

LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

2024
GOALS

**SWITCH TO
REMOTE WORK
MOVE TO ARMENIA**



THE NEXT CHAPTER
WHAT AWAITS
ARMENIA IN 2024

IN VINO VERITAS

BUILDING INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS MODELS WITH
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COFFEE BREAK OR COFFEE WORK?

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LA BIENNALE DI YEREVAN

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HOW ELSE CAN FOREIGNERS LEARN HOW
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A BLUEPRINT FOR ARMENIAN YOUTH

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BYTE-SIZED BREAKS

THE HEART OF ARMENIAN TECH
COMPANIES LIES IN THEIR KITCHENS



MATHEW ZEIN

EDITOR'S LETTER

This issue of Life in Armenia holds special significance for me as it marks the end of 2023, the year this magazine was born.

Launched with hope, Life in Armenia has grown beyond borders and expectations, reaching thousands of readers from the US and Canada to Europe and the vibrant professional community in Armenia itself.

With over 100 articles and tens of international contributions from across the globe, the magazine has begun to leave its mark on Armenia's digital nomad scene. The country possesses everything necessary to become an international hub for remote workers worldwide, capable of competing globally. However, it lacks broader awareness—a platform to share the stories of those who have already experienced its magic and had the chance to call Armenia their home away from home.

I'm thankful to anyone who believed in this magazine, accepted to be interviewed, engaged on social media platforms, promoted it to their networks worldwide, and made it all come true.

While the journey is far from over, 2024 beckons on the horizon with too many challenges for my goal. Challenge accepted! I hope that when writing next year's editor's letter, the streets of Armenian regions will be bustling with digital nomads worldwide.

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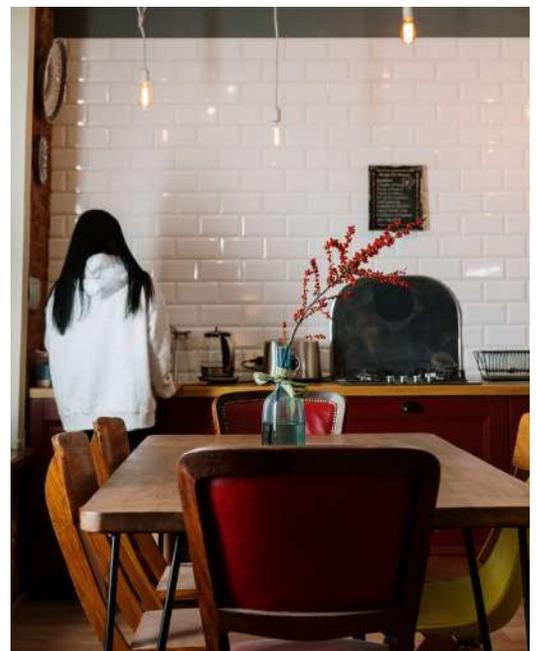
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Take a byte-sized break into the heart of Armenian tech companies, where kitchens are not just spaces for coffee breaks but integral cultural hubs. Beyond the daily grind, these kitchens symbolize a commitment to employee comfort, well-being, and a distinct cultural touchstone.

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In 2024, Armenia anticipates a tech-driven future with Starlink connectivity and WCIT 2024, showcasing global recognition. The Science and Technology Development Council underscores the nation's innovation focus, while a digital nomads program highlights its commitment to attracting global talent.



IN VINO VERITAS

BUILDING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MODELS WITH ARMENIA AT THE CORE



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**HAIK
KHACHATRYAN**

CO-FOUNDER OF OPEN
CONTAINER/CEO



IN VINO VERITAS BUILDING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MODELS WITH ARMENIA AT THE CORE

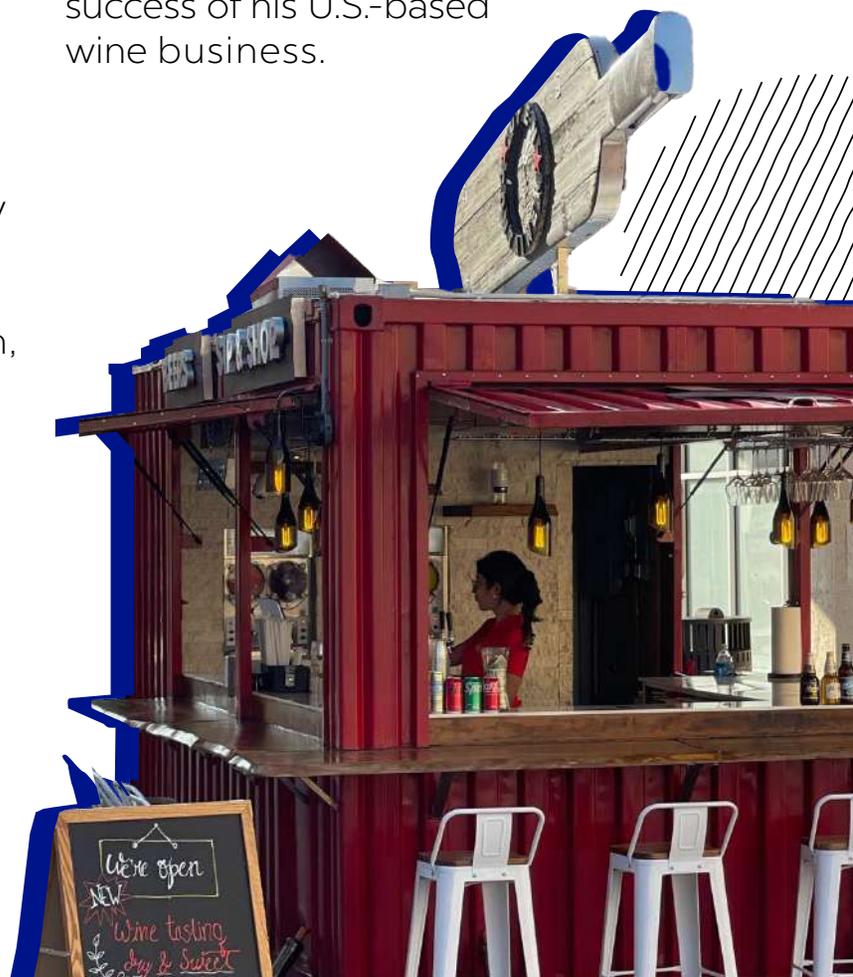
Armenians boast an ancient and fascinating relationship with wine, stretching back thousands of years. In a stunning discovery, archaeologists unearthed a winery complex in the Areni-1 cave, dating around 6,100 years ago. This incredible find, complete with fermentation vats, a wine press, and even remnants of grape seeds, stands as **the oldest known winery ever uncovered**.

Today, Armenia's unique grape varieties like Areni, Voskehat, and Sireni flourish, and the country produces a captivating range of wines, from crisp whites and bold reds to sparkling treasures and sweet dessert wines.

I'm featuring wine in a digital nomad magazine because I recently came across a special business model that has Armenia at its core. In the realms of wine and innovation, Hayk Khachatryan, an American-Armenian entrepreneur, stands out with his unique venture, Open Container. His brainchild masterfully intertwines ancient Armenian wine-making traditions with modern American entrepreneurial spirit, creating a business model that's as robust as it is refined.

Open Container is exactly what it sounds like – a modified shipping container transformed into a wine shop, offering a distinctive experience for wine enthusiasts across the United States. While repurposing shipping containers for the food industry isn't groundbreaking, Hayk stands out as the pioneer in **using this concept for wine**. However, the project goes beyond just having an open container.

Curious to find out more, I interviewed Hayk and asked him about the ins and outs of his project and the **significant role Armenians play** in the success of his U.S.-based wine business.



Why do you say that your business has Armenia at the core?

Our business places Armenia at its core because every aspect is rooted in the country. The container, from construction to outfitting, takes shape in Armenia before making its way to the United States. The open containers showcase nine distinct wine labels, **all exclusively ours and crafted in Armenia.**

We maintain vineyards in Armenia, nurturing the grapes year-round with the help of local farmers. The process continues at local wineries, where the grapes are transformed into our wines and meticulously bottled and packaged to **meet our standards and branding requirements.**

Essentially, everything, from the containers to the wines we offer, originates from Armenia. The wines themselves are a narrative of resilience and uniqueness. Open Container features grape varieties that have withstood millennia, offering a sip of history. This authenticity sets them apart, aiming to elevate Armenian wine to global recognition.



What about your team? Are they also in Armenia?

As for our team, my brother and I are the sole members based in the United States, overseeing the entire business. To streamline operations, we've **strategically partnered with professionals in Armenia** who manage the wine production process and supply chain seamlessly.

Additionally, our marketing is managed remotely by an agency in Armenia, which is responsible for our campaigns, brand awareness, and social media promotions. I can confidently attest to their professionalism and the **satisfaction derived from their services**.

Collaborating with Armenians proves to be mutually beneficial, primarily due to the **cost efficiency and the pool of talented individuals** available. For instance, we hired a videographer in Armenia who delivered results exceeding what we could expect in the United States. The notable difference, however, lies in the **competitive pricing offered in Armenia**.

It's crucial to mention that professionalism comes with its associated costs, regardless of location. However, the cost contrast between the U.S. and the Armenian market is attributed to differences in the cost of living and taxation systems, making Armenia a competitive **service provider for international businesses**.



What significance has Armenian grapes brought to your wine labels?

The significance of Armenian grapes in our wine labels is profound, as we aim to provide an authentic wine experience through our unique Open Container concept. In fact, we are serving the same grapes that ancient civilizations were enjoying over 8000 years ago.

The grape variety we use remains **the most resilient in the world**, retaining its essence from six millennia ago. Our approach is distinct, and no one else is doing the same work we are doing. Our mission is to bring Armenian wine to the forefront because it's a hidden gem many are unaware of.



How did you grow your business in the US?

Entrepreneurship has been a part of my life since childhood, starting at the age of 8 while working in my family's restaurant. My journey in the United States began with opening a bar in South Carolina in 2011. Here, I started with 1 750 sq foot bar and grew to 4 brick and mortar locations in less than 5 years, winning awards every year for our service and products! The desire for expansion led me to Florida, seeking opportunities for another wine bar, as South Carolina was already maxed out.

The idea of selling our wine through a kiosk took shape, and inspiration struck when my brother in California, familiar with container businesses, proposed the shipping container idea for alcohol. This evolved into the shipping container concept we know today. In December 2017, Open Container made its debut

in Orlando. Initially, we imported wines from various wineries and brands, lacking our own label. It took five years to turn this dream into reality.

In 2017, the idea of franchising emerged, but life threw challenges our way – health issues and other businesses in South Carolina demanded attention, delaying our plans. Overcoming obstacles, **we grew organically without business brokers.** The concept itself proved to be a powerful selling point. Currently, we have sold 2 franchises, with three more in the pipeline. Managing everything related to franchising is my role; we have an amazing team of 8 at our corporate locations on the ground, including winterenders and bartenders – 4 at each location and 1 manager overseeing both.

What added value did Armenia bring to your US business?

Armenia has brought substantial added value to our U.S. business, particularly in terms of **talent across various industries**. Despite our business not being IT-related, we found skilled individuals in Armenia capable of handling every aspect, from farming in our vineyards to marketing our exclusive wine labels. It's remarkable to have built the core of our business in a country that is **thousands of miles away from the United States**.

Beyond the business perspective, Armenia offers a unique selling point – **being the birthplace of wine**. This historical significance serves as a robust marketing strength, especially when promoting our franchises. By the way, it's not only about the wines; Armenia provides a rich historical backdrop that entrepreneurs and investors can **leverage for diverse business ideas** in today's commercial landscape.

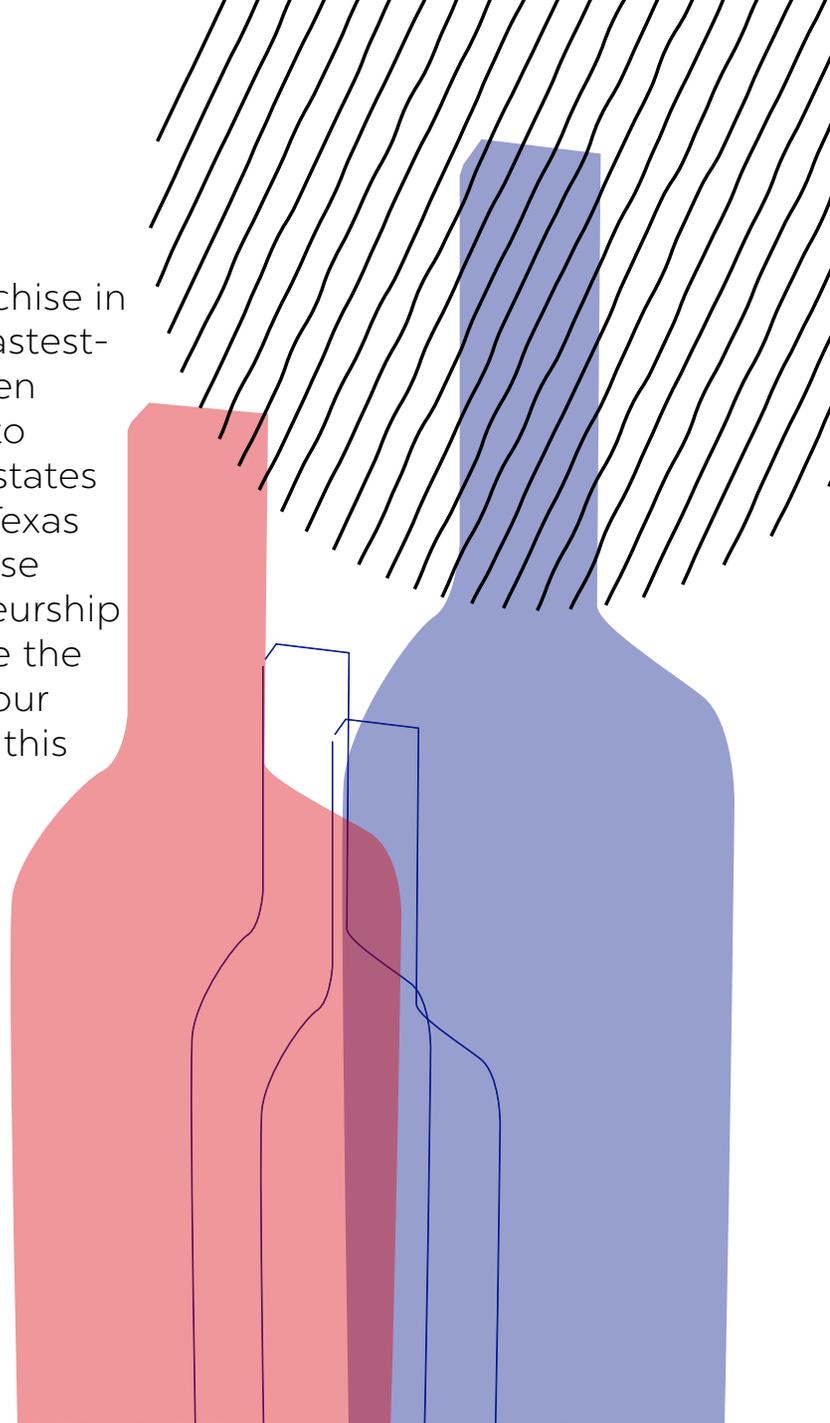
It's crucial for the diaspora to engage in more business ventures in Armenia, not merely relying on donations during challenging times. **Investing in the country's future is essential**. Personally, I invested \$250,000 of my earnings from the U.S. in Armenia because I have confidence in the people and the country's untapped potential. This investment has never been a source of doubt; it's a testament to the trust in Armenia's capabilities and the belief in planning for a prosperous future.



What are the future plans for the franchises?

We plan on being the number #1 franchise in the alcohol beverage sector and the fastest-growing franchise in the world! As Open Container looks to the future, it seeks to expand its footprint. Currently eyeing states like Florida, California, New York, and Texas for potential franchisees, We invite those passionate about wine and entrepreneurship to join this exciting venture. If you have the perfect location for a container, need our help finding one, or wish to be part of this innovative team, reach out to us at haik@opencontainerfranchise.com.

This model isn't just a business; it's a cultural exchange, a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit, and a celebration of **Armenia's ancient wine-making tradition**. As Open Container grows, it offers more than just wine; it offers stories, a legacy, and an opportunity to be part of a unique journey.



COFFEE BREAK OR COFFEE WORK?

ARMENIA'S GROWING TREND OF CAFÉS EMBRACING REMOTE WORK



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

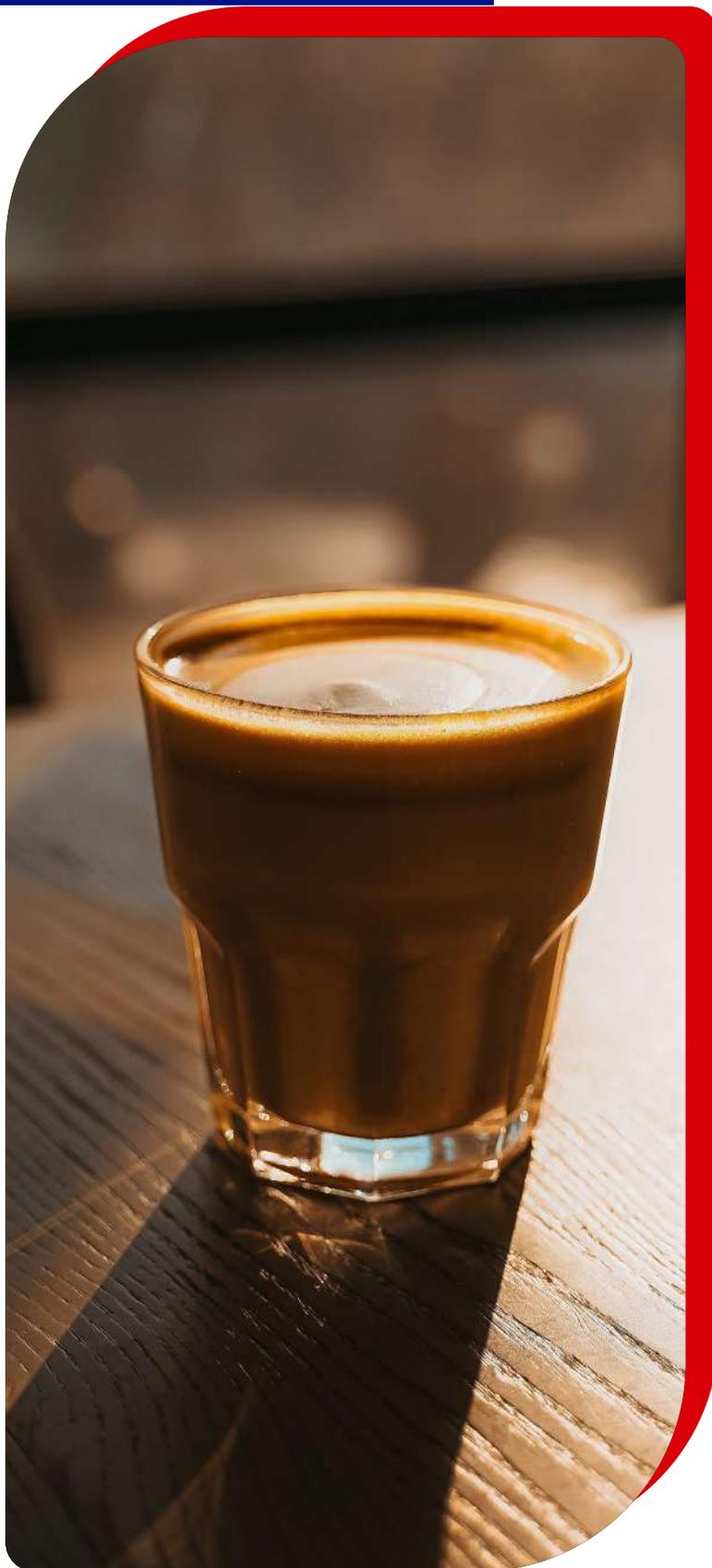


COFFEE BREAK OR COFFEE WORK? ARMENIA'S GROWING TREND OF CAFÉS EMBRACING REMOTE WORK

Armenia has always boasted a vibrant cafe culture, with coffee shops seemingly around every corner, especially since its rise as a popular tourist destination. In Yerevan, entire streets like the Cascade are lined with cafes and restaurants, offering a global coffee experience with a distinct Armenian flair. The lively nightlife adds further spice to the atmosphere, keeping these cafes buzzing with joy late into the night, particularly during the warm summer and spring evenings.

However, a new trend has emerged in recent years, fueled by the global shift towards remote work and the subsequent influx of freelancers and digital nomads. Armenia has [seen a surge in coworking spaces](#), and cafes have readily embraced the concept. Today, almost every coffee shop in Yerevan provides high-speed Wi-Fi and welcomes remote workers with open arms.

While it's impossible to list every coworking space and cafe in Armenia in a single article, here are a few highlights, based on my personal experience, that are worth checking out if you're planning to visit or relocate to Armenia as a digital nomad.



A1 ART SPACE

Step into a World of Art and Calm



A1 Art Space is a multifaceted space in downtown Yerevan, serving as an [art gallery](#), [cafe](#), and [coworking space](#). It is housed in a historical brick building constructed in 1911 by the visionary engineer Yervand Ter-Avetikyan. Co-founded by the Yerevan Biennial Art Foundation (YFAB), A1 Art Space offers a unique atmosphere for creative minds and art enthusiasts. It's worth mentioning that A1 Art Space is one of several art initiatives founded by the YFAB in Armenia.

The moment you enter A1 Art Space, you're greeted by a calming and classy ambiance with a touch of simplicity. Comfortable chairs and balcony seats invite you to relax and soak in the surroundings. [Artwork adorns the walls](#), showcasing sculptures and paintings by talented Armenian artists. A1 Art Space embraces its individuality, even in its operating hours. Unlike most establishments, it [closes on Mondays](#) but opens on Saturdays and Sundays.

While exploring the space, you'll likely stumble upon an old chimney, a charming reminder of the building's historical significance. A vibrant cultural scene thrives within A1 Art Space. The cafe regularly hosts events, workshops, art therapy, painting classes, wine degustation, live music, dancing, and exhibitions, offering visitors diverse artistic experiences.

A1 Art Space is more than just a place; [it's an experience](#). Whether seeking inspiration, a quiet space to work, or simply wanting to immerse yourself in art and culture, A1 Art Space offers something for everyone.



LOFT COWORKING

From Concrete to Creativity

LOFT was the first to bring the concept of coworking to Armenia years before anyone else talked about it. What started as a single venue in downtown Yerevan has expanded over the years to include several venues across the city and reach other Armenian provinces as well. The moment you enter LOFT, you can feel the mix of contemporary decor with traditional touches throughout the space. It's neither overly decorated nor plain but strikes a balance that feels practical and conducive to a relaxed atmosphere for remote workers.

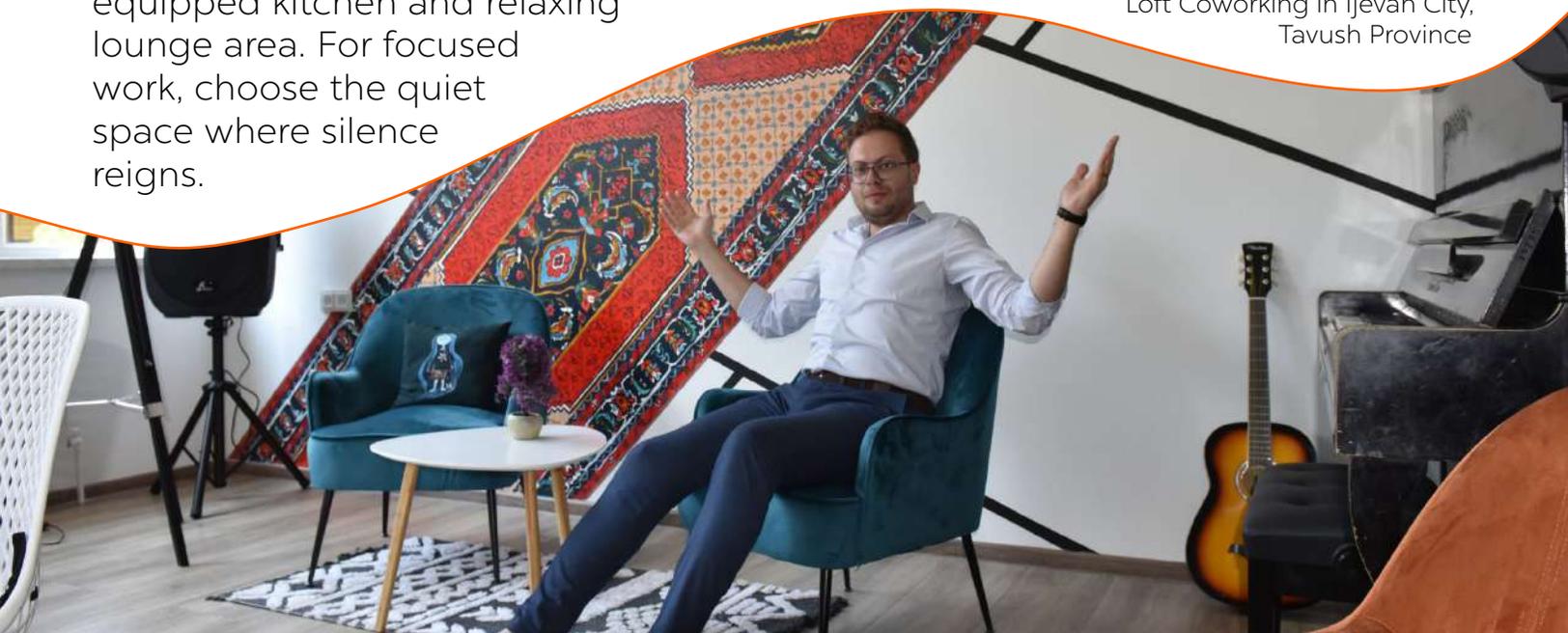
Thriving ecosystems are more than just desks and chairs, and LOFT understands this. It offers a diverse range of amenities and services designed to foster a sense of community, from cozy meeting rooms and event spaces to a well-equipped kitchen and relaxing lounge area. For focused work, choose the quiet space where silence reigns.

Alternatively, work in the relaxed lounge where select music and the gentle hum of collaboration or entertainment provide a background ambiance. Whenever I organize workshops in Armenia, LOFT is my go-to option. I usually rent the Yellow or Red Room there and host productive events.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of meeting Ohannes Arakelyan, co-founder of LOFT, in Ijevan City, Tavush Province. As part of LOFT's mission to spread the coworking culture in Armenian regions, he was in Ijevan, collaborating with the municipality and the Tavush Tourism Development Agency NGO to launch LOFT Ijevan.

One thing I appreciate about LOFT is how they blend Armenian culture with modern coworking space standards. Step into any of their halls, and you'll immediately notice cultural aspects here and there, something that says "Welcome to Armenia." This is exemplified by the traditional Armenian carpet painted on the wall of LOFT Ijevan.

Loft Coworking in Ijevan City,
Tavush Province



GROUND ZERO SPECIALTY COFFEE



The Community You Belong To

Ground Zero Specialty Coffee is the first venture cafe in Armenia and the region, where founders meet, and investors look for the next unicorn. Established by Karén Gyulbudaghyán, an American-Armenian revolutionizing the entrepreneurship landscape, it serves as a vibrant hub for international remote workers and local professionals, nurturing a community of ambition and innovation.

Whenever I feel uninspired or lacking motivation, I head to Ground Zero. The energy of everyone around pursuing their dreams is truly infectious. The air itself is filled with ambition and potential. Moreover, Karen's dedication to quality shines through in every cup of coffee served at Ground Zero. My personal favorite is the Glace', a delicious mix I'm quickly becoming addicted to.

Ground Zero regularly hosts breakfast events at 8:30 am, which is pretty unique in Armenia, to further ignite the entrepreneurial spirit. These gatherings bring together 40-50 guests, including inspiring individuals from around the world, to connect, share knowledge, and collaborate. Host Karen, along with his esteemed guests, actively contributes to building a stronger professional community within the country.





This venture cafe has been setting new trends in Armenia and developing new cultures of wellbeing, partnerships and global business mindset. It's a unique platform for starting collaborative projects and initiatives in various industries like food, high-tech, sports, arts and crafts. In fact, Ground Zero is the place where all the Armenian deep-tech startups have started their journey to UC Berkeley SkyDeck, Forbes top university accelerator. As a fact, Ground Zero has hosted more UC Berkeley SkyDeck alumni founders than any place in the world outside of Berkeley.

Inspired by Ground Zero's innovative concept, other businesses in Yerevan have begun adopting similar models, creating a dynamic ecosystem for entrepreneurs and professionals alike. You can learn more about Ground Zero and brewing entrepreneurship in the September 2023 issue of [Life in Armenia](#).



KENATS HATS

Good Food, Good Mood

Located in Ijevan City, Kenats Hats truly cares about the quality of food they offer, all the way to the end. This dedication to quality extends beyond the plate, creating a high-quality atmosphere perfect for remote workers seeking a [productive and comfortable space](#). Whether you're starting your day with breakfast or enjoying a late dinner, Kenats Hats has delicious food and drinks available anytime to satisfy your cravings.

With an [in-house bakery and bread oven](#), the aroma of fresh-baked goodness fills the air, setting a warm and inviting mood. Kenats Hats is more than just a place to work; it's a place where good food sets the mood, and what better recipe is there for success?

Kenats Hats is a full multi-story facility. The bottom floor boasts a modern, sun-drenched restaurant where you can enjoy food amidst lively music and a vibrant atmosphere. Do you feel stressed over work and need a quiet space for concentration? [Seeking something calmer?](#) One floor up, you'll find a spacious area filled with carefully selected seats to suit every potential taste. Here, the music is calmer and different, and focusing is easier, especially near the fireplace during the cold winter nights.





Collaborating with colleagues and looking for a place to meet up and kickstart your project? The third floor is equipped with **professional meeting and conference rooms**, offering a quieter environment than the other two floors. It's the perfect place to host a meeting, work on something that requires focused thinking, and still enjoy the same high-quality food from the kitchen.

I've been to Kenats Hats several times, alone or with friends, and have always enjoyed what I've ordered there. Once, I mentioned that I had to make an online call and needed a quiet space for it. After showing me around, I inquired about the prices and received a surprising answer: there's no need to pay if you're only going to have a call. You can stay for an hour or so; the place is yours.



UNICORN COMMUNITY CAFE

Nurturing the Startup Ecosystem

The Unicorn Community Cafe is more than just a place to grab a coffee; it's a vibrant ecosystem where startups grow, ideas take flight, and [connections are made](#). Step inside the cafe, and you'll be greeted by a warm, inviting atmosphere. The modern design is functional and comfortable, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. Here, you'll find startup founders at various stages of development, from fledgling ideas to established businesses, all sharing the same energy and spirit of innovation.

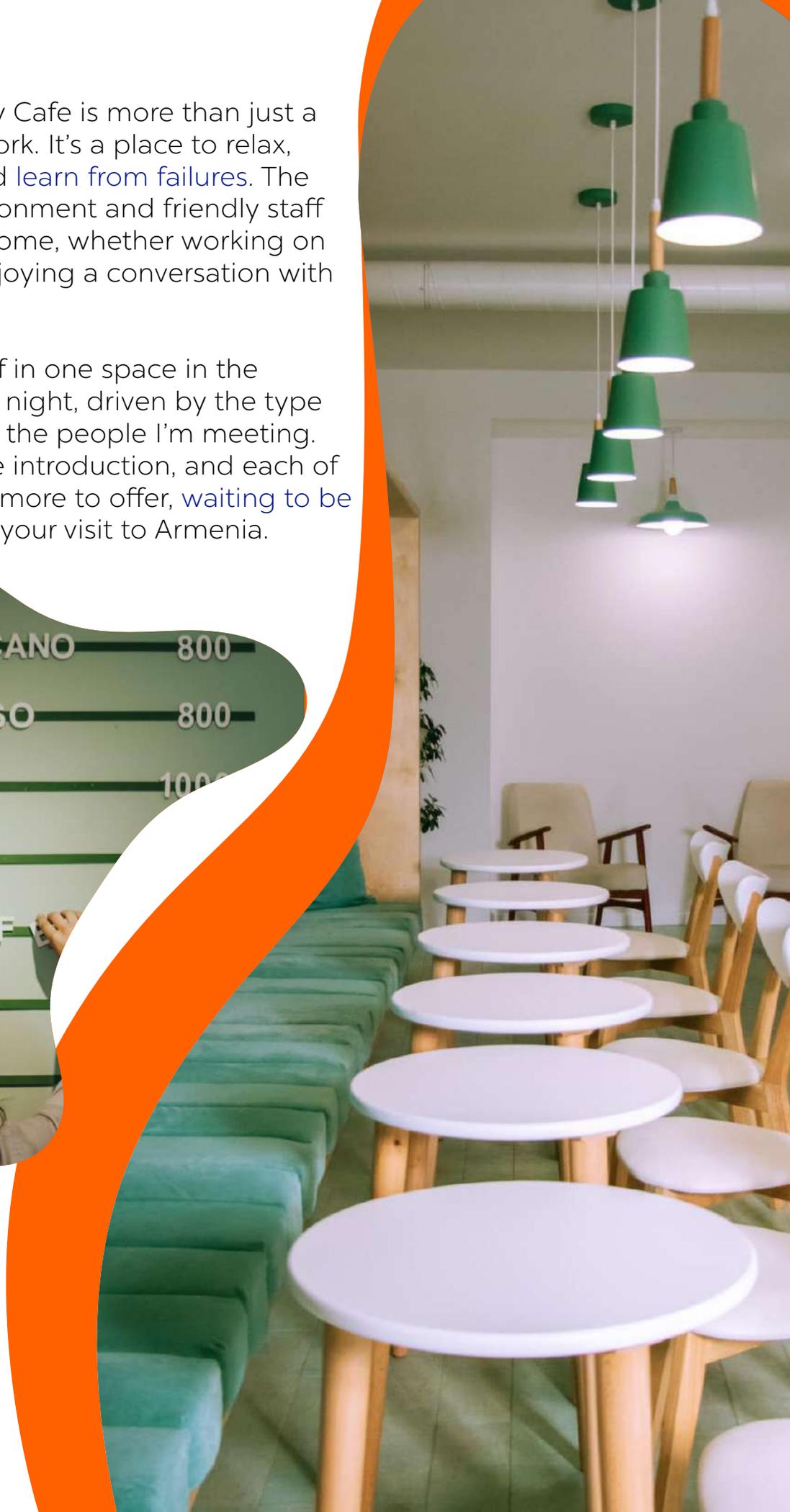
The cafe's menu reflects this spirit, with unique coffee creations like the "AI Cappuccino," the "Lean Espresso," and the "Hacker Americano". But the cafe offers more than just caffeine; it's a platform for sharing ideas, learning from others, and building connections to propel your business forward.

The Unicorn Community Cafe is [committed to nurturing the startup ecosystem](#) in Armenia. They host various events designed to connect entrepreneurs, investors, and industry experts. These events include [Coffee Talks](#), where renowned founders and successful entrepreneurs share their experiences and insights with attendees; [Movie Nights](#), where professionals gather to watch movies related to the startup industry, followed by networking opportunities; and [Breakfast with an Angel](#), where attendees have the chance to hear from an angel investor and learn about their investment strategies. Recently, Unicorn launched a series of events called [Qloong](#). These events are designed for startup founders to pitch their ideas and receive honest feedback from seasoned judges. Think of it as a constructive, no-holds-barred roasting session. The goal is to expose potential pitfalls, identify areas for improvement, and help startups pivot or refine their business models for ultimate success.



The Unicorn Community Cafe is more than just a place to work and network. It's a place to relax, celebrate successes, and [learn from failures](#). The cafe's comfortable environment and friendly staff make it easy to feel at home, whether working on your next big idea or enjoying a conversation with a fellow entrepreneur.

Sometimes, I find myself in one space in the morning and another at night, driven by the type of work I'm tackling and the people I'm meeting. This list serves as a mere introduction, and each of these venues has much more to offer, [waiting to be discovered firsthand](#) on your visit to Armenia.



CAPITAL IS IN THE AIR

ARMENIAN DATING IS CLEARLY ABOUT MONEY, NOT LOVE



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

CAPITAL IS IN THE AIR ARMENIAN DATING IS CLEARLY ABOUT MONEY, NOT LOVE

From the heart pounding with anticipation to the heady mix of excitement and uncertainty, Love whispers its promises. It's a choice made, a commitment offered, a constant devotion to the shared journey with another. Love doesn't fear, nor does it rejoice in misfortune. They say Love is about compromise, patience, and understanding. But what if Love wasn't earned but bought? What if it wore two faces: one giving, the other seeking? Perhaps then, **Love could be a transaction!**

On November 17, 2023, I was invited to COWO Mergelyan by a friend to **a speed dating session** to witness firsthand how love can become a transaction in the Armenian capital city of Yerevan. In this practice, as far as I saw, you can forget the usual dating charade – no need for the butterflies-inducing compliments, the first date jitters, or the drawn-out dinner conversation. This interaction is short, concise, and leaves no room for exclusivity. In fact, **exploring other options is encouraged.**

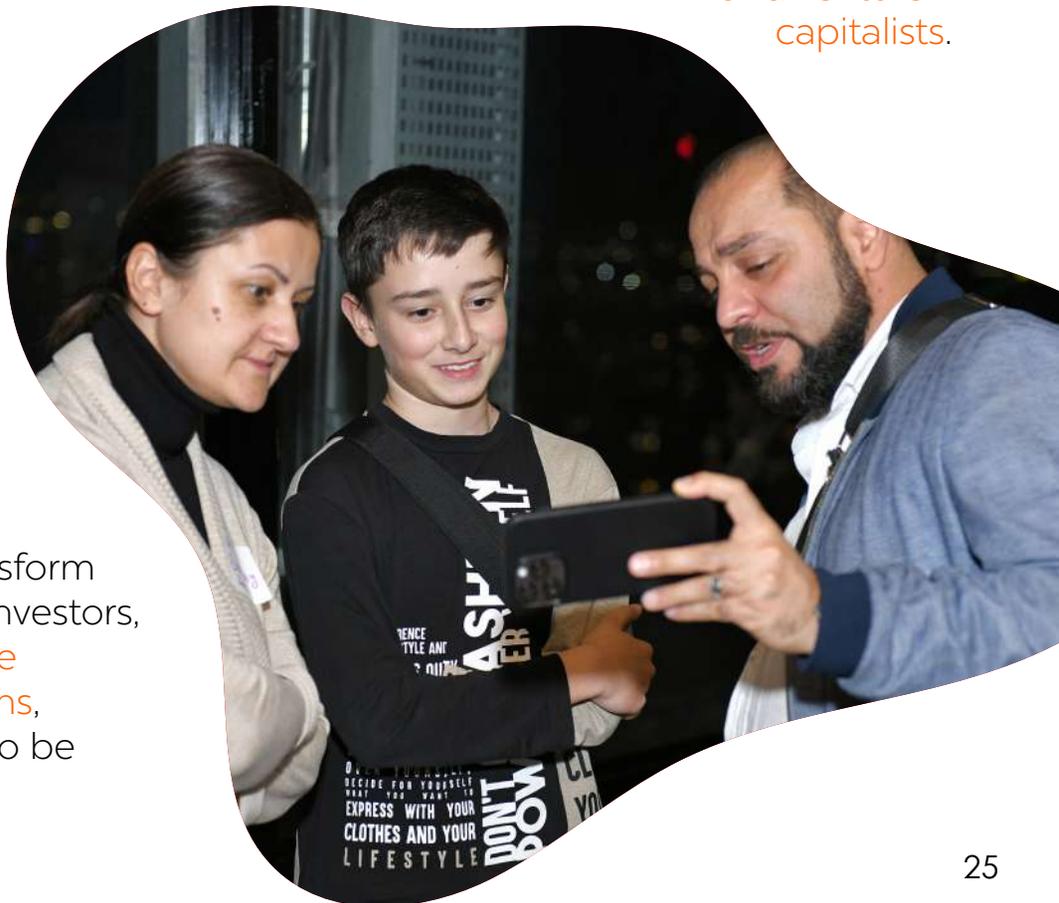




To secure the date, your game needs to be sharp, especially with **80+ participants invited** to the speed dating session under one roof. Every participant has the opportunity to join 15-20 speed dates with **a time window of 4 minutes each**. A relationship of sorts could unfold in these short minutes, and these seemingly superficial encounters can forge lifetime partnerships.

Cupid was absent from this speed dating session because what truly set it apart was its honest approach to romance: it was all about the money. Let me introduce myself quickly: if you like me, **let your bank account do the talking**. If not, well, good luck to the next contestant! Things became clearer as I realized the participants in this speed dating session were not ordinary men and women but **startup founders and venture capitalists**.

In the heart of the financial district, where fortunes are made and deals are struck, this isn't your typical corporate mixer; it's **investor speed dating**. For entrepreneurs, it's a chance to find their ideal partner who fulfills their most pressing needs. This interaction offers the resources necessary to transform their vision into reality. For investors, it's a treasure hunt, **a chance to uncover potential unicorns**, the next big thing waiting to be unveiled to the world.



The space was filled with startup founders; each came with innovative ideas and burning ambition, hoping to be paired up with keen-eyed investors seeking the next big break. Like a whirlwind romance, these brief encounters can ignite sparks of a potential alliance, where passion meets prudence and **dreams meet funding**.

The deal is simple; this affair begins with a simple registration, declaring that an entrepreneur is ready to enter the realm of all possibilities. Each 4-minute conversation is a rapid-fire exchange of ideas, a **short pitch encapsulating the essence of a business plan** to melt the hearts of investing whales.

The air crackles with excitement as entrepreneurs showcase their revolutionary products and demonstrate game-changing approaches. Investors listen closely as their minds sift through the deluge of information, evaluating the potential of each financial venture. An investor's **capital, experience, and professional connections** are a startup's diamond and planned growth; high revenue is an investor's best friend. This time, being judgy and picky helps; our lovers aren't looking to settle; they're looking for the best of the best.



We were amid Global Entrepreneurship Week in Armenia, which took place from November 13th to 19th, 2023. **Over 25 events** spanning conferences, talks, panel discussions, competitions, showcases, and workshops were organized nationwide to celebrate and empower entrepreneurship and the thriving startup ecosystem Armenia has become known for in recent years.

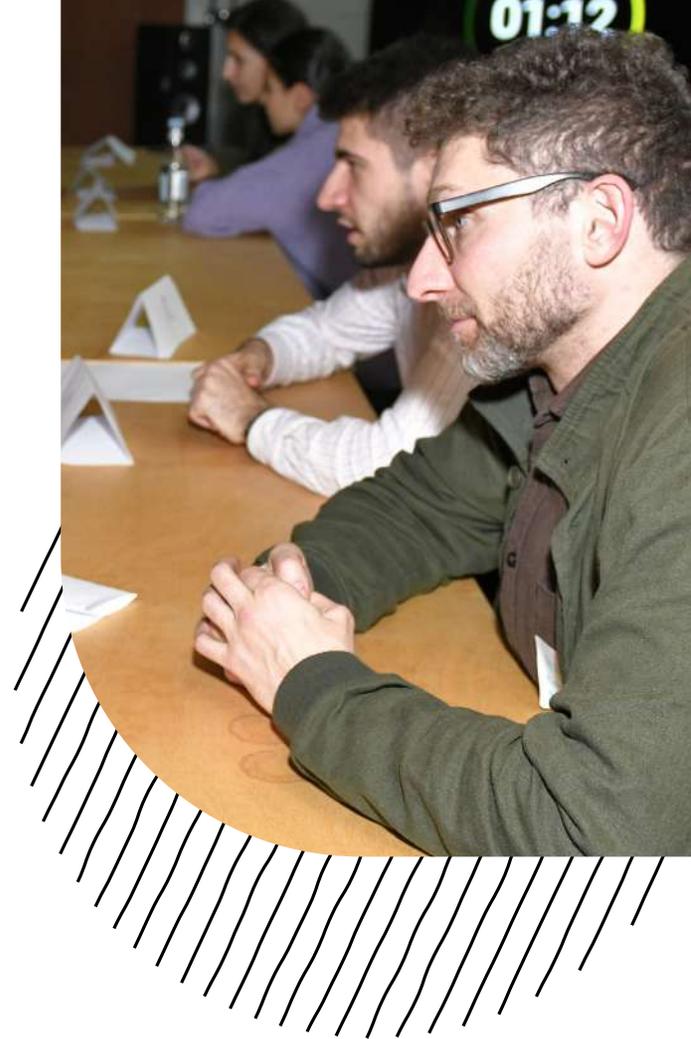
Startup Speed Dating, a unique networking opportunity organized by the Startup Grind Yerevan Chapter within the framework of Global Entrepreneurship Week, was one of these events. It brought together startups, investors, mentors, and connectors from the Armenian startup ecosystem for **facilitated networking**. The format turned out to be completely new in Armenia; some were a bit hesitant to participate, thinking it was all about serious dating!

Inspired by enthusiastic participant feedback, the Startup Grind Yerevan Chapter will **host more frequent speed dating sessions**. Moreover, it has been made clear that these events aren't exclusively for founders with established startups or those with startup ideas seeking funds; they present an opportunity for entrepreneurship enthusiasts to meet industry leaders, receive professional advice, or even expand their network for future plans. **Everyone interested is encouraged to participate** in future events, whether they have already founded a startup or not.

The level of interest in investor speed dating is unsurprising, given Armenia's vibrant startup ecosystem and the pervasive entrepreneurial spirit. For Armenians, innovation represents a crucial pathway to global impact and leaving a lasting mark on humanity—a **reality they deeply understand**.

In this fast-paced world of finance and entrepreneurship, it's about pursuing business, the determination for progress, and the thrill of making big bucks. So, let the investor speed dating commence! Let the sparks fly, let the alliances be forged, and let the **next wave of innovation be unleashed**.

Credits to the Entrepreneurship and Product Innovation Center (EPIC) of the American University of Armenia (AUA), the official representative of GEN in Armenia since 2021, for organizing GEW Armenia 2023, not only in Yerevan, but also in Gyumri, Goris, and 16 other communities all over Armenia, engaging 1,500 participants.



LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

SANTA FOUND
WORK-LIFE BALANCE!
YOU TOO CAN DO THE SAME

MOVE TO ARMENIA

WORK REMOTELY
ENJOY YOUR LIFE



SAFE SPACES, BRIGHT FUTURES

MARUK'S PROJECT FOR CHILDREN IN ARMENIA



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**DIANA
MARUKYAN**

CO-FOUNDER AT
MARUK'S PROJECT



SAFE SPACES, BRIGHT FUTURES MARUK'S PROJECT FOR CHILDREN IN ARMENIA

Inna and Diana Marukyan, two Dutch Armenians, considerate of their fellow Armenians, have been realizing projects since 2016. From providing families in need with food and clothing to organizing school trips for children in the regions. Since Inna and Diana had a desire to make a lasting impact on their homeland, they sought a sustainable way to help beyond traditional monetary donations. Recognizing the challenges faced by hardworking Armenian individuals, **especially single parents**, they established Maruk's Project's Daycare in collaboration with the Dutch embassy in Armenia.

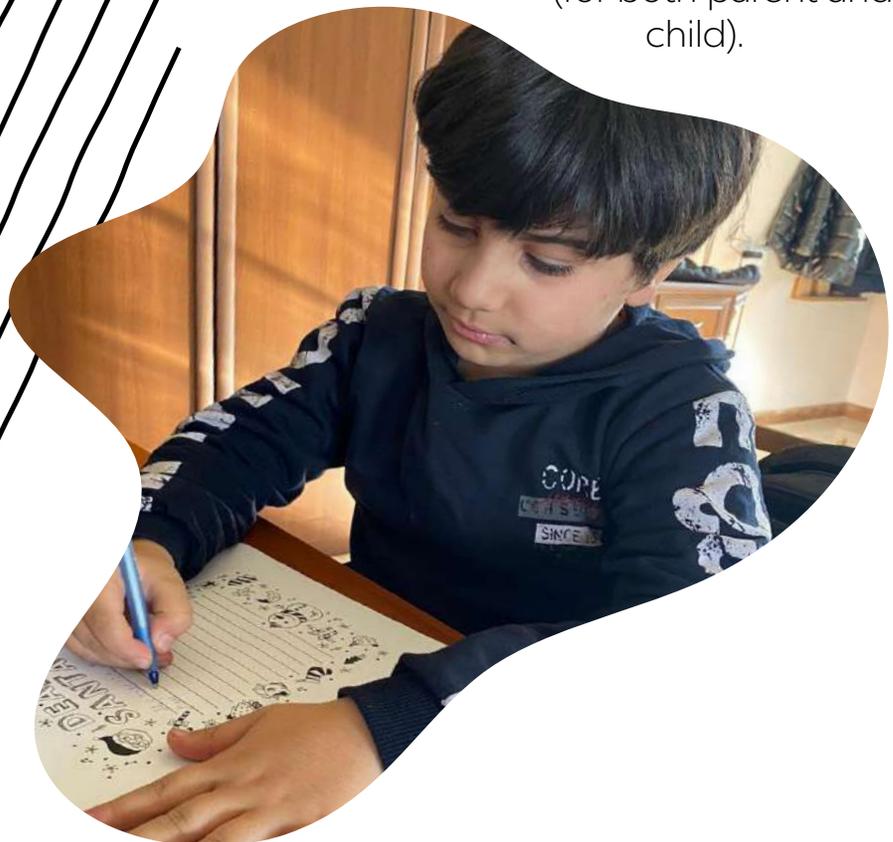
Rather than focusing on aiding specific families, Inna and Diana aimed to create a broader impact by establishing a daycare center in Yeghvard, Kotayk region. Children of single parents, aged between 6 and 10 years, are provided with free guidance by qualified teachers in preparing their homework, and, where necessary, extra attention is given to **children with learning disabilities**.





In addition, a qualified psychologist engages in the children's mental state. On top of that, volunteers from the area assist children with preparing their homework for the English subject. The daycare **allows parents to work with the peace of mind** that their children will be cared for and prepared for a positive future.

The combination of supporting the workforce and aiming to allow children to experience a nurturing environment, foster their dreams, and receive quality care from professionals is, they believe, the **perfect formula for a bright future** (for both parent and child).



Since its establishment, Maruk's Project has received support from individuals and companies in the Netherlands and Belgium, but especially from the Dutch embassy in Armenia. However, to sustain its operations, expand daycare facilities, and ensure the continued provision of quality care for children, the project relies on donations.

Spread the joy this holiday season! Click here to [donate to Maruk's project](#) and support their efforts to provide Armenian kids and their families a better future. In the spirit of Christmas, the children recently wrote heartfelt letters to Santa, and **your contribution can make their wishes come true**. Join us in making this festive season brighter for these young ones!

Feel free to browse [Maruk's project website](#) for more information about the daycare center and the work done so far. You can also contact them directly through info@maruksproject.com



LA BIENNALE DI YEREVAN

HOW AN ITALIAN VISIONARY ESTABLISHED AN ART FACTORY FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN ARMENIA



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**FABIO
LENZI**

CO-FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN OF
THE BOARD AT YEREVAN BIENNIAL
ART FOUNDATION



LA BIENNALE DI YEREVAN HOW AN ITALIAN VISIONARY ESTABLISHED AN ART FACTORY FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN ARMENIA

Living in Armenia as an expat can be a rewarding and enriching experience. While challenges exist, the positive aspects of life in Armenia **often outweigh the difficulties**. With an open mind and a willingness to adapt, foreigners can find a fulfilling life in this unique and welcoming country.



One common thing between expats with no Armenian roots is that whenever they meet, they ask each other, “What brought you here?” This is inevitably followed by a second question: “**What made you stay?**” While the answer to the first question is always diverse, reflecting the varied paths that led these individuals to Armenia, the response to the second question is remarkably consistent: “There’s something about Armenia, something in the air that **makes you fall in love with the country.**”

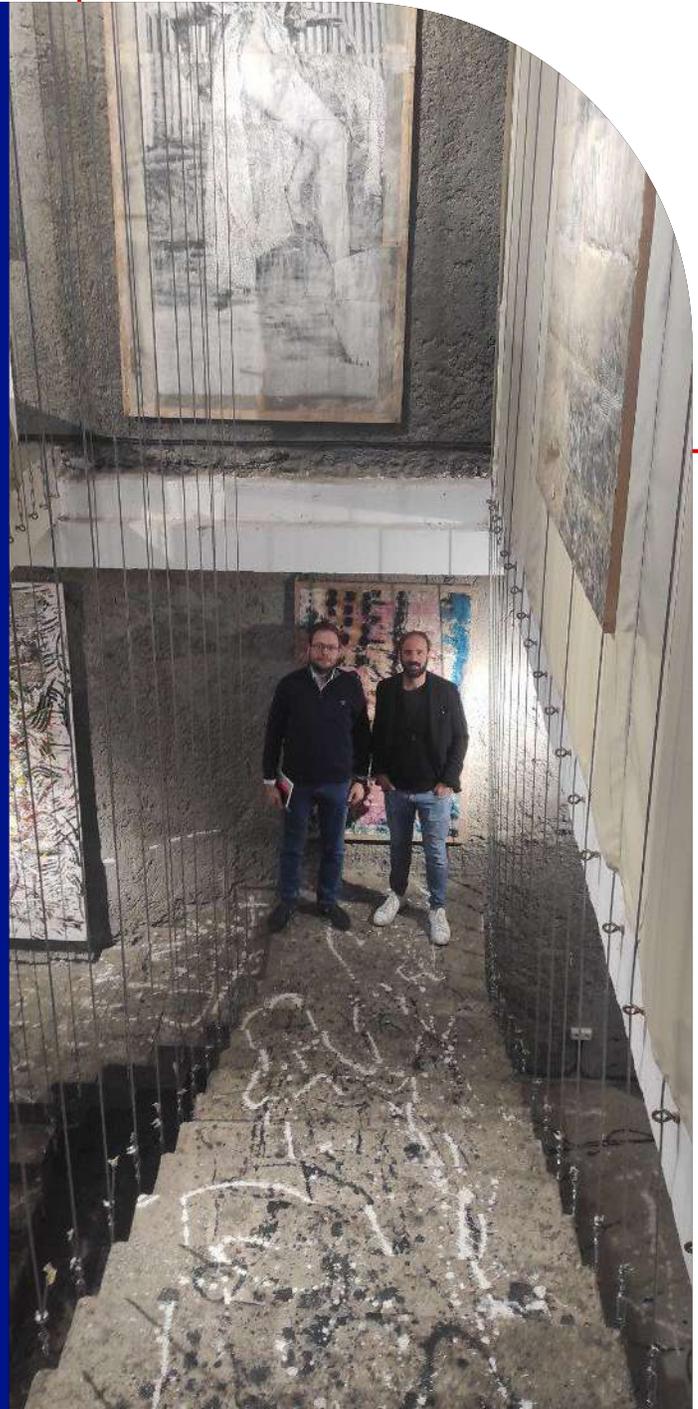
A1 Art Space



It wasn't until earlier this month that I considered myself unique in dropping digital nomadism and relocating to Armenia as a resident. However, meeting Fabio Lenzi in Yerevan changed my perspective because I learned I wasn't the only digital nomad who made such a decision.

An Italian national, Fabio traveled the world as an economic reporter and first arrived in Armenia in 2013. Unsurprisingly, he fell in love with Yerevan and decided to make it his home. Interestingly, he relocated **around the same time I did**. Fabio is the co-founder of the Yerevan Biennial Art Foundation (founded in November 2019), A1 Art Cafe' and The Art Factory. He has played a significant role in advancing the art movement in Armenia, fostering connections between local artists and the **global artistic community**.

When some friends told me about Fabio, I knew I had to meet him. Last month, we met in his art cafe, with countless questions swirling in my mind, including the two regular questions I mentioned above.



A Biennale With an Armenian Taste

Fabio saw clearly that Armenia had two main things to offer the world: art and culture. He envisioned La Biennale di Yerevan taking place amidst the vibrant Armenian streets, showcasing the country's rich artistic heritage and fostering international cultural exchange.

Fabio was inspired by the Venice Biennale, which is a major international art exhibition held every two years in Venice, Italy. It is one of the world's oldest and most prestigious art exhibitions and is considered one of the most important events in the global art calendar.

Venice Biennale is divided into two main sections: the International Art Exhibition and the International Architecture Exhibition. Additionally, the Biennale also features a number of other events and exhibitions, including a film festival, a music festival, and a theater festival. It is a major tourist destination, attracting millions of visitors worldwide. According to Fabio, during the Venice Biennale, the streets of Venice come alive with a vibrant energy that is unlike any other time of year, and temporary art installations pop up in unexpected places, adding a touch of surprise and delight to every corner.

The Art Factory

An Armenian Biennale has the potential to bring significant cultural and economic benefits to the country.

It would be a major step forward for Armenian art and culture and help strengthen Armenia's position on the world stage. The Biennale could also play an important role in Armenian cultural diplomacy, promoting regional peace and reconciliation. By bringing together artists from different cultures, the Biennale could help to break down barriers and create understanding and tolerance. This is especially important in a region that has been plagued by conflict for many years.

Despite facing initial challenges, Fabio's vision for the Yerevan Biennale began to take shape in 2020 with the launch of the online Biennale, named the Time Complex, with artistic director Lorenzo Fusi. This digital platform provided a virtual space for artists to exhibit their work and connect with a global audience.



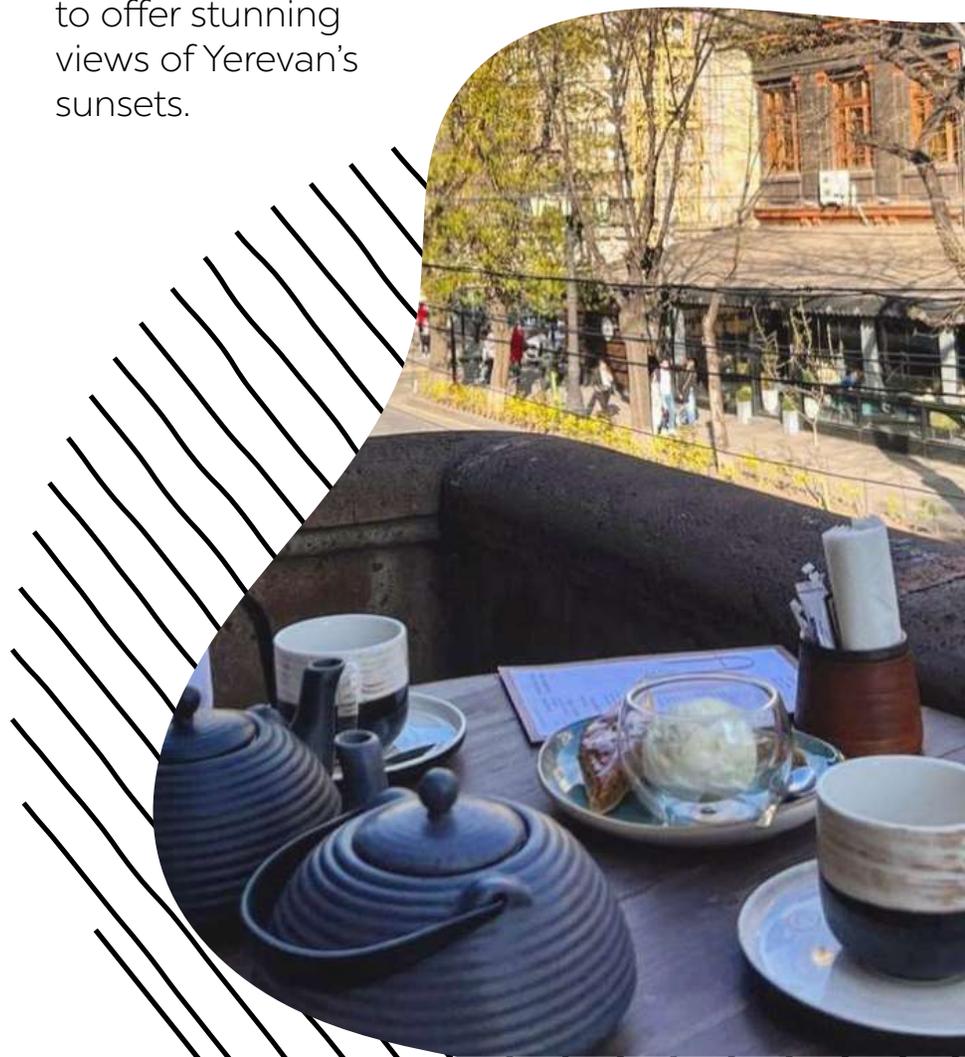
In 2025, the Yerevan Biennale will take its next major step forward with the on-site Biennale, a physical event bringing together thousands of artists, curators, and art enthusiasts worldwide. This landmark event will be held in various venues throughout Yerevan, showcasing the city's vibrant cultural scene and its growing reputation as a center for contemporary art. The Biennale will provide a platform for Armenian artists to showcase their work to a wider audience and to connect with international art professionals. This exposure will be invaluable in raising the profile of Armenian art and contributing to its development and growth.

Yerevan's Biennale won't be anywhere close to Venice's Biennale at this point because you simply can't compete with an event that has been taking place since 1895. However, Yerevan's Biennale would have something Venice doesn't have, and that's the Armenian taste infused in every corner of the Biennale.

A Trip to The Art Factory

Being the co-founder of the Art Factory, Fabio invited me to visit the facility, which is a 20-minute drive from downtown Yerevan. The Art Factory is a [multifunctional space dedicated to fostering creativity](#) for all aspects of culture and innovation. The building begins with The Latitude Art Space on the first floor, a space for artists to showcase their work and organize exhibitions.

Ascending the artistically-architected building, I encountered three floors of art studios. Here, artists worldwide can affordably rent studios to live and create their art in an environment [surrounded by fellow artists and creativity](#). Above these floors lies The Beach Yerevan, a beach-like bar designed to offer stunning views of Yerevan's sunsets.



Next to this building is the art studio of Baron Scancelli, a co-founder and American Armenian artist. Baron's journey from a successful businessman to a passionate artist makes him pretty unique. We discussed digital nomadism, remote work, and his recent residential complexes project [targeting international digital nomads](#) interested in Armenia. It was really nice to know others in Armenia see the potential digital nomadism brings and are developing projects to increase Armenia's position as a destination for remote working travelers.

Throughout the Art Factory, I witnessed creativity in every corner – in the corridors, rooms, halls, and even on tables. Everything there was [a potential piece of art](#), and residents had the opportunity to make it their own. The building's exterior is covered in small purse mirrors that reflect the streetlights, creating a dazzling display of colors. The wooden doors, reminiscent of castles, and the oddly placed neon lights further contribute to

the [environment's artistic vibe](#), making it a perfect haven for artists and their creative pursuits.

While on the way back to Yerevan from The Art Factory, Fabio introduced me to cultural diplomacy and how it uses cultural exchange and dialogue to build relationships, understanding, and cooperation between nations. It can encompass various activities, [including art exhibitions](#), music performances, film festivals, and educational exchanges. Art can be a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy because it can transcend language and cultural barriers. It can provide a platform for artists to share their perspectives and experiences and help create empathy and understanding between different cultures.

So, back to the question we all have in mind when meeting foreigners here: What made Fabio stay in Armenia? His simple words were, "Man, there is something about this city, this country, that [makes you love it for some reason.](#)"



GLOBAL FINANCIAL FREEDOM

TAX IMPLICATIONS ON RETIREMENT PLANS FOR US DIGITAL NOMADS IN ARMENIA



**ANNA
BRUNO**

SENIOR AMERICAN FINANCIAL
ADVISOR



GLOBAL FINANCIAL FREEDOM

TAX IMPLICATIONS ON RETIREMENT PLANS FOR US DIGITAL NOMADS IN ARMENIA

In the [September 2023 issue](#) of Life in Armenia, we discussed retirement planning for American digital nomads considering relocating to Armenia. Today, we delve deeper into finances and continue on the same topic to learn more about healthcare planning and tax implications on retirement plans while living in Armenia.

The tax implications of transferring or maintaining your U.S. retirement accounts while living in Armenia can be complex and depend on several factors, including your account type, income level, and the specific tax treaties between the U.S. and Armenia. Here are some general considerations:

Early Withdrawal Penalties

Early withdrawals (before age 59½) from certain U.S. retirement accounts may result in penalties, regardless of your residency status. These penalties can still apply if you move the accounts to Armenia.

Income Taxation

Assess how retirement account distributions are taxed in Armenia and the U.S. Different account types (e.g., Traditional IRA vs. Roth IRA) may have varying tax implications.

Reporting Requirements

Be aware of any reporting requirements to both U.S. and Armenian tax authorities when you have retirement accounts in both countries.

Explore Tax-Efficient Investment Options for Expatriates

Consider investment options that provide tax advantages for expatriates, such as retirement savings plans that may offer tax benefits in both the U.S. and Armenia. Here are some tax-efficient investment options and strategies to explore:

Tax-Advantaged Retirement Accounts

Depending on your income and tax situation, you may still be eligible to contribute to and maintain U.S. retirement accounts like Traditional IRAs, Roth IRAs, and 401(k)s. These accounts can provide tax benefits and a familiar investment environment.

Local Investment Opportunities

Investigate whether Armenia offers residents any tax-advantaged retirement accounts or pension plans. These accounts may provide local tax benefits and be a tax-efficient way to save for retirement.

Tax-Efficient Investment Accounts

Invest in a diversified portfolio of tax-efficient investments, such as stocks and tax-efficient mutual funds or ETFs. These investments can result in lower annual tax liabilities.

Tax-Efficient Fund Choices

Select investment funds that are designed to minimize taxable distributions, such as index funds or passively managed funds. These investments tend to generate fewer capital gains, reducing your tax burden.

Diversification and Asset Location

Place tax-inefficient investments, such as bonds and actively managed funds, in tax-advantaged accounts and hold tax-efficient investments, like stocks, in taxable accounts. This can reduce the overall tax impact of your investments.

Utilize Tax Treaties

Review any tax treaties or agreements between the U.S. and Armenia to understand how they may impact your investments and income taxation. Tax treaties can help prevent double taxation and provide certain benefits to expatriates.

Tax-Loss Harvesting

Implement a tax-loss harvesting strategy by selling investments that have incurred capital losses to offset capital gains. This can help lower your annual tax liability.



Remember that tax-efficient investing is a long-term strategy that should align with your overall retirement goals. If you're unsure about which investments and strategies are best for your situation, consider working with a

[financial advisor](#) who can provide personalized guidance based on your financial goals and risk tolerance.

You can also check my [YouTube channel](#) for many informative videos about retirement planning and personal finances.

Social Security and Pension Considerations

Review international agreements that may impact your Social Security benefits in Armenia and explore the best strategies for claiming these benefits while abroad.

Social Security and Medicare

If you are eligible for Social Security benefits, you can generally receive them while living in Armenia. However, it's essential to understand the impact of living abroad on your benefits, such as potential reductions due to the Windfall Elimination Provision or the Government Pension Offset. Additionally, Medicare generally does not cover healthcare expenses incurred outside the United States, so retirees in Armenia should consider obtaining international health insurance coverage.



When American citizens retire in Armenia while holding US company-provided pension plans, they need to consider several important factors and plan accordingly to ensure a smooth transition and effective management of these pension assets.

Here are key considerations and steps for planning:

- Determine the type of pension plan you have. It could be a defined contribution plan, such as a 401(k), 457, or 403B plan, depending on the type of employer that you worked for. There are also defined benefit plans, which promise specific benefits upon retirement. You may have one or more of these pension plans by the time you are ready to retire from your U.S.-based company.
- Review the terms and conditions of your pension plan, including vesting requirements, distribution options, and any potential penalties or tax implications associated with early withdrawals.
- Reach out to your former employer's plan administrator or HR department to discuss your retirement plans and explore your pension plan options
- You may choose to leave your pension plan with your former employer, allowing it to continue growing until you decide to begin withdrawals. When you begin withdrawals, typically, you have 2 options: .
 - You can choose to annuitize the plan, which means you will have a pension income guaranteed for life.
 - Or you can choose to roll over your plan into another retirement account, such as an IRA (an Individual Retirement Account). This can provide more control over your investments and allow for greater flexibility in managing withdrawals.
- Be prepared for currency exchange considerations. If you decide to receive pension distributions in U.S. dollars, you will need to convert them to Armenian Drams (AMD) for living expenses, which may involve exchange rate fluctuations and associated fees.
- Be aware of how pension income may affect your Social Security benefits. Some of your Social Security benefits may be subject to taxation, depending on your overall income.
- Plan for the long term. Armenia's cost of living and economic conditions may change over time. Consider how inflation and your retirement lifestyle will impact the sufficiency of your pension income.
- Periodically review your retirement plan to ensure it aligns with your evolving needs and goals. This may include adjusting your investment portfolio or distribution strategy as circumstances change.

Evaluate the Tax Implications of Receiving Social Security Abroad

Understand the tax implications of retiring in Armenia on your Social Security benefits and Medicare coverage. Here are the key implications of SSI benefits:

- 1 Eligibility and Receipt of Benefits:** As a U.S. citizen, you can generally continue to receive your Social Security benefits while living abroad, including in Armenia.
- 2 International Agreements:** The United States has Social Security agreements with some countries, but Armenia is not one of them. These agreements, also known as Totalization Agreements, can help determine eligibility and benefit amounts for retirees living abroad. Totalization Agreements have two primary purposes. First, they eliminate dual Social Security taxation, the situation that occurs when a worker from one country works in another country and is required to pay Social Security taxes to both countries on the same earnings. Second, the agreements help fill gaps in benefit protection for workers who have divided their careers between the United States and another country.
- 3 Direct Deposit:** To receive your Social Security payments while living in Armenia, having them directly deposited into a U.S. bank account is advisable. This can simplify the process and ensure timely payments.
- 4 Reporting Requirements:** You must continue to report changes in your living situation to the Social Security Administration, such as moving to a new country. Failing to do so may lead to issues with your benefits.
- 5 Currency Exchange:** Remember that your Social Security payments will be made in U.S. dollars. If you need Armenian Drams (AMD) for living expenses, you will need to convert your U.S. dollars to AMD, potentially incurring exchange rate fees.
- 6 Limited Coverage Abroad:** Original Medicare (Part A and Part B) provides limited coverage for medical services received outside the United States. It typically only covers emergency medical care in Armenia or any other foreign country.
- 7 Supplemental Insurance:** To fill the gaps in Medicare coverage while in Armenia, you may consider purchasing private international health insurance that includes coverage for routine and non-emergency healthcare services.

8 **Prescription Drug Coverage (Part D):** Medicare Part D prescription drug plans do not provide coverage outside the United States. You may need to explore alternative options for obtaining necessary medications while in Armenia.

9 **Medigap Plans:** Medigap (Medicare Supplement Insurance) plans generally do not provide coverage for healthcare services received outside the United States. Therefore, you should explore alternative coverage options for your medical needs in Armenia.



10 **Returning to the U.S. for Extended Care:** Some retirees choose to return to the United States for extended periods to access Medicare benefits. If you plan to do this, it's important to understand the rules and requirements for maintaining your Medicare coverage.

11 **Consult with Medicare Specialists:** To navigate Medicare coverage while living abroad, consult Medicare specialists or insurance advisors with expertise in international healthcare coverage. They can help you explore options and make informed choices based on your healthcare needs.

Research the requirements and procedures for receiving Social Security benefits while living abroad. Consider the need for supplemental health insurance to cover healthcare expenses not covered by Medicare while in Armenia.

In the January 2024 issue of Life in Armenia, I'll continue on this topic and discuss utilizing tax advantage accounts and healthcare planning options in more detail.

Disclosure

The information provided in this article is intended for informational purposes only and should not be construed as investment advice. It is essential to understand that investment decisions should be made carefully and considerate of your individual financial situation, goals, and risk tolerance.

Readers are strongly encouraged to consult with appropriate financial advisors, tax professionals, and legal experts before taking any specific actions related to investments, retirement planning, or currency hedging. The content in this article does not constitute personalized financial advice or recommendations, and any reliance on it is at your own discretion and risk.

We do not assume responsibility for any financial or otherwise consequences arising from using the information provided in this article. Each individual's financial situation is different, and professional advice is essential to ensure that any actions taken are suitable and tailored to your specific needs.

Startup Tip
Armen A. Avakian
@NotForEveryone
YouTube Channel



Armen A. Avakian

Co-Founder and Chief Business Development Officer at Hexact
Helping over 100,000 users stay one step ahead of their market



Top Myths About Startups

If you work at a startup, then your offices are probably really cool

When I say we've got a startup, people have in mind this image of people driving around on hoverboards and riding bicycles around campus – No, absolutely not! Startup is a grind; there is a reason it's called startup grind.

We have almost 40 full-time employees, and overall, it's not what you think it is. It's long hours, lots of time and effort to get this business off the ground and get it up and running. It's not just a bunch of people hoverboarding around, eating pizza, and going to the cafe. No, it's simply not true.

Our offices are just like any other offices, more or less. We have a coffee machine and a kitchen area, just like normal offices. The only difference

is we have a ton of computers and spaces for things like server rooms and studios and stuff like that. Overall, the atmosphere in the office is more or less the same.

The only difference in startups, the majority of the time, like us, is that you have employee stock options. So all our employees are shareholders. From that perspective, I don't necessarily need to be the bad cop all the time as a manager. I can be a good cop because everyone is motivated to do the best they can. If the business grows, everybody wins, and they know it.

The offices don't have to be cool and awesome, like table tennis and stuff like that. Our office is just like any other office.



@NotForEveryone

SMALL ACTS, BIG IMPACT

A NEW MICRO-DONATION APP IN ARMENIA



Easy way to help Armenia



**ANI
AVOYAN**

CONTENT MANAGER

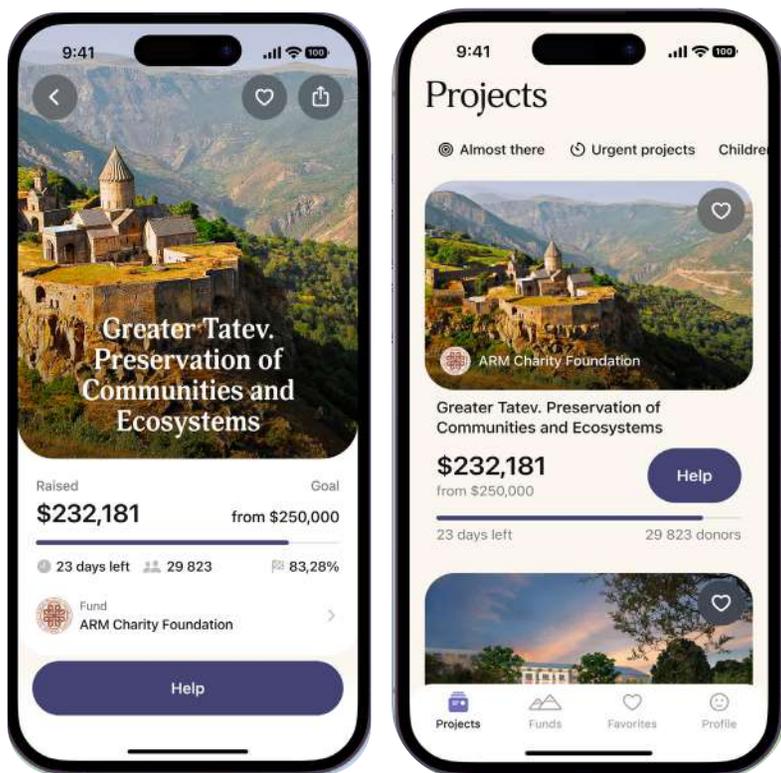


SMALL ACTS, BIG IMPACT A NEW MICRO-DONATION APP IN ARMENIA



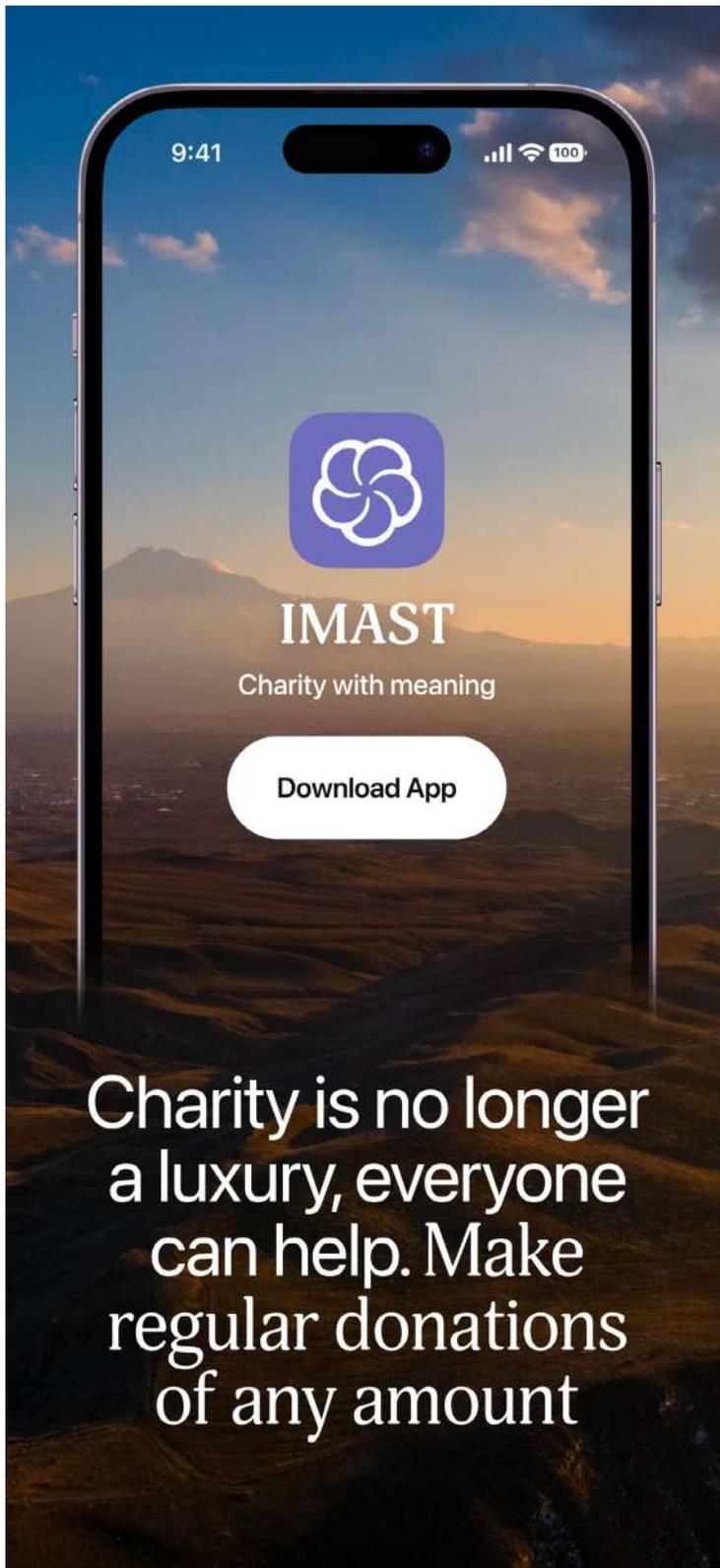
IMAST is a model of how to create a positive social change through digital solutions.”

Hayk Ayrapetian,
founder of IMAST



The idea of the app was initiated by Hayk Ayrapetian, a social entrepreneur and repatriate, who realized that many interesting initiatives already address diverse problems in Armenia. Still, they need to be **unified and reach wider audiences** to carry out their projects. He also saw that, sometimes, the lack of transparency and accountability in Armenia's charitable sector created **skepticism and indifference among donors**, discouraging them from contributing to solutions to prevailing social problems.

The start-up idea is now a reality that addresses these challenges by providing a user-friendly platform for donors to find and support the causes they care about and by requiring nonprofits to undergo detailed legal and financial screening before being verified as reliable.



The app allows users to donate in just a few taps on their smartphones. This is how IMAST aims to develop the giving culture in Armenia, where people will systematically donate, consider it their responsibility, and get motivated by the **changes their micro-donations make.**

“What sets IMAST apart from other similar initiatives,” says Ayrapetian, “is that each mechanism is structured to **make giving a habit in this digital era.**” He mentions that creating a mobile application instead of a website serves that purpose as its features keep the users tuned and engaged in each charitable activity.

Creating a large community of micro-donors and developing the giving culture in Armenia. These are the IMAST micro-donations app’s underlying values that are revolutionizing the country’s charitable sector.

Download the [IMAST app](#) to find out how small acts can leave significant impacts. The app is now available on the App Store and Google Play Store.

HARMONY BEYOND LANGUAGES

HOW ELSE CAN FOREIGNERS LEARN HOW MANY TIMES ARMENIANS KISS ON THE CHEEK!



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**SONA
HOVANNISYAN**

CO-FOUNDER AND GENERAL
MANAGER OF YEREVAN
PERSPECTIVES & FOUNDING
PRESIDENT OF HAYA FESTIVAL



HARMONY BEYOND LANGUAGES HOW ELSE CAN FOREIGNERS LEARN HOW MANY TIMES ARMENIANS KISS ON THE CHEEK!

Last month, I had the pleasure of meeting Sona Hovhannisyan, the founder of Yerevan Perspectives, a leading international music festival in Armenia held annually. The festival invites top-class orchestras and musicians worldwide to perform in Armenia and fosters cultural exchange by touring Armenian musicians to perform on international stages.

With her charming personality and calm words, Sona unveiled a new world before me – a world where music holds true significance in **Armenian cultural diplomacy**. Through the universal language of music, Yerevan Perspectives cultivates connections and promotes peace.

In 25 minutes, Sona recounted the festival's 25-year journey, detailing the renowned musicians and performers who graced the Armenian stages. These weren't just artistic collaborations but **bridges built with each note**, fostering understanding and appreciation for Armenia's unique cultural identity. Such genuine connections forged through music are invaluable for a small nation like Armenia





Sona's vision extended beyond the classical concerts. She spoke excitedly about their future plans to create a **smaller Armenian version of Tomorrowland**: a music campus where performers would play for days and party lovers could bliss out. They envisioned leveraging Armenia's unique geographic advantage – being a convenient 2-hour flight from many EU, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries – to turn Yerevan into a major concert destination. This would not only attract international music fans but also **generate significant tourism revenue** for the country.

By the end of our meeting, Sona invited me to the “Rolando Villazón and Xavier de Maistre” concert on November 11th, where I could

experience firsthand how music connects cultures and **shares Armenian heritage** with the world.

The Concert

On November 11, 2023, a magnificent performance unfolded at the Aram Khachaturian Hall in Yerevan, the Armenian capital, during the 24th Music Festival organized by Yerevan Perspectives.

Rolando Villazón Mauleón, the renowned Mexican operatic tenor, and Xavier de Maistre, the accomplished French harpist, took the stage, captivating the audience with their exceptional artistry. The two talented artists played a curated selection from their shared masterpiece, **the Serenata Latina** album.



Vocabulary of Musical Emotions

Villazón's emotionally charged performance of "Flor de un día" conveyed the full range of emotions in the song, from the tree's deep love for the rose to its heartbreak when she was taken away. Despite the language barrier, the song's emotional impact was undeniable, thanks to music, [the universal language of the human spirit](#).

During the concert, de Maistre played a few solo pieces on the harp, showing great technique and impressing the audience with his mastery of the musical instrument. Additionally, a few songs by Silvio Rodriguez were performed, with Xavier de Maistre [replacing the original guitar music with harp](#), as explained by Rolando Villazón.

The audience's applause erupted in the concert hall as Rolando Villazón and Xavier de Maistre performed the traditional folk song "La Llorona."

People stood up and applauded the emotional performance and the [depth of feeling Villazón expressed](#) as he moved about the stage.

"Caminito" was an outstanding display of artistry and emotion. The song, about moving forward toward a dream despite the pain, resonated deeply with the Armenian audience, which had endured great hardship in recent years. It was clear that the Armenian audience, not a Spanish-speaking one, [felt the song instead of understanding its words](#).

After two hours, the two artists repeatedly attempted to end their performance, but the [audience's applause pulled them back](#) for three more encores. The audience's desire for more music kept them clapping even after the artists left the stage, prompting their joyous return for another round again and again and again.

A gentle running water sound throughout the concert created the [perfect backdrop for the performance](#). It was clear that Yerevan Perspectives crafted the perfect atmosphere for the concert with meticulous attention to detail.

The opera house was packed with Armenians of all ages, some of whom had brought their children to experience authentic musical culture. International attendees were also well-represented throughout the hall, [reflecting Yerevan's diverse population](#).



Culture Beyond Melodies

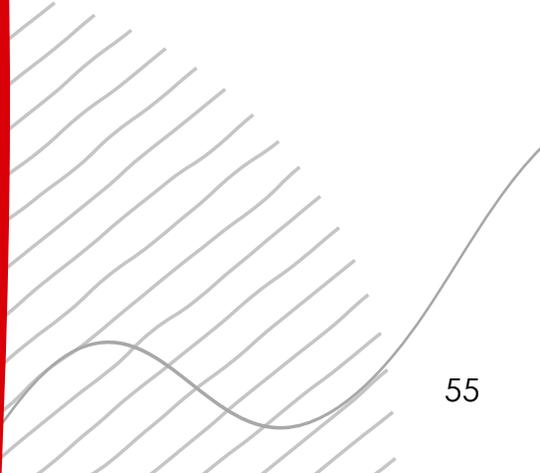
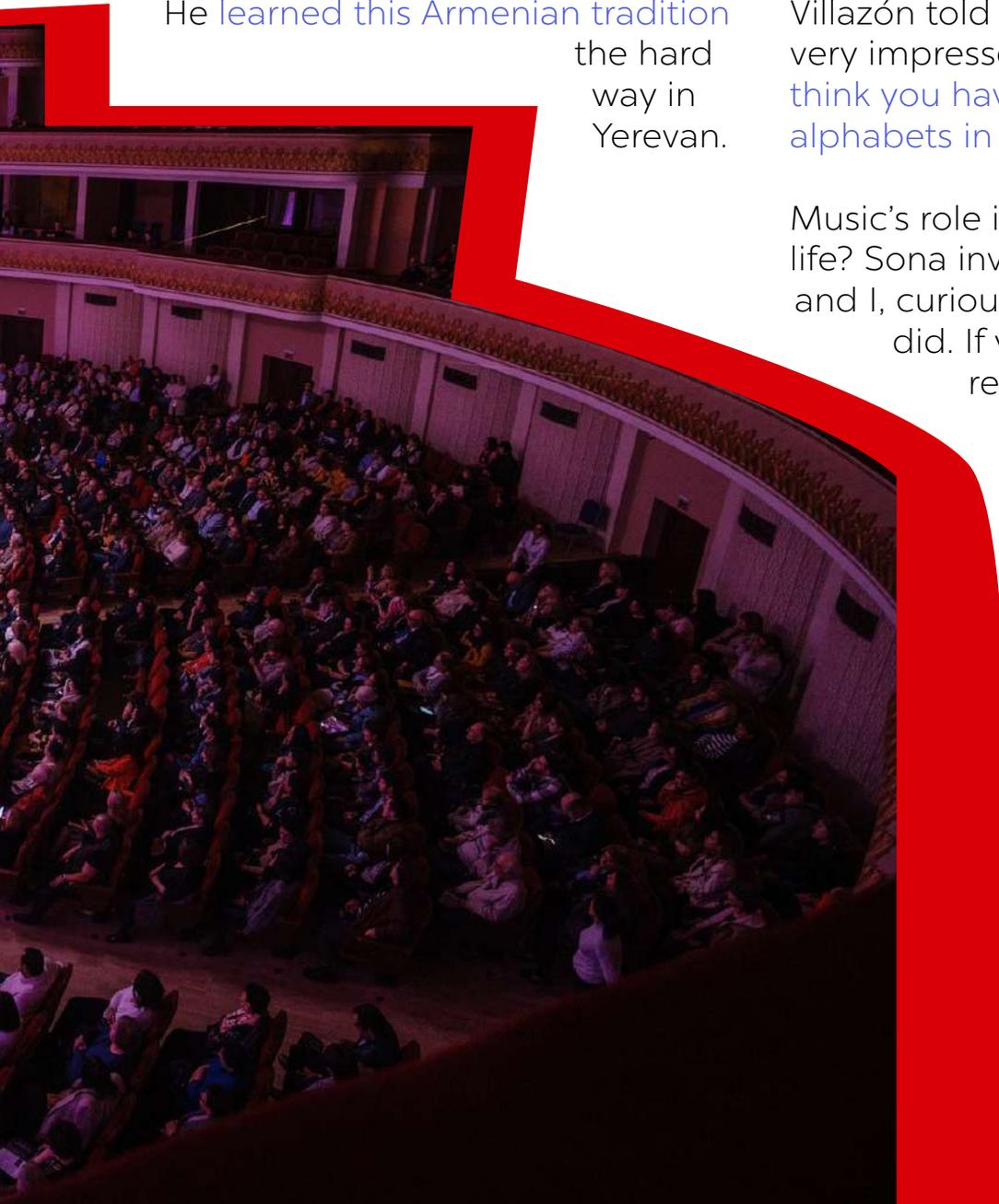
As the concert ended, a young woman from the audience approached Xavier de Maistre, kissed him on the cheek, and then handed him a bouquet of roses. de Maistre wanted to reciprocate with a kiss on the other cheek, which is **unusual in Armenia**. While some cultures kiss three times and others twice, Armenians kiss only once on either cheek. As they say in Armenia, “Just move your head and go with the wave.” The audience laughed, and de Maistre laughed as well.

He **learned this Armenian tradition** the hard way in Yerevan.

Inviting international artists to perform in Yerevan is **a form of cultural diplomacy**, using cultural exchange to build relationships between countries and promote understanding and respect for different cultures. Inviting Villazón and de Maistre to perform in Yerevan is a way to **share Armenian culture with the world** and to build bridges between Armenia and other nations. This was evident at the end of the concert when Villazón told the audience, “I am very impressed with Armenia. **I think you have one of the best alphabets in the world.**”

Music’s role in Armenian daily life? Sona invited me to find out, and I, curious and willing, joyfully did. If you’re considering relocating to this

country, remember that Armenia is not just about pristine landscapes and a thriving tech scene but **a rich cultural life you can experience fully.**



A BLUEPRINT FOR ARMENIAN YOUTH

BUILDING THE FUTURE FROM THE GROUND UP IN ARMENIA



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**ALISA
GALSTYAN**

SENIOR GRADUATE YEAR
STUDENT AT THE ARMENIAN
UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS



**ANITA
IVANYAN**

11TH GRADE SCHOOL
STUDENT

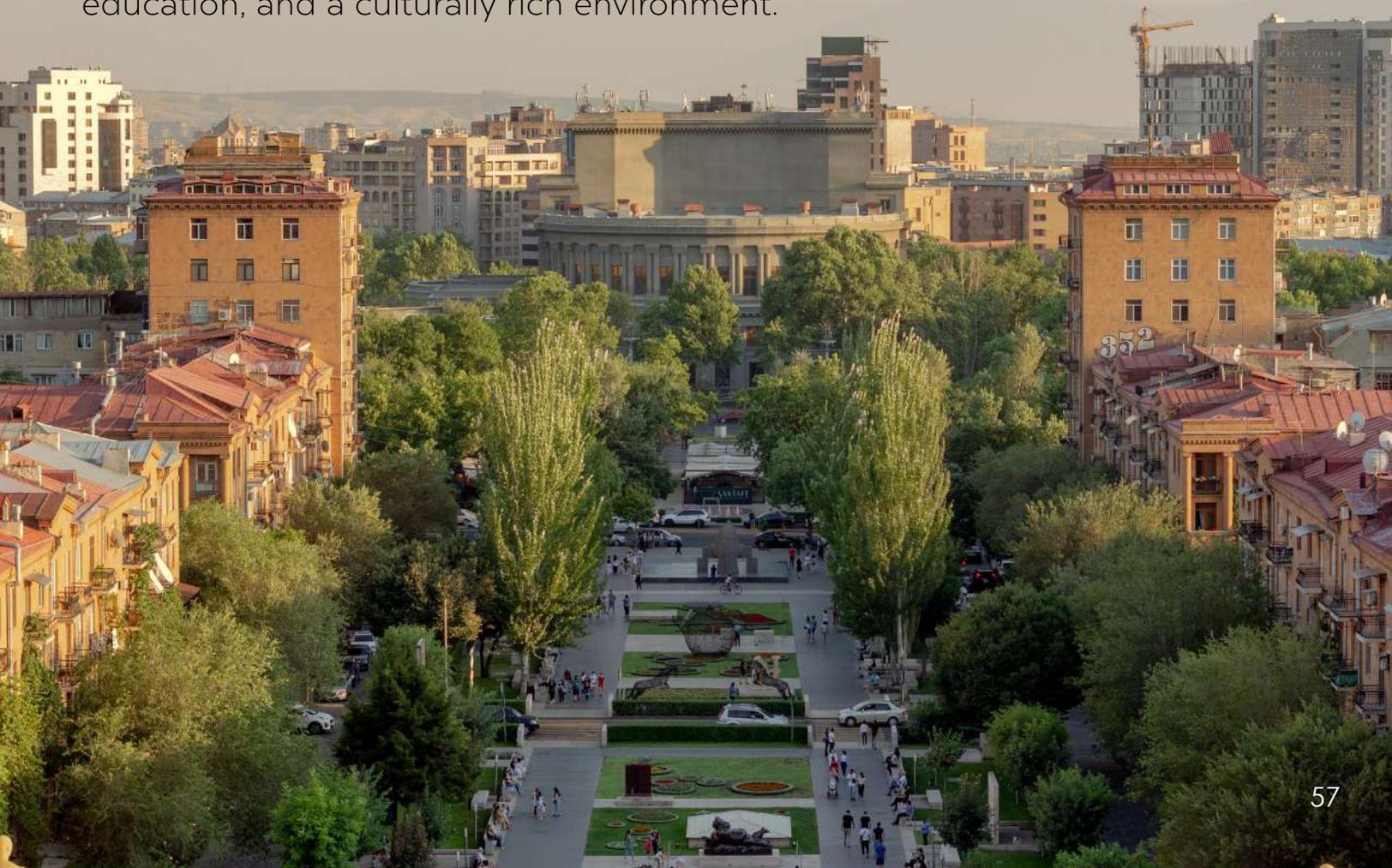


A BLUEPRINT FOR ARMENIAN YOUTH BUILDING THE FUTURE FROM THE GROUND UP IN ARMENIA

One question I frequently receive, almost every month after releasing a new issue of Life in Armenia, is about **the potential Armenia has for children** traveling with their digital nomad parents. People want to know if Armenia compares to the “land of opportunities” and if the country offers something special for kids to help them build a bright future.

My response to everyone who asks about Armenia’s potential is always the same: the idea of a single “land of opportunities” doesn’t exist. Opportunity isn’t bestowed upon us by a magical location; it’s **a construct of individual initiative and drive**. It’s within our own power, regardless of where we are in the world, to create the conditions for success, to push open doors, and forge our own paths.

However, certain countries, like Armenia, undoubtedly provide a fertile ground for children to cultivate their talents and aspirations. These environments nurture growth by offering a supportive infrastructure, access to quality education, and a culturally rich environment.



As The Germans Say, “All Good Things Come in Threes”

The first time you meet someone might be a chance; the second could be a coincidence, but by the third meeting, obviously, **life is crossing your paths** for a reason.

While attending the FemInno Conference in Yerevan this year, I was fortunate to meet two inspiring young volunteers, Anita and Alisa. After the conference, we connected on social media, and I was consistently impressed by their **tireless volunteer efforts** across many other events.

Later, while covering Metrix’s No Bla Bla Marketing Hackathon in Yerevan, I was delighted to reconnect with them in person again. This encounter was followed by a third meeting at the Global Entrepreneurship Week a few weeks later.

Witnessing their dedication and commitment firsthand, I knew Anita and Alisa were **role models for building success** from the ground up in Armenia. To gain deeper insights into their perspectives, I interviewed them in Yerevan and was surprised by the insightful and unconventional ideas they shared.



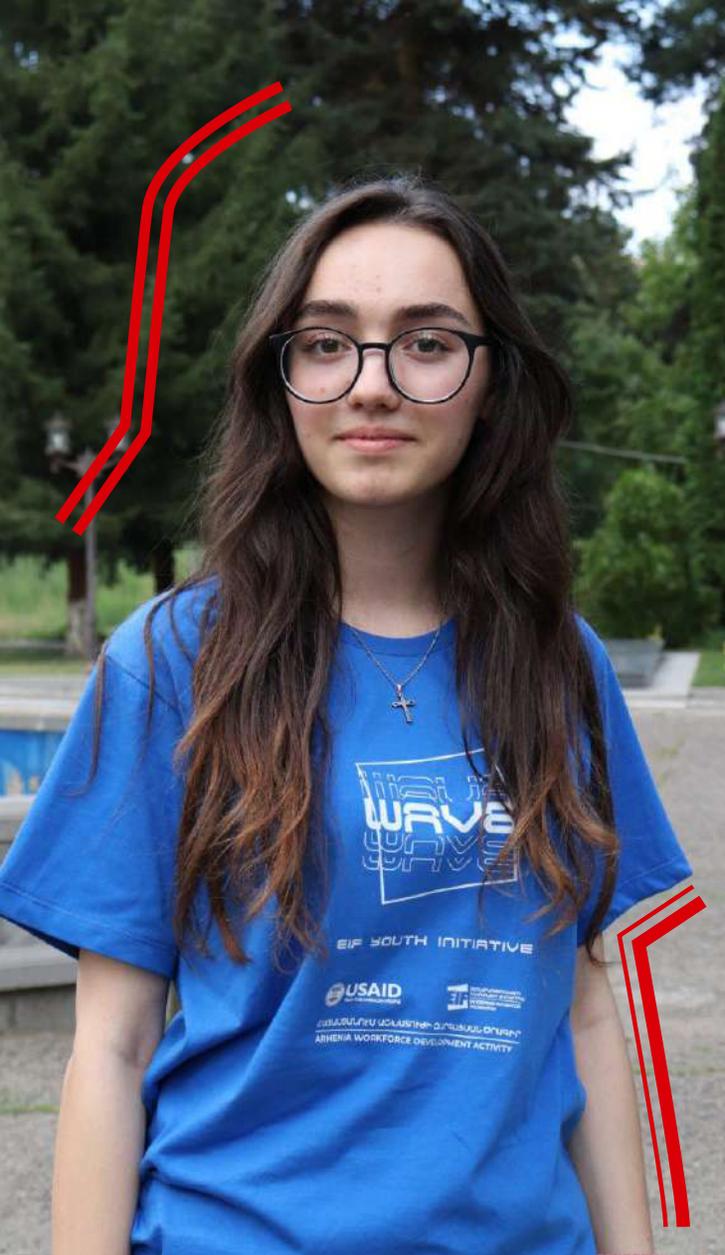
Rising Star

Alisa, a 21-year-old graduating senior at the Armenian State University of Economics, spent a semester in Spain on an Erasmus+ student exchange scholarship. Now nearing graduation, she is considering Master's degree options, with her eyes on available programs at the American University of Armenia. Her impressive work experience at such a young age includes a part-time intern position at Ameria Bank, followed by a job offer she accepted from the same bank. Currently, she is [interning at TeamViewer's office](#) in Yerevan.

Despite her demanding schedule encompassing university studies, internships, and personal life, Alisa prioritizes volunteering for professional events in Armenia whenever possible. When I inquired about her university fees, she informed me they were around 600,000 AMD, though her university entrance exam score earned her a scholarship.

[At just 21](#), this young lady boasts work experience at two major corporations, an academic semester in the EU, and volunteer contributions to many international events in Armenia. Remarkably, she achieved all this independently while her loving family provided full support and guidance.





Young and Ambitious

To my surprise, Anita turned out to be a 17-year-old high school student in her 11th grade. You can imagine my astonishment when I inquired about her college major, only to be met with her response, “I’m still in 11th grade.” Anita, who speaks fluent English, volunteers at major conferences with poise and grace, and possesses a confidence I myself lacked until my late twenties, left a lasting impression on me.

Anita studies English at the American University of Armenia (AUA) and plans to apply there upon high school graduation, pursuing a major in English and Communications. Volunteering has opened doors for Anita, introducing her to the professional community in Armenia despite her young age. Whenever she learns about a conference, international event, or local happening in Armenia, she eagerly applies to volunteer. If she doesn’t initially receive a response, she proactively reaches out through social media messages, securing a volunteer spot for herself.

The Role Volunteering Plays

For 21-year-old Alisa, volunteering represents more than just giving back to the community; it’s a dynamic learning experience. She shared that interacting with professionals from diverse fields has significantly enhanced her soft skills, particularly communication, teamwork, and adaptability. This exposure has broadened her perspective and equipped her with valuable tools for navigating professional environments. Additionally, Alisa highlighted the networking opportunities that volunteering presents. Connecting with established professionals has opened doors to potential career paths and provided her invaluable mentorship.





Anita, the joyful 17-year-old high school student, echoed Alisa's sentiments. Despite her young age, she recognizes the **transformative power of volunteering**. Anita feels that volunteering has been crucial in developing her confidence and communication skills. Sharing ideas and engaging in conversations with experienced professionals has honed her public speaking abilities and **fostered a sense of self-assurance**. Furthermore, Anita emphasized the significance of the professional network she has built through volunteering. These connections have exposed her to diverse career fields and provided her valuable insights into the professional world, even before she began her formal studies.

Unlocking Doors to Success

Alisa and Anita's stories represent the true blueprint for success, not just in Armenia but in many countries. However, in Armenia, the accessibility to international events, professional communities, and opportunities makes opening those doors to success considerably easier. **All you need is the willingness to knock** and actively seek your next chance.

Alisa and Anita are just **two examples of many Armenians** who forge their own paths and build their futures on their own terms. While it's true that no one will hand you success on a silver platter (anywhere in the world, not just Armenia!), this country provides unique



advantages. Those willing to put in the effort can find the road to success and take their first steps at a young age, leveraging Armenia's unlimited academic and professional opportunities and strong international relations.

Throughout the entire conversation, I never felt like I was interviewing two young women who were almost half my age. Instead, I felt like I was engaged in a thoughtful discussion about life paths with two mature ladies who are capable, strong, and aware of every step they take.

By the end of this article, I want to express my gratitude to Alisa and Anita's parents for their dedication to trusting their daughters, nurturing their potential, and ensuring a bright future for them. As a new parent myself, I understand the desire to be around your children and protect them, sometimes even excessively. However, it's crucial to find the right balance when it comes to giving your teenagers the freedom to pursue their dreams. Done correctly, this freedom can be a major factor contributing to their success.

Considering Armenia as your next destination with the family? Wondering about the opportunities it holds for your kids? Well, the answer is now clear: Armenia offers many experiences that will engage, educate, and inspire your children.



BYTE-SIZED BREAKS

THE HEART OF ARMENIAN TECH COMPANIES LIES IN THEIR KITCHENS



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

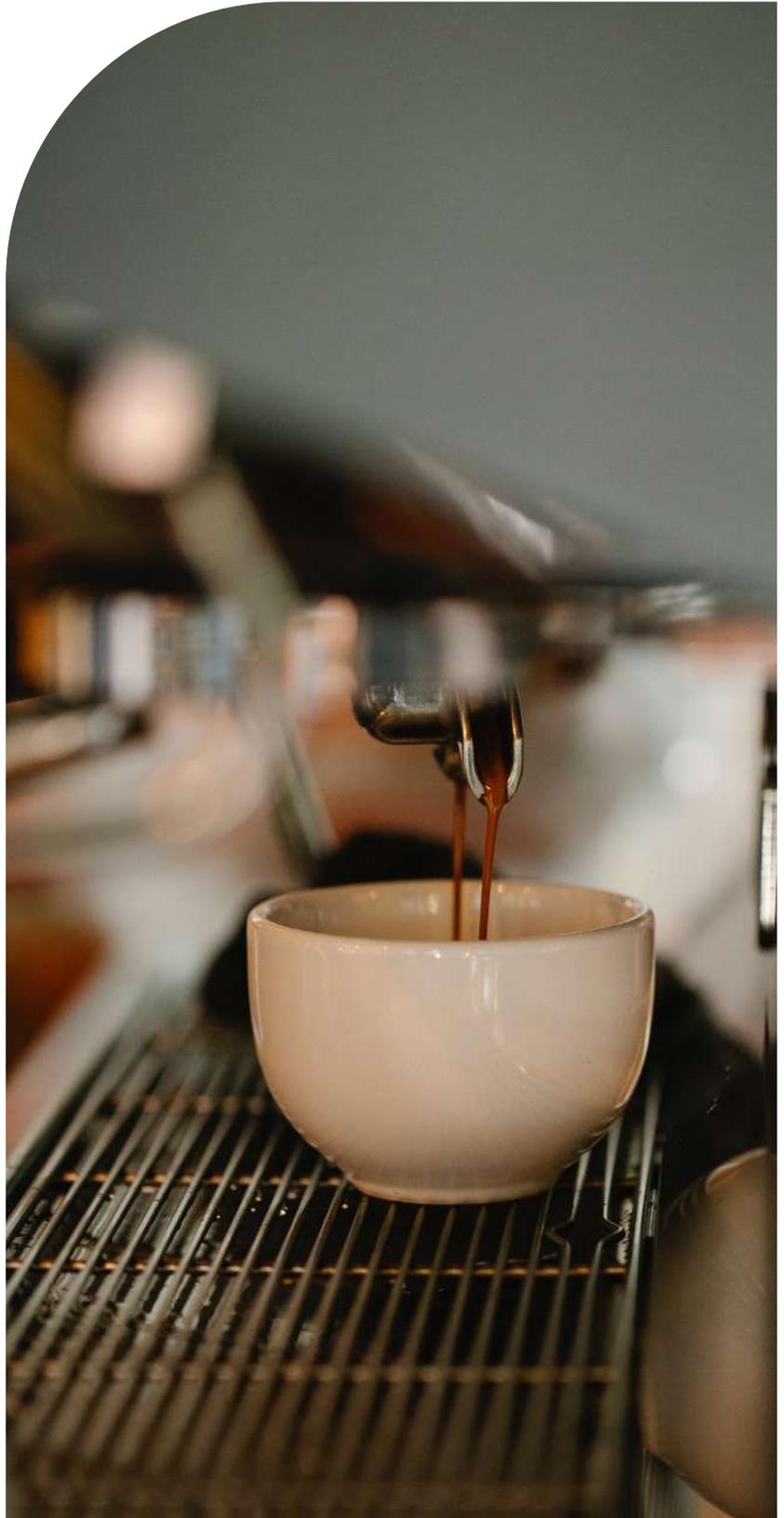


BYTE-SIZED BREAKS THE HEART OF ARMENIAN TECH COMPANIES LIES IN THEIR KITCHENS

As a freelance journalistic writer who has been to many cities around the world and experienced diverse work cultures, one thing has stood out in my collaborations with Armenian companies, particularly in the tech industry: **their unique focus on kitchen spaces.**

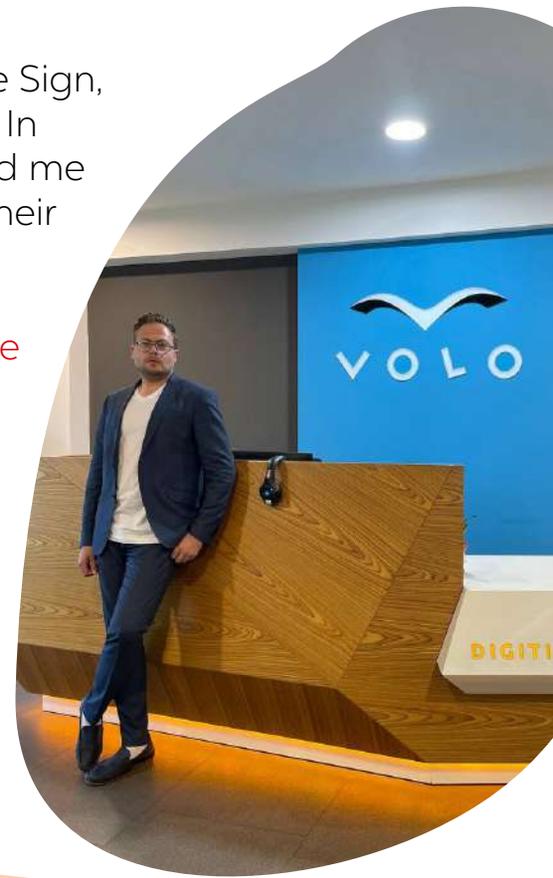
While kitchens and cafes are common in offices worldwide, Armenian companies elevate them to an art form. Spacious kitchen areas, comfortable break lounges, and cafes boasting **barista-quality espresso and cappuccino** are not just perks but cultural cornerstones.

Last year, I visited SADA's Global Delivery Center (GDC) in Yerevan for an interview with Syuzanna Azoyan, the Director of GDC Operations. I remember her words distinctly as she offered me a Cappuccino, **boasting about their office's delicious brew.** And she was right; it was excellent. In fact, I know many cafés that would be jealous of their Cappuccino!



Another example that resonates with this article is Square Sign, a US-based custom sign-making and printing company. In October 2022, Meline Muradyan, the HR Manager, invited me to spend a full day at their Yerevan office to experience their work environment firsthand. The company had a lovely kitchen area equipped with an espresso machine and high-quality coffee, and the **atmosphere around the table during lunch** was truly unforgettable.

Earlier this year, I was invited into VOLO's office in Yerevan by Haykuhi Taneghyan, who, at the time, was the Director of Marketing and Business Development. One of the first things that struck me about their multi-level building was the presence of **not just one but two spacious kitchen areas**. These dedicated spaces provided employees ample opportunities to take breaks, enjoy a bite to eat, and socialize over coffee.



A Company to Remember

I spent several days collaborating with DeeM Communications on the November issue of Life in Armenia this year. The separate kitchen area in the backyard immediately caught my eye as I entered their office; the kitchen was equipped enough to cook meals. To make things even more special, they had a dedicated person, **affectionately called "mom,"** who cooked daily meals for the team, ensuring a healthy lifestyle. It was common to hear the phrase "I'll check what we have for today"

while working at DeeM's office, something I'd never encountered before. For a few years now, the team has even marked

Thanksgiving with a special meal that always includes a stuffed pumpkin called [ghapama](#)!



As the inviting space permits it, DeeM also hosts a **Brunch with a DeeMer each month**, where former employees are invited to reminisce about past events, projects, and experiences, passing down some of the company's history and community-centered culture.

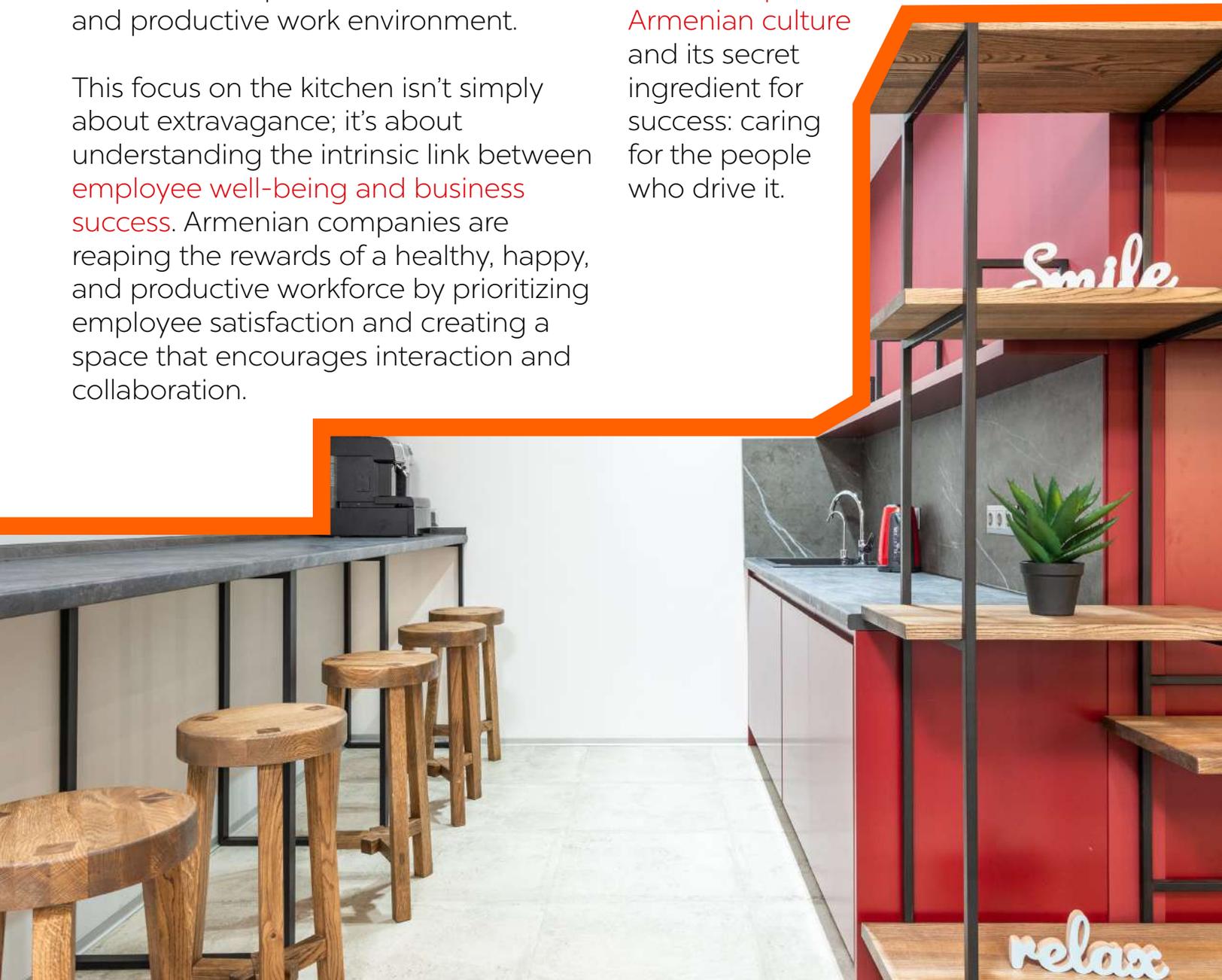
This dedication to employee comfort is unmatched in the region. Some companies even **hire chefs to prepare full meals**, ensuring employees have access to healthy and delicious food throughout the day.

The kitchen becomes a central hub where employees gather beyond lunch breaks. It's a place for informal conversations, brainstorming sessions, and team bonding. Food, in Armenia, is **a cultural touchstone**, and this extends to the workplace. By nourishing their employees' bodies and minds, Armenian companies cultivate a vibrant and productive work environment.

This focus on the kitchen isn't simply about extravagance; it's about understanding the intrinsic link between **employee well-being and business success**. Armenian companies are reaping the rewards of a healthy, happy, and productive workforce by prioritizing employee satisfaction and creating a space that encourages interaction and collaboration.

This article might sound crazy to some readers living and working in Armenia. However, for many others, it **represents their daily work routine**, especially if they are employed by companies in the tech sphere, as I emphasized at the outset. This includes software development, IT, AI research centers, and even some digital marketing and branding agencies.

So, the next time you find yourself in an Armenian office, don't be surprised by the impressive kitchen. It's not just a place to grab a coffee; it's **a testament to the unique Armenian culture** and its secret ingredient for success: caring for the people who drive it.



THE NEXT CHAPTER

WHAT AWAITS ARMENIA IN 2024

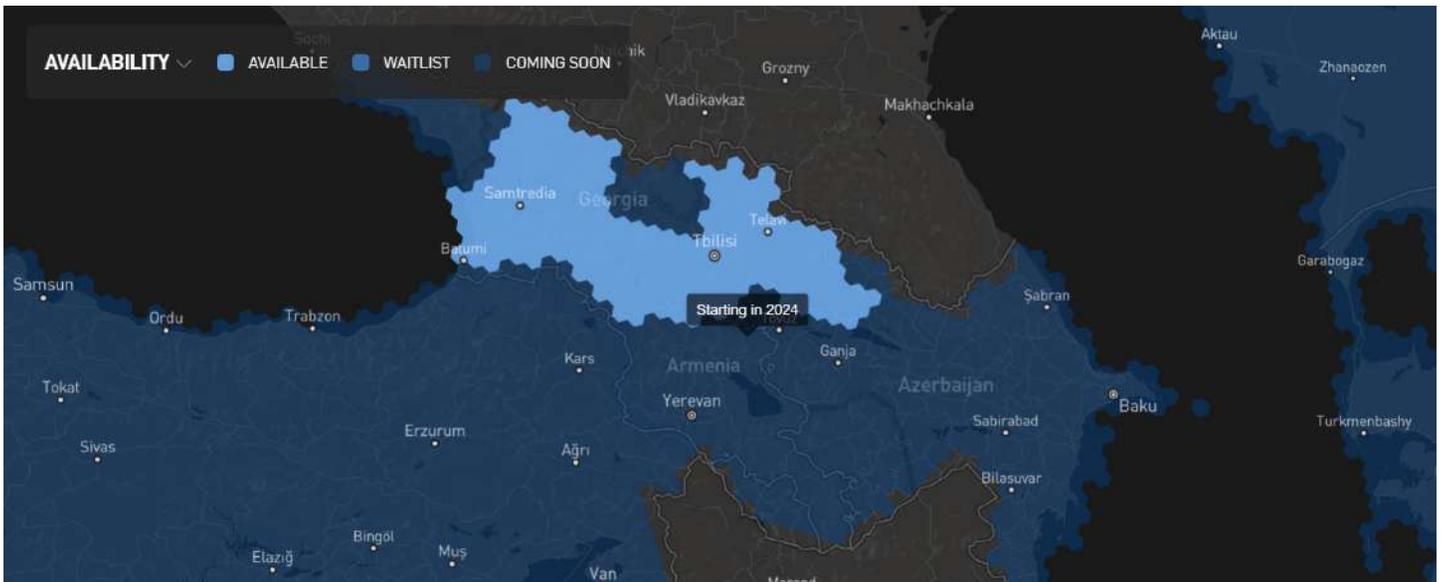


**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

THE NEXT CHAPTER WHAT AWAITS ARMENIA IN 2024

As 2023 draws to a close, the upcoming year holds considerable significance for Armenia, with various events poised to shape the course of life within the country for both residents and visitors. In this article, I aim to highlight key events and developments that position Armenia as an ideal destination for digital nomads in 2024.



Starlink Internet Covers Armenia

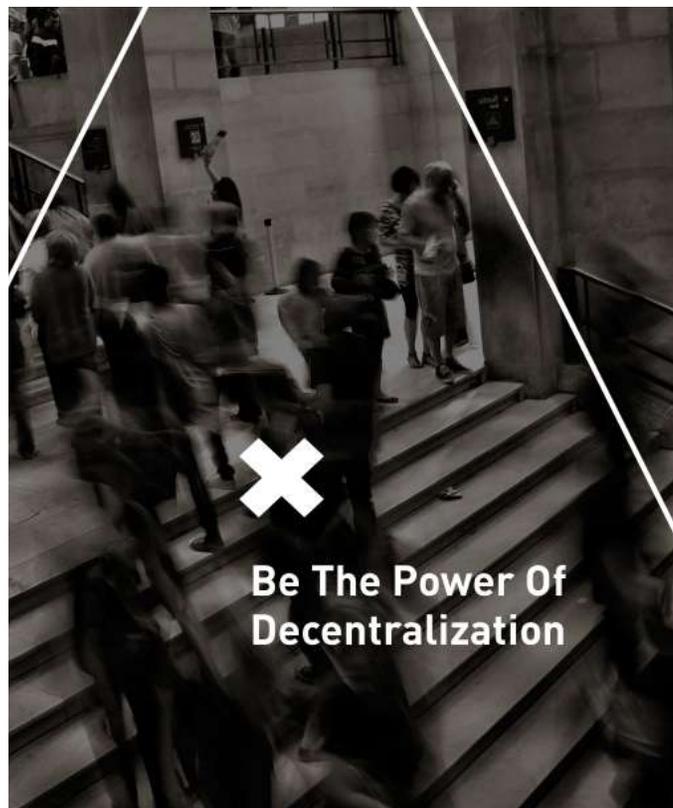
According to the [map of Starlink](#) satellite internet provider, Starlink internet connection will be available in Armenia in 2024.

Starlink is a satellite internet constellation operated by SpaceX that provides internet access to many countries. It uses a network of thousands of small satellites orbiting at an altitude of about 550 kilometers (342 miles), which is much closer to Earth than traditional geostationary

satellites. This means Starlink can provide lower latency and [faster speeds than traditional satellite internet](#).

Armenia has a relatively high internet penetration rate, with several ISPs offering quality affordable internet bundles; however, [some remote areas of the country](#) still lack access to reliable internet service. Starlink could help bridge the internet coverage gap in Armenia by providing internet access to remote areas.

The current cost of Starlink Internet in Armenia is [not yet known](#), as the service is not yet officially available in the country. However, based on the costs of Starlink in other countries, we can estimate that the [monthly subscription fee will be around \\$99](#), and the upfront hardware cost will be around \$499.



Armenia is Hosting WCIT 2024

The World Innovation, Technology, and Services Alliance ([WITSA](#)) announced that [Armenia will host the next World Congress](#) on Innovation and Technology (WCIT) in 2024. Themed “Science As A Means Of Fulfilling The Promise Of The Digital Age,” WCIT 2024 will be held on October 4-7, 2024, at the Karen Demirtchian Complex in Yerevan, Armenia.

WCIT 2019 was held in Yerevan, Armenia, from October 6 to 9, 2019. It was one of the largest and most prestigious ICT events globally, bringing together over 2,000 delegates from 70 countries and 31 sponsoring organizations. The central theme of WCIT 2019 was “The Power of Decentralization: Promise and Peril.” It’s also worth mentioning that WCIT 2023, held in Malaysia, recorded [a total of over 10,000 attendees](#) from over 50 countries.

This prestigious event coming soon in Armenia will bring together global leaders in technology and innovation. It’s [a unique opportunity to network](#), learn, and be part of shaping the digital landscape.

Science and Technology Development Council of Armenia



Armenia is making substantial investments in its future with the aim of positioning itself as a [prominent technology hub in the region](#). A key initiative demonstrating this commitment is the establishment of the Science and Technology Development Council of Armenia in December 2023. The council comprises distinguished individuals from the fields of [innovation, business, and science](#).

“The goal of the council is to contribute to the rapid scientific and technological development of Armenia and the transformation of Armenia into [a high-tech, industrial country](#),” said Hakob Arshakyan, Vice President at the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

Armenia’s commitment to becoming a regional tech hub signals [a more vibrant tech ecosystem](#), with greater opportunities for digital nomads in fields like software development, AI, cybersecurity, and data analysis.

“The creation of the Science and Technology Development Council of Armenia is a critically important step forward that [sends a strong message to the world](#),” said Karén Gyulbudaghyan, Strategic Value Ventures, founder, Berkeley SkyDeck, Ambassador, and Advisor.

Digital Nomads Program in Tavush Province

In 2024, the Tavush province, specifically Ijevan City, is gearing up to launch Armenia's digital nomads program. This initiative aims to attract leaders from around the globe in the [digital nomadism and remote work industry](#), inviting them to spend a few weeks in the city and experience firsthand the unique work-life balance that Armenia offers to international remote workers.

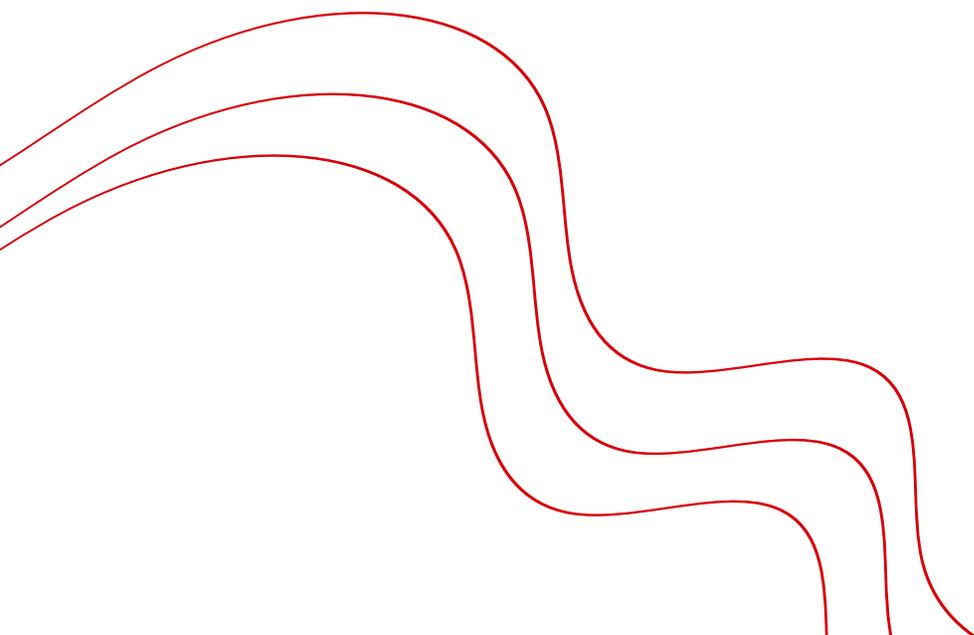
Participants in this program will have the opportunity to attend various local professional conferences and meetups, providing them with insights into the Armenian tech ecosystem and the chance to interact with professionals in the country.

The primary objective is to showcase how Armenia distinguishes itself through its people and landscapes, [offering the best of both worlds](#)—a place where remote working professionals can savor a very affordable high quality of life and

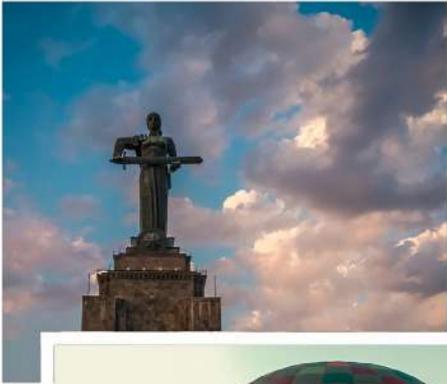
well-being while actively participating in a thriving tech ecosystem and startup environment.

I'm honored to be the one behind the idea of this program, and I hope it brings the anticipated results to the province in two years. The program is set to be organized in collaboration with the Tavush Tourism Development Agency NGO in Ijevan City to replicate the success of [similar programs held in Eastern Europe](#), with the ultimate aim of establishing an international tech hub in Ijevan.

Consider Armenia your next destination in 2024 if you're a digital nomad. Beyond what we've already discussed in the magazine, the country is [gearing up to attract attention from professional societies globally](#). Many professionals will travel to Armenia for various purposes, presenting an excellent opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals.



CREDITS AND SPECIAL THANKS



TOURISM COMMITTEE
MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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The Hidden
Track

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OF GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK IN ARMENIA

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