Armenian students will have access to Columbia's SHAPE summer program,** semester-based visiting scholar opportunities, and support for competitive undergraduate admissions.

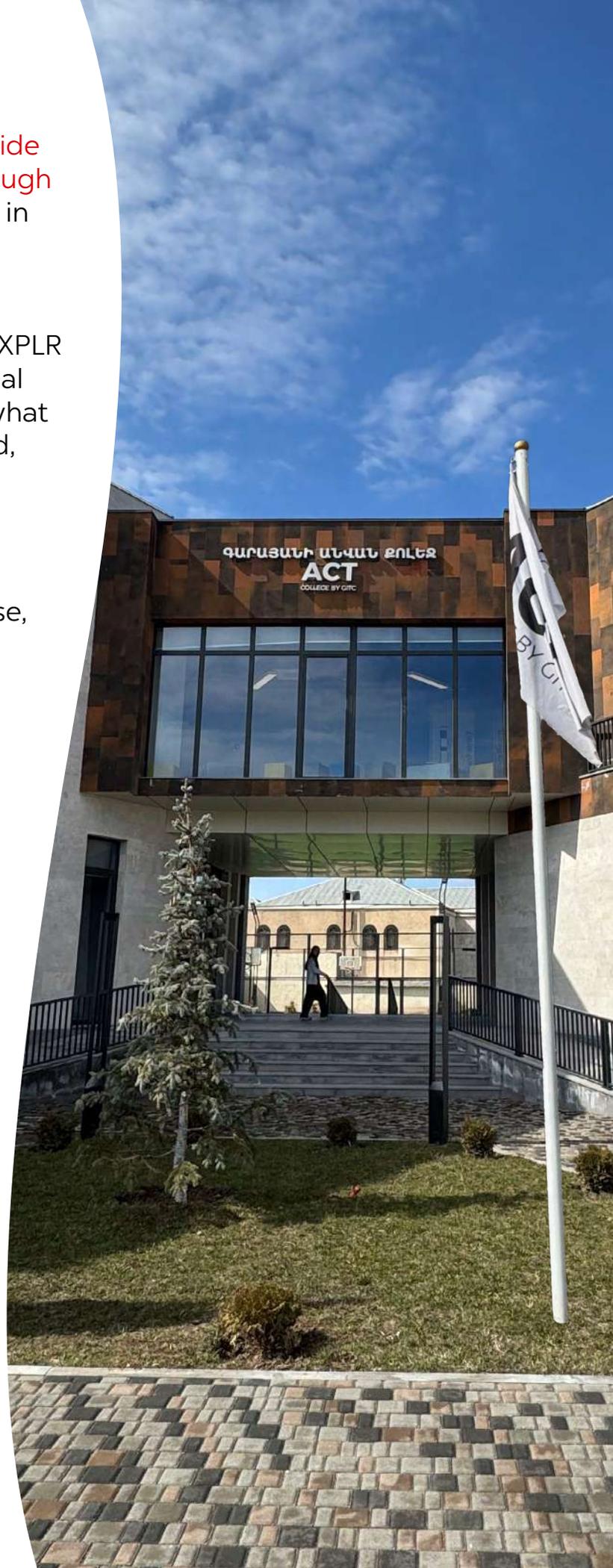
Then there's ServiceNow, the global technology company. At their Chicago office, ACT signed a partnership to **provide students with skilling opportunities through ServiceNow University**; getting certified in ServiceNow is a career accelerator.

In Washington, D.C., ACT signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EXPLR Media to bring a large-scale international STEM conference to Armenia in 2026, what would be Armenia's first event of its kind, hosted right at ACT College.

These are only a few examples, and the list goes on. At this point, you are likely wondering about the cost; to my surprise, **ACT College is more affordable than many other schools in Armenia**. In fact, it is accessible to the vast majority, and scholarships are available for those who need financial support. In my conversation with the CEO, Amalya, she insisted that the goal is not profit, but rather to **shift the perception of education and replicate this model across the country**.

I sat down with a group of ACT students and teachers to discuss the impact of this new educational model on their lives, both in and out of school. Look for the full story on how it affects their lives in our next Life in Armenia magazine issue.

I know ACT College won't change Armenian education overnight. **But it's a credible attempt I've seen to build something that could**. The model is real, the partnerships are real, and the first class is already in the building.



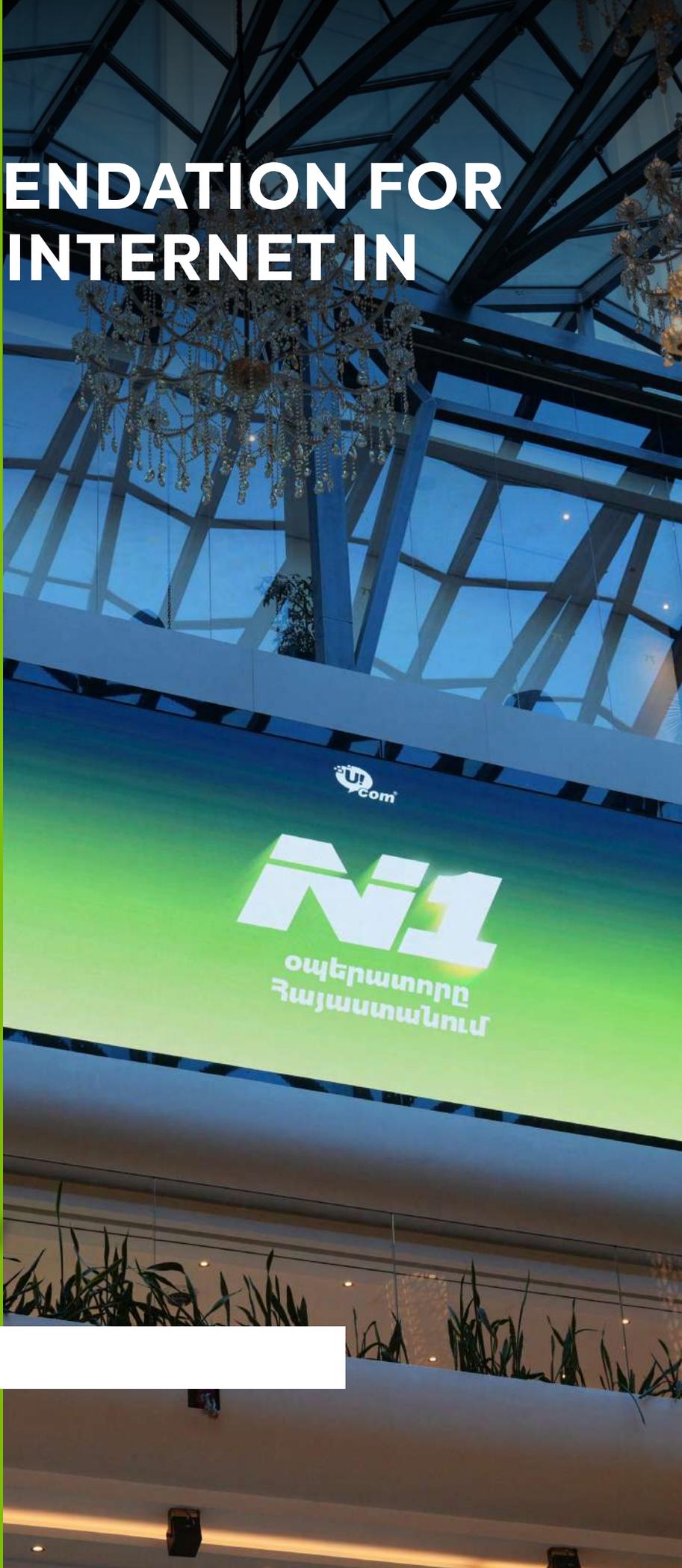
DATA DOESN'T LIE

# MY RECOMMENDATION FOR HIGH-SPEED INTERNET IN ARMENIA



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

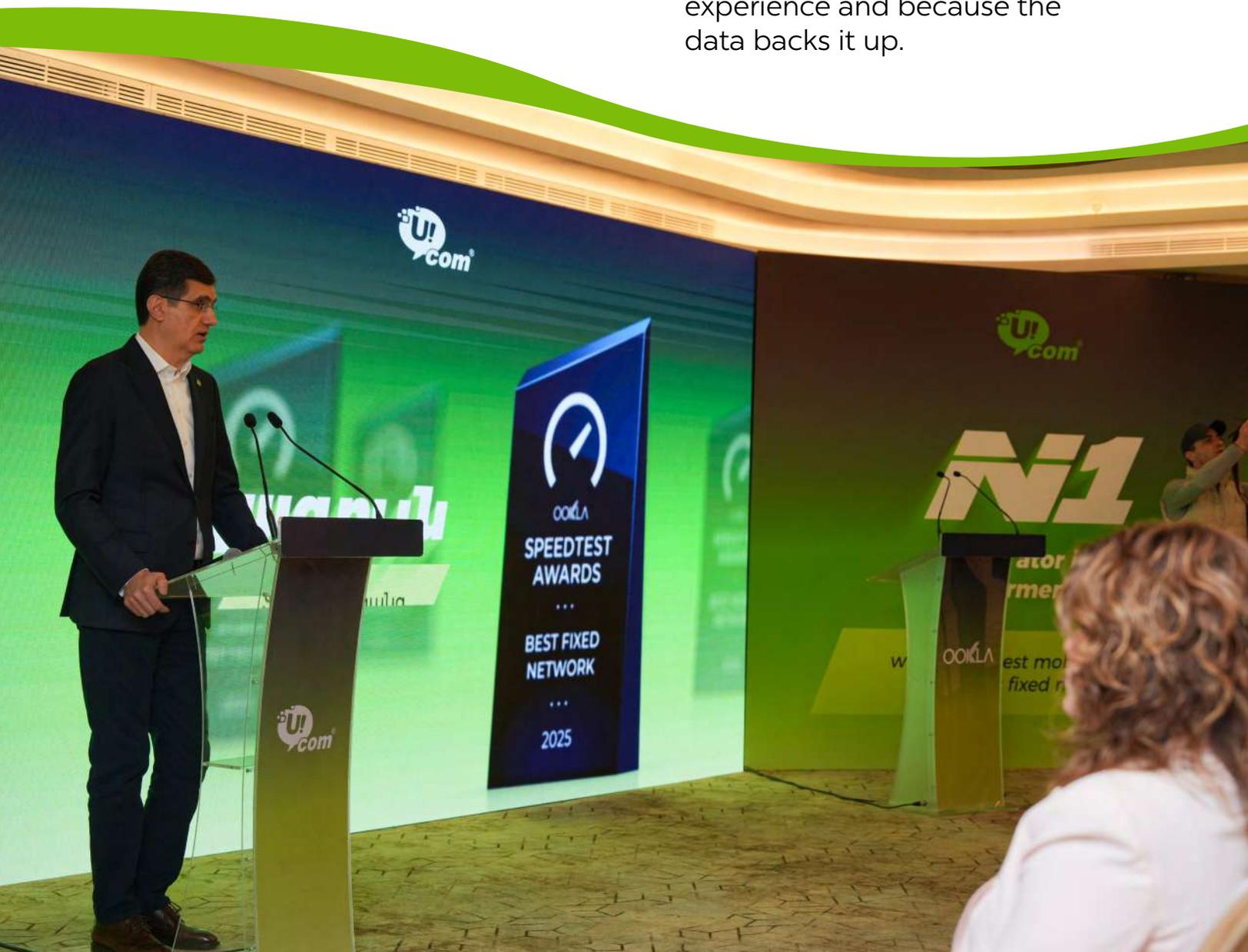


DATA DOESN'T LIE

## MY RECOMMENDATION FOR HIGH-SPEED INTERNET IN ARMENIA

Armenia has been quietly climbing the ranks as a destination for remote workers. The cost of living is relatively low, the food is incredible, the country is safe, and the internet, honestly, is a lot better than what you'd expect. Simply put, **Armenia has quality 5G coverage across almost the entire country**, even in the remote towns and villages.

I'll cut right to it. If you're a remote worker, digital nomad, or traveler heading to Armenia and you're wondering which internet provider to go with, **my personal recommendation as an ex-digital nomad who traveled the world and a 15-year remote worker is to go with Ucom**. I'm saying that based on my personal experience and because the data backs it up.



# No.1 Operator for The Fastest Mobile Internet and the Best Fixed Networks

In the second half of 2025, Ucom won [five Ookla Speedtest Awards](#) for Armenia: Fastest Mobile Network, Best Mobile Network, Best Fixed Network, Best Mobile Gaming Experience, and Best Internet Gaming Experience. **That's every major category.** I was present at the award ceremony in Yerevan and saw the full demonstration from Ookla about their testing methodology and results.

For those unfamiliar, Ookla is the company behind Speedtest, the app hundreds of millions of people use worldwide to test their internet speed. They don't base their awards on marketing claims or self-reported numbers. **They're based on real-world data from actual users running actual speed tests.** Download speeds, upload speeds, latency, jitter, video streaming performance, gaming responsiveness, all of it measured and analyzed at scale.



Here's what that means in plain language: when thousands of real people in Armenia tested their internet,

**Ucom consistently came out on top across both mobile and fixed connections.**

## Why This Matters If You Work Remotely!

As mentioned above, Ucom also has the widest 5G coverage in Armenia. They've been expanding their fixed network into regional cities like Dilijan, Ijevan, Goris, Sevan, and others, places that are becoming popular with remote workers **precisely because they offer a quieter alternative to Yerevan without sacrificing connectivity.** In fact, I did tour the country myself and test their 5G to confirm it works as they claimed. You can read about my trip and recommendations in the December 2025 issue of Life in Armenia.



And by the way, the gaming award matters to you as well even if you never touch a video game. A provider that excels in gaming performance is, by definition, a **provider that excels at keeping your connection fast and responsive under pressure.**

Why am I so confident in recommending Ucom! They took home the Fastest Mobile Network award in 2022 and the Fastest Fixed Network award in both 2021 and 2022. When a provider keeps winning the same awards year after year, that gives me confidence recommending them to others. Add to that **my personal experience being a satisfied mobile and fixed network user since 2017.**

**5G**  
**Ucom**

## My Practical Advice

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If you're landing in Yerevan for a short stay, grab a Ucom SIM card at the airport; **it takes 10 minutes and all you need is your passport.** Unlimited data plans are very affordable. For longer stays, look into their fixed broadband packages or their convergent bundles, which combine mobile and home internet into one plan.

If you're renting an apartment for a long time, ask the landlord which provider they use. If it's not Ucom, it might be worth asking if you can switch, or at least supplementing with a Ucom mobile plan as your backup. Having a reliable mobile hotspot from Armenia's top-performing network is **the cheapest insurance policy for your remote work setup.**

Armenia is a fantastic place to live and work remotely. It ranked 18th on the Global Digital Nomad Index in 2024. **It's one of the safest countries in the world.** The cost of living lets you stretch your income further than almost anywhere in Europe or the Middle East.

I don't do endorsements lightly. But when Ookla's data shows one provider winning five out of five awards in a market, the conclusion is simple. **To me, Ucom is the most proven internet provider in Armenia,** and if you're coming here to work, it's the safest bet you can make. Data doesn't lie. And neither do I.

HOW I CHOSE ARMENIA FOR MY NEXT CHAPTER

# A NIGHT FLIGHT TO YEREVAN THAT CHANGED MY LIFE



in



**MICHAEL  
KERSCHBAUMER**

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MOSELLE  
ARMENIA JERMUK

## HOW I CHOSE ARMENIA FOR MY NEXT CHAPTER A NIGHT FLIGHT TO YEREVAN THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

Thinking back especially on my career journey; I always have to admit I have done nothing else in nearly 40 years than giving all my passion and love to the Hospitality Industry. If you would have asked during the time, as I was a teenager, even as I stepped into the Hotel College and University later on, I would never believe that 40 years later I am still totally committed to this Industry. Today this experience nobody can take away from me and sometimes I think I should sit down and start writing a book.

There would be many stories about this Industry, people and happenings. I am sure one happening would be definitely part of this book. It's all about Christmas time in Cairo, Egypt. A very difficult time in these years, especially Christmas as different cultures and religions are meeting each other.

I remember the General Manager of this huge hotel complex in Cairo downtown was a German guy, a highly experienced Hotel Veteran working for Marriott, this gentleman never lost his temper and was always on the top

of everything till this one day. A day I will never forget!

We had great connections to the Lufthansa office in Cairo these days and we made it happen that a natural Christmas tree was brought in from Germany by Cargo. As this tree was delivered to the hotel, we asked the local engineers to put this tree in the lobby not estimating that this task will give us a huge learning. These local guys never had seen a Christmas tree in real life. The issue was that the tree was too high for the lobby. So, these guys had cut the tree from the top and not as usual from the bottom.



Once they finished their job the guys came and reported being totally proud the tree is standing. We on the way to the lobby could see the tree already from far and understood, I never saw this highly experienced Manager acting like this. He was totally shocked, jumping and screaming. With a lot of decoration, we managed to fix the top part back to the tree to have a normal

Christmas tree in the center of Cairo.

Coming back to my career I remember my grandmother; she said one day: this boy will become a Chef. I think at that time nobody took her statement seriously, in the end I started my career in the kitchen, till today I love standing next to the oven and creating meals for my family and friends. I personally strongly believe you can

taste if someone cooks with "Love" or is just preparing any kind of meal.

After nearly two years working in different positions in hotel kitchens, I understood for myself that this can't be the end, with all respect to great chefs but that's not what I wanted for my future.

I took all my theoretical knowledge from college and university to the

side and started from scratch my way from regular employee to middle management and management in different departments and areas of the hotel. One day I received an offer to step into the international hotel industry; I took this opportunity with wide open arms as I always was dreaming to travel and work and started working for Marriott International.



In over 20 years with Marriott, I had the opportunity to understand Corporate Business, learn, to understand different cultures and religions and lead teams in many different countries of the world. My journey brought me from Europe, to Middle East and Eastern European countries, till I landed one night in Yerevan. **This was exactly 22 years ago. A typical night flight arrival at the old Yerevan airport.**



Dark, gray, police officers and border control in these classical former soviet uniforms, I was thinking and asking myself: Man, what have you done wrong that Marriott is sending you here? Believe me I was totally wrong and the first impression was not stopping me from entering Armenia. **Till today I am thankful I didn't turn around.**

Back then, on the streets, locals looked strange on foreigners walking around or you have been stopped by local authorities, not for bribery, just asking for a cigarette. It was this time as old Lada's have been changed to BMW and Mercedes appearing in the streets of Yerevan. Many things have changed in these last 22 years but the mentality is often still the same. I think I have learned to work around this over the years.

I want to underline one thing, **it was the time I made the best and most positive experiences during all my years with Marriott.** My private life had changed completely and I found the love of my life. I remember the comments of local hotel colleagues during my first weeks in Yerevan, "you will see you will get married to an Armenian." Nothing better could happen to me. **Both of our kids have been born in Armenia, getting 18 and 16 years old now.**

After 4 years in Yerevan, we moved out of Armenia due to a new Job assignment with Marriott. Two postings and 5 years later we came close to Armenia as I was taking over the Tbilisi Marriott Hotels. During these years away from my new home we became a typical international family traveling around the world based on job opportunities. Having positive and challenging experiences with international schools, embassies, visas and work permits.

Being some years in Georgia I saw in these days huge opportunities in Hospitality Industry growth and I decided to found and establish my own Hotel development, Management and Trainings company. As STS Hospitality Georgia was founded and was able to go into great, different projects, I immediately continued to further develop my company and opened a branch in Armenia. STS Hospitality Armenia was born.

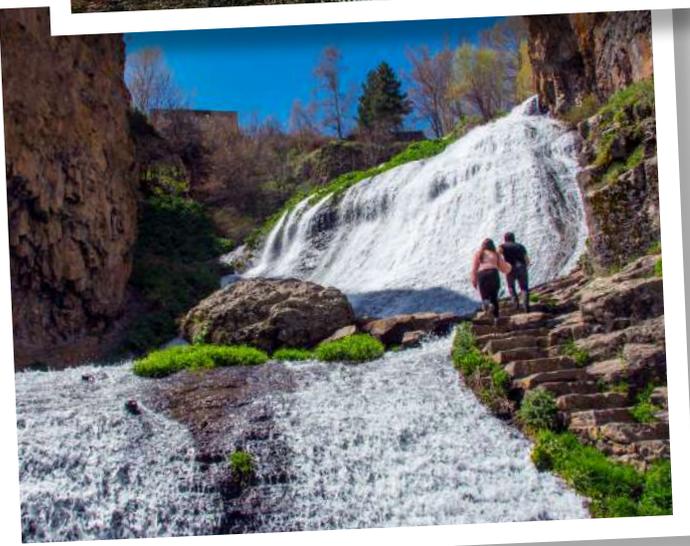
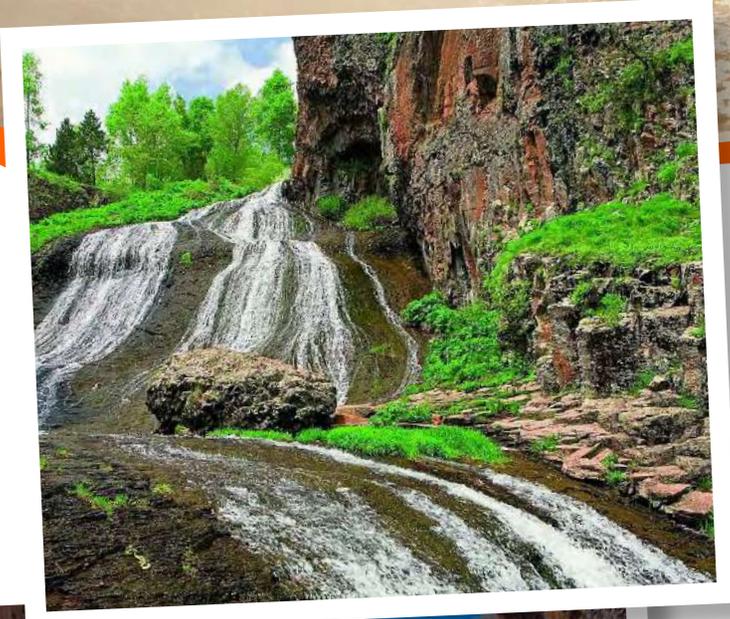
Maybe the time was not the best as COVID-19 and the lockdown kicked in but we were back to Armenia, not permanently but at least with a company we are owning. Better don't ask about any success story these days with STS Hospitality Armenia. I think I chose the worst time to get a start up out of the ground. After some years of jumping in between Georgia and Armenia **we decided to move back to Yerevan as some huge projects have been waiting for us in Jermuk with STS Hospitality.**



Today I am running and managing MOSELLE ARMENIA WELLNESS & MEDICAL SPA in Jermuk and we are working with the investor on the opening of a second Hotel and One bedroom apartment complex in Jermuk.

MOSELLE ARMENIA is one of the leading Wellness and Medical SPA investments in all the Caucasus Region and beyond, offering next to 120 upscale hotel rooms, family suites and more than 80 different medical procedures included in the standard rates.





Jermuk, well known nationally and internationally for its healing thermal water and the medical procedures is expanding today as well to a family friendly destination in the mountains with the best climate, fresh air and wonderful mountains around. As Jermuk was before only highly frequented in the summer months so is Jermuk today developing to a 4-season destination, maximum 2,5 hours' drive away from Yerevan.



Anyone in love with Armenia should support Jermuk and its neighborhood villages to make "Jermuk Great Again!" **We at Moselle Armenia Wellness & Medical SPA are waiting for you!**

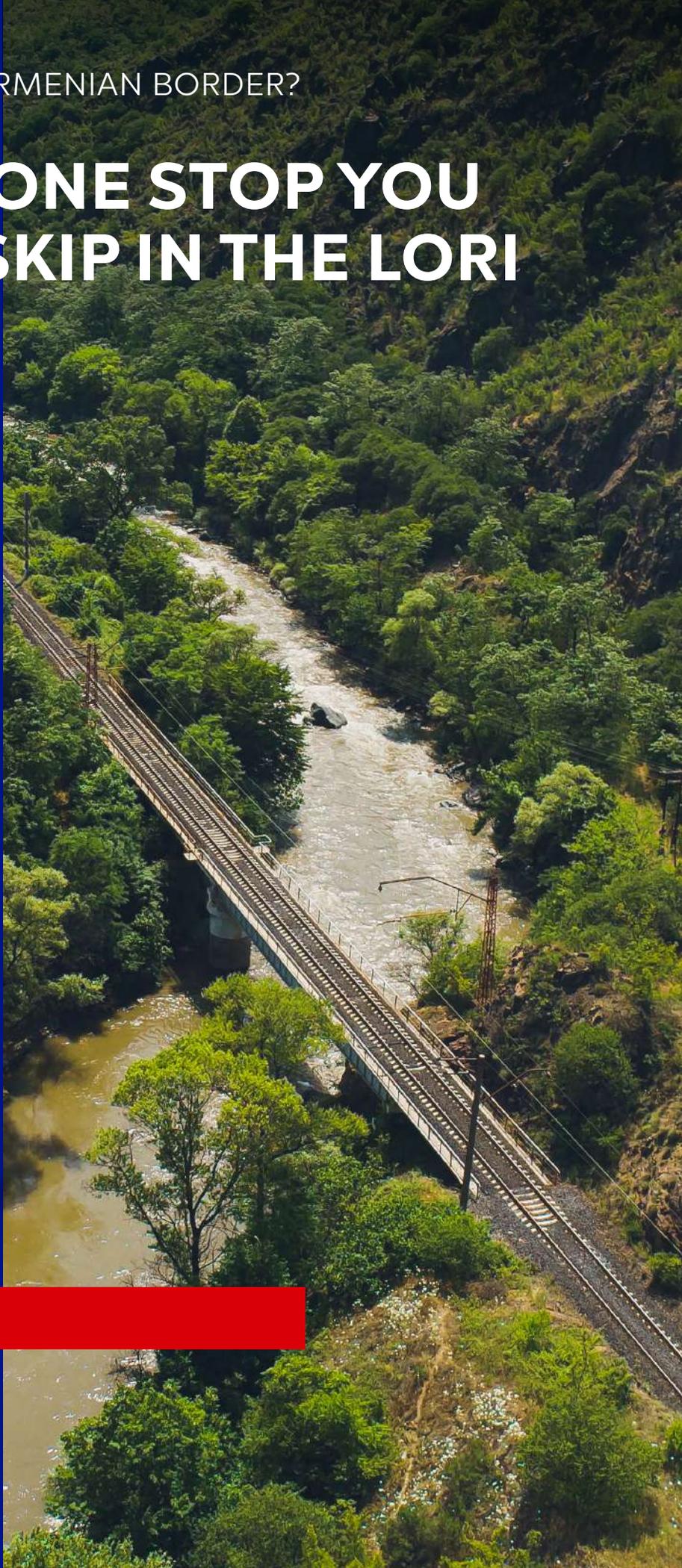
CROSSING THE GEORGIAN-ARMENIAN BORDER?

# HERE IS THE ONE STOP YOU SHOULDN'T SKIP IN THE LORI REGION



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



## CROSSING THE GEORGIAN-ARMENIAN BORDER? HERE IS THE ONE STOP YOU SHOULDN'T SKIP IN THE LORI REGION

Most people traveling overland between Tbilisi and Yerevan treat northern Armenia as a windshield view. They cross the border, drive through the Debed Canyon, pass two UNESCO monasteries without stopping, and arrive in Yerevan tired and vaguely aware they missed something. [I did the same thing the first time.](#) I'm writing this so you don't.

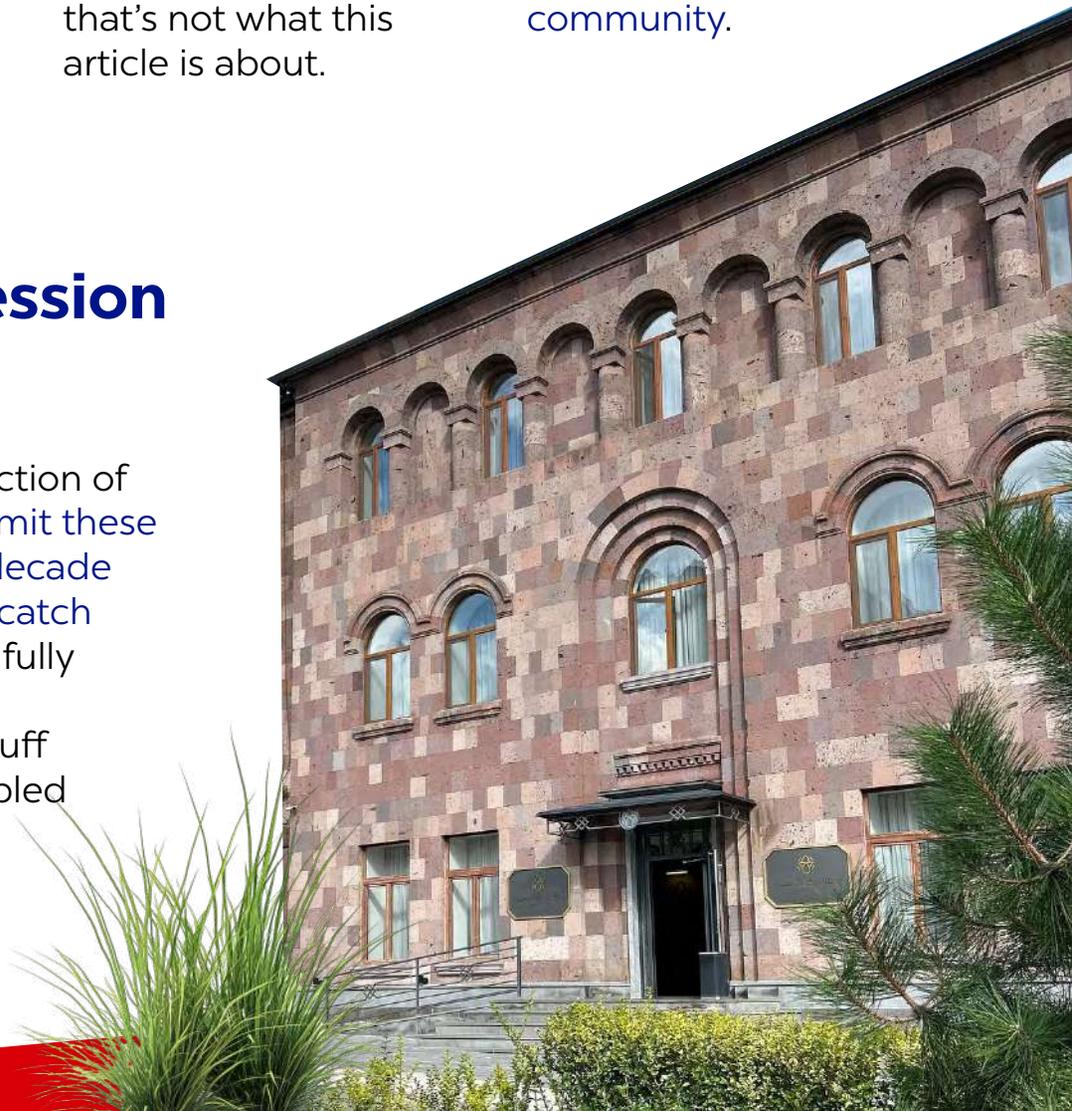
Alaverdi, in the Lori region, sits about 2.5 hours south of Tbilisi and 3 hours north of Yerevan. [It's a natural midpoint on the route.](#) The 10th-century monasteries of Sanahin and Haghpat are minutes away, and the Debed Canyon itself is one of the most dramatic terrains in the Caucasus. But that's not what this article is about.

This article is about where to stay. [Finding a spot that understands your needs as a remote worker,](#) and makes you glad you stopped, makes all the difference. My top pick is The Vallex Garden Hotel simply because they were the first, and only, ones to reach out, [inviting me to their lovely city to see what it offers our remote work community.](#)

## The First Impression

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The building is a true reflection of Alaverdi itself. [I have to admit these structures, even after my decade of living here, never fail to catch my eye.](#) You can tell it was fully renovated not long ago. It's classic Armenian pink tuff stone on the outside, marbled on the inside.



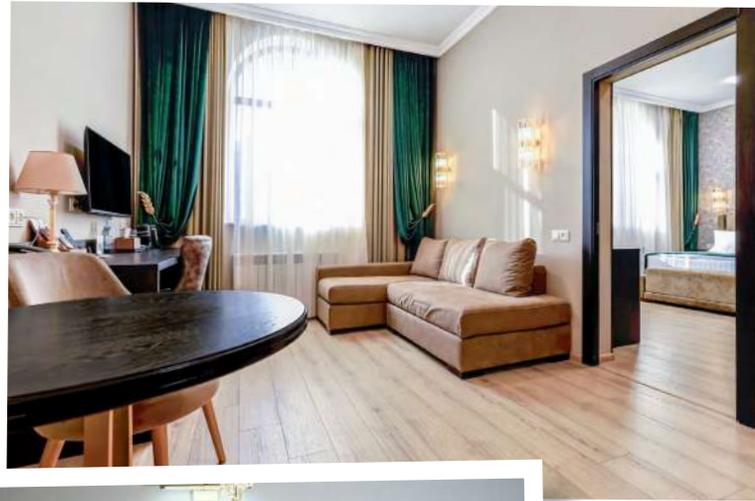
The hotel features 37 modern, well-equipped rooms. From a remote worker's perspective, what I appreciated most was having a real desk, not just a shelf. The bedding was also excellent, which is a lifesaver for quality sleep after a long day of remote work. The room overlooked the hotel's gardens and

the mountains beyond. If you look up, you can see the old Soviet-era cable car. **There's something about waking up in a canyon that resets your perspective**; the light comes in differently, and if you're a morning person, that's really all you need.



For remote workers, the Wi-Fi is solid, and I know this matters a lot. I had no issues with video calls or regular work during my stay. You're not going to set up camp here for a month, but for a working night or two between countries, it handles everything you need without issues. Additionally, the 5G coverage was strong in the hotel area and throughout the city. I tested it myself using a Ucom SIM card and found the connection to be very reliable.

Breakfast is included and served buffet-style with local options. It's not a five-star spread, but it's fresh, filling, and sets you up properly for a morning long drive south if you're heading to Yerevan. The on-site restaurant, Vallex Garden Cafe, serves Armenian food and international varieties. The terrace seating is so inviting that you'll likely find yourself staying longer than planned; I even opened my laptop there to get some work done over coffee.





It's worth noting that the staff is multilingual, speaking English, Russian, and Armenian fluently. The front desk was especially helpful, even assisting me in planning my visits to the nearby monasteries.

Room rates run roughly \$45 to \$80 a night depending on the room type, season, and booking platform. Breakfast included. Free Wi-Fi. Free parking. An on-site restaurant so you don't need to figure out dinner in a town you don't know. For a 4-star property with this level of comfort, in a location this beautiful, those rates are hard to argue with.

# The Case for One Night

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Here's what I'd tell any traveler crossing the Georgian-Armenian border: **don't do the whole drive in one shot**. Break it at Alaverdi. Check into Vallex Garden. Visit Sanahin that afternoon, it's practically above you. Have dinner on the terrace. Sleep in a real bed in a quiet canyon. Hit Haghpat the next morning before the tour groups arrive. Then continue south to Yerevan or east to Dilijan, **rested and having seen a part of Armenia that most visitors never experience**.

Once again, I'm thankful to the hotel's administration for inviting me to visit, **for caring about the remote work community**, and for working hard to offer a perfect stop for nomads crossing the borders between our two countries.



THE JOURNEY TO LAUNCH ARMENIA'S FIRST  
DOMESTIC SATELLITE – PART 2

# WHY DOES A COUNTRY OF 3 MILLION NEED ITS OWN SPACE PROGRAM?



**MATHEW  
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



**AVETIK  
GRIGORYAN**

Co-Founder of Bazoomq Space  
Research Laboratory, Chief Scientist of  
the First Armenian Domestic Satellite's  
Design Team

INTERVIEWING



# THE JOURNEY TO LAUNCH ARMENIA'S FIRST DOMESTIC SATELLITE – PART 2

## WHY DOES A COUNTRY OF 3 MILLION NEED ITS OWN SPACE PROGRAM?

On December 1, 2023, Armenia, a landlocked nation of three million people, still recovering from decades of conflict and economic challenge, **launched its first locally designed and built satellite into space.**

In Part 1 of this series, which was published in the January 2026 issue of our magazine, we followed Avetik Grigoryan and the Bazoomq team as they defied decades of 'lost' Soviet-era infrastructure to launch Hayasat-1, a tiny one-kilogram cube that carried the weight of a nation's ambitions. Now, with a satellite circling the Earth every 90 minutes, we dive into Part 2



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## What a Tiny Cube Can Actually Do

Honestly, I initially struggled to understand what a one-kilogram cube could accomplish. Hayasat-1 isn't imaging the Earth with high-resolution cameras. It isn't providing telecommunications. It's primarily a technology demonstrator, a platform for understanding how satellites operate in the harsh environment of space and for building operational experience.





But as Avetik walked me through the mission objectives, I started to see the bigger picture.

First, **Hayasat-1 is training a generation of Armenian engineers in real space operations.**

The students, interns, and young scientists working at Bazoomq now have hands-on experience with satellite design, testing, launch coordination, and mission operations. **Each mission builds on the previous one.**

Second, Hayasat-1 is demonstrating Armenia's capacity to international partners. The satellite was built and tested in collaboration with CSIE to meet international standards. It successfully launched and operated reliably in orbit. That track record opens doors to partnerships, joint missions, and technology transfer agreements with other countries and space agencies.

Third, Hayasat-1 is a starting point for future missions focused on practical applications. The stated objectives

include ecological and natural-disaster monitoring; monitoring of water and other resources; technological experiments; in-orbit validation of domestically designed satellite components; traffic and cadastre; communication; scientific research; and, eventually, border control support. Future satellites could carry Earth observation cameras, communication relays, or specialized sensors tailored to Armenia's specific needs.

“We’re laying the groundwork,” Avetik explained. “This satellite proves we can do it. The next ones will be more capable and will help master more sophisticated and must-have technologies. And the ones after that will be even better and practically useful.”

He showed me architectural plans for Bazoomq’s expanded facilities. They’re going to build an ISO8-standard cleanroom for final satellite integration and testing. They’re establishing partnerships with geospatial analytics companies to develop the ground infrastructure for processing satellite data. They’re designing future CubeSat missions with more sophisticated payloads and innovative technological solutions.



Mathew Zein and Avetik Grigoryan at Bazoomq

## Why This Matters Beyond Armenia

Will Armenia launch its own space station? Says the sarcastic, skeptical voice, of which you can find many on social media platforms, and the answer is no; that isn’t even the goal. Armenia isn’t competing with the United States, China, or India in some grand space race. **Armenia is building a specific capability tailored to its specific needs.** And in doing so, it’s joining a community of nations recognizing that space infrastructure is as fundamental to 21st-century sovereignty as roads and power grids were to 20th-century development.

There’s something about a country of three million people looking up and saying, “We belong up there too.”

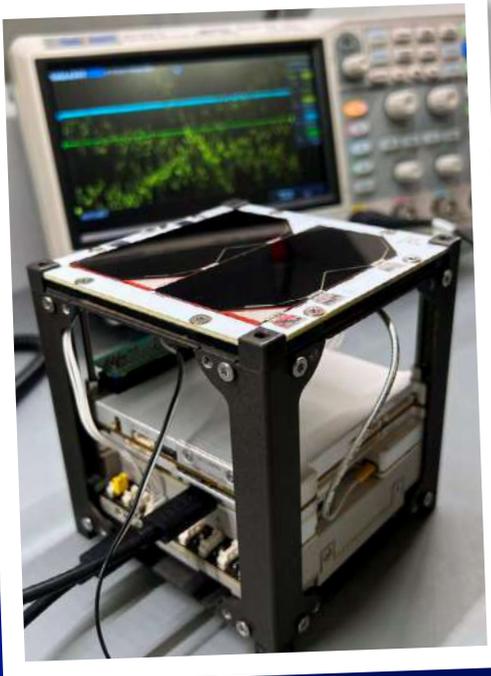
The space economy Avetik cited, potentially worth \$2.7 trillion by 2040, won’t be dominated solely by the traditional powers. It will include contributions from many countries, each bringing unique perspectives, innovations, and applications.

# The Educational Mission

“Space technology easily inspires youth,” Avetik said. The lab offers educational programs for students, internships, hosts workshops, collaborates with universities, and actively works to make space science exciting and accessible to young Armenians. **The goal is to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers**, to show them that Armenia can compete at the highest levels of technology.



He's right. When children see in the laboratory the non-flying twin of the satellite designed and built in Armenia, which later orbited the Earth for a while, **it changes their perception of what is possible**. It opens career paths that didn't exist before. It creates a culture of ambition and innovation that extends beyond space into every high-tech sector.



The AYAS Aerospace Club, which Avetik founded in 1988 and later, in 2018, registered as AYAS Aerospace Society, continues to run extracurricular courses in aeronautics, aviation, astronomy, and astronautics for school students. About 300 alumni have passed through over the

years. Some of them now work at Bazoomq. Others have gone on to careers at international companies and research institutions, founded their own companies, and contributed to education. **This is how ecosystems emerge. One lab, one mission, and a lot of inspired students at a time.**

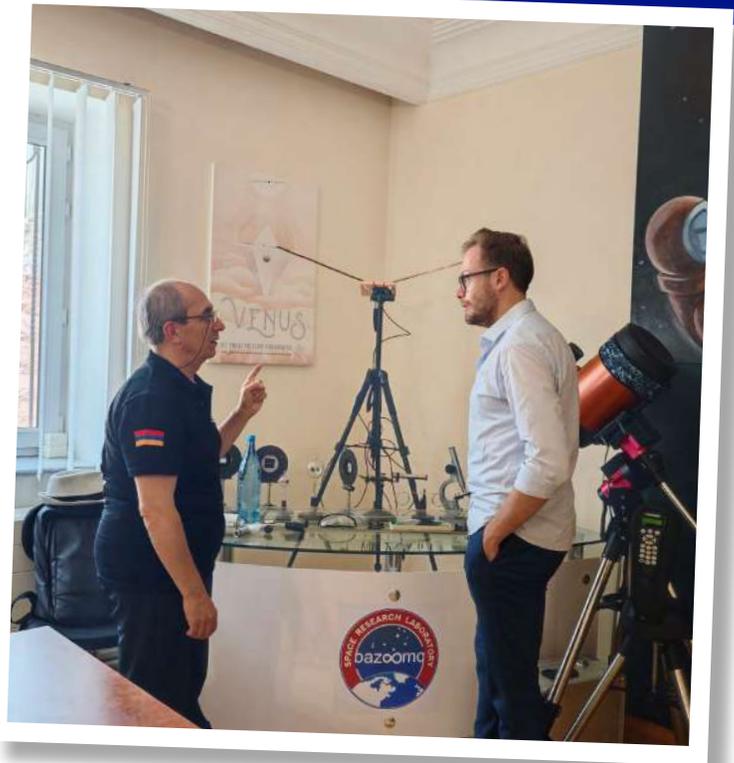
## The Hard Questions

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I asked Avetik the one-million-dollar question: Why space? Armenia faces real, immediate challenges in economic development, energy security, infrastructure, education, and healthcare. **Why pour resources into launching satellites?**

His answer was more than convincing: “Space activities can be a locomotive for the development of all scientific and technological directions in our country. The skills, infrastructure, and mindset required for space missions spill over into everything else – materials science, software engineering, systems integration, project management, manufacturing precision, and so on. These are modern technological skills and organizational culture.”

I also asked about funding and sustainability. Bazoomq operates as a non-profit, supported by government grants, private donors, and international partnerships. The first satellite cost a fraction of what traditional space missions require, but **scaling up will require sustained investment.**



Avetik acknowledged the challenge but pointed to [Armenia’s Law on Space Activities](#), passed in 2020, which provides tax benefits and regulatory frameworks designed to encourage private sector participation. The government has made space a priority. The Ministry of High-Tech Industry is actively involved. There’s momentum. However, the absence of an accepted Space Strategy document, which is currently under development, and the annual state fee for licensed space activity remain serious obstacles for beginners, especially for nonprofits.

“We’re not trying to do everything at once,” he said. “We’re building step by step. Each mission supports funding and promotion of the next one. Each success attracts more partners and more investment. It’s sustainable if we’re strategic.”



## What Comes Next

I asked Avetik what success he expects five years from now, ten years from now.

“Five years: We’ll have launched additional CubeSats with increasingly sophisticated capabilities. We’ll have an operational Earth observation capacity providing actionable data to government agencies and private companies. We’ll have trained more engineers. We’ll have established Armenia

as a reliable partner for international space collaborations.”

“Ten years: We’ll be contributing meaningfully to global space science. We’ll have startups spinning out of Bazoomq’s research. We’ll have students who grew up watching Hayasat-1 launch now designing the next generation of missions. We’ll have moved from proving we can do this to actually doing it at scale.”

“And maybe, just maybe, we’ll have inspired other small countries to believe they can do this too.”

And just for the record, the depth of [Avetik’s Impact](#) was officially recognized on a national stage last year when he was named the [grand prize winner](#) of the **‘Hero of Our Times’** award. Standing before the country’s leadership, he was honored for the symbol he has become.

# The Bigger Story

Avetik told me that Bazoomq's ultimate goal is to help Armenia "regain its former reputation in space activity, collaborate with other countries, and provide value to the world once again."

Regain. That word suggests something was lost and is now being found again. For three decades after the Soviet collapse, Armenia's space ambitions existed mainly in memory. Now they exist in orbit, in laboratories, in classrooms, and **in the minds of people who believe that a country of three million can reach the stars.**

Why does Armenia need a space program? Because inspiration matters. Because small countries have contributions to make to humanity's future in space. Because it's possible. And maybe most importantly, because looking up reminds you what's possible when you refuse to accept limits.

Hayasat-1 became history. In the Science & Technology Museum (Yerevan), a new exposition dedicated to Hayasat-1 appeared. [Hayasat-1 ended its mission](#) on April 25, 2025, when it crossed the Kármán line, the conventional boundary of space, and burned up in the atmosphere. It happened earlier than expected, as with many other satellites during that period, due to very high solar activity heating and expanding the atmosphere, leading to increased atmospheric drag. Nevertheless, Hayasat-1 successfully accomplished its mission, preparing the ground for the next step.



As you read this, a discussion on Hayasat-2 pushed it closer to its mission. After launch, it'll be up there for another few years, a bigger and more ambitious CubeSat with an outsized message.

**Armenia is here.  
Armenia is capable.  
And Armenia is just getting started.**

TRADITIONAL ARMENIAN LIFESTYLE

# WHEN “SUSTAINABILITY” WAS JUST CALLED “LIFE”



**ANAHIT  
SAHAKYAN**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

## TRADITIONAL ARMENIAN LIFESTYLE WHEN “SUSTAINABILITY” WAS JUST CALLED “LIFE”

Moving to a new country starts with research to understand whether this country will be a match for you and your family. The formal aspect: the legal and the economic environment is rather easy to understand because what is on paper does not differ much from the reality. However no matter how much you research the culture and the lifestyle of people, **you will still find new and surprising things when you actually move to the country.**

When I moved from Armenia to Spain at 18 years old to study at university, I was excited to dive into the culture of enjoying tintos under the sunlight and relaxing. But the reality was a bit different. The relaxed lifestyle also meant less working hours for supermarkets, banks and other establishments. I had to schedule my day around these working hours, which was a huge change for me, because **banks have 24/7 customer care services and supermarkets work all day long in Yerevan.**

However, getting to know different perspectives always helps to make a more complete image of life in a new country. An aspect of life in Armenia I am going to explore is cultural ecological practices integrated into the life of people and recent government efforts in the sustainability field.



Ecological practices in Armenia come more from culture and care, rather than intention.

**What I mean is that people unconsciously protect nature with certain practices**, without recognizing the bigger impact it leaves on the environment.

The most common practice is reusing plastic containers. The life of a plastic container from the store does not end when the product in it finishes. The container is then filled with fruit, vegetables, leftover food and stored in the refrigerator or the freezer. Only when the container breaks and is no longer suitable for use is it thrown away.

Food too is taken very seriously in Armenia. Families avoid throwing away food unless it is not edible. If there are leftover veggies, we cut and combine them into a salad, sometimes inventing new varieties. When food remains are not edible, such as the peel of potatoes or egg shells, it is a common practice in the villages to bury the organic food remains in the soil, as it turns into compost and benefits the plants growing in the yard.



Bread is a completely different story. It is considered a sacred food, and never thrown into the trash. If the lavash, a type of Armenian bread, gets dry, we cut it into pieces, marinate it in seasoning and oil and bake it into chips. Another alternative is crushing it into khash, a traditional soup eaten with lavash. Other breads are usually finished, or crushed into small pieces and fed to the birds. You might even come across plastic bags hanging from the side of trash cans with bread in them. These are usually left there for the homeless, because bread cannot be thrown out.



The food is also sourced sustainably. You can buy fruit and vegetables from the markets or the small shops in the neighborhoods, where the goods are fresh and straight from the farm. Sometimes we go an extra mile to get the freshest, most organic products, buying in bulk from the local farmers and storing them for winter. For example my family regularly buys milk from a farm in a nearby town, and it has excellent quality and is also cheaper than in the supermarkets.

Some foods are also grown at home. I have seen people grow small tomatoes, peppers and greens on their window sill, enjoying fresh products every day.

Besides food, Armenians value other resources as well, such as clothes and other belongings. You can donate the clothes you no longer need to the church or to families in need. Sometimes we use the fabric for sewing new shirts or we turn it into cleaning clothes for dust or the tables, if the fabric is too used. **If the zipper**

**of the pants is broken, it is more common in Armenia to get it fixed at the tailor, then throw it away.** Tailor shops are all around the city and the prices of fixing a zipper or a hole is very affordable as well.

Now all of these are practices taken by the people, so how does the government and other organizations contribute to sustainable development? According to the [2025 National Comprehensive Green Transition Assessment Report](#), Armenia is in the early stages of its sustainability journey.

The cultural practices set the base for sustainability, while the government takes measures on the more formal side. Sustainability is commonly mentioned in national strategies and sectoral plans, however no national report is solely dedicated to sustainability. This makes it more difficult for investors and the people to see the current state and the progress the institutions make in the field.

Armenia has a clear climate policy framework, with targets such as GHG emissions reduction and renewable energy adoption set on paper. In recent years there has been progress in the energy field, with many businesses and people installing solar panels and converting to renewable energy. **Even in the villages you can see houses with solar panels on the roof.**

The import of electric vehicles, such as public transportation and personal use vehicles has also increased and is continuing in that direction. According to official data, as of June 2025 2.5% of all personal use vehicles were electric. **In my experience, driving through the streets of Yerevan, it feels like 1 out of 3 is an EV.** The government is incentivizing people to purchase electric vehicles, by waiving parking fees in the capital city and proposing other benefits.

While the renewable energy adoption is consistently improving in Armenia, the country still experiences hardships with air pollution and waste management.

On average in December 2025 the [air quality](#) in Yerevan was moderate to unhealthy for sensitive groups, with an AQI of approximately 100. Yerevan has a specific geographical position, surrounded by mountains which create a basin effect, trapping air during temperature inversion, and contributing to the formation of fog during the

winter months. The air pollution from the construction of dozens of new buildings is worsening the situation, while contributing to the development of the country in the long-term. Moreover, the situation is completely different in the other cities of Armenia, such as Dilijan and Gyumri, as they do not have the same geographical difficulties.



The waste management system in Armenia is also lacking structure. Most of the municipal waste ends up in landfills and while laws exist, I believe the enforcement is weak. This can be viewed as a big environmental issue that needs immediate attention from the government. However, besides being a critical environmental issue, it is also a huge opportunity. By implementing the waste management strategy used in Japan for recycling waste into

power generation, the country could benefit economically. In 2025, this market value of the Waste Recycling system in Japan was [valued](#) at \$4.6Bn, and if Armenia reaches even 10% of this, it would be an enormous benefit for the country.

This year, [Armenia will be hosting the 2026 United Nations Biodiversity Conference](#), the seventeenth meeting of the Parties with the purpose of advancing protection for biodiversity and expanding the country's sustainability efforts. The UN office [states](#) that “this election

reaffirms the growing confidence of the international community towards Armenia` as an important stakeholder in global environmental processes”.

Overall, Armenia is progressing in the field of sustainable development through continuous organizational and institutional effort and a rich cultural foundation. The care and the meaning that Armenians put into their everyday practices help to preserve the environment, increasing the engagement of the population in sustainable development.





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# CREDITS AND SPECIAL THANKS



**ARMENIA**  
The Hidden  
Track



SPECIAL THANKS TO THE TOURISM COMMITTEE AT THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA FOR BEING COLLABORATIVE AND PROVIDING THE DIGITAL MEDIA (PHOTOS AND VIDEOS) TO USE IN THE MAGAZINE

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# LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

MARCH, 10<sup>TH</sup> 2026 | NO. 35 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

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