

longer time and that once behind schedule, this resulted in less time in the ports.

Hurtigruten ships are very much working vessels carrying not only tourists but local inhabitants and freight, calling at 34 ports along the coast of Norway. It is very difficult to adhere to a very strict schedule, as factors such as weather, groups and cargo can have an impact on the timings.

Many of our ports of call along the way are little more than tranquil hamlets on tiny islands, and whilst we may schedule a 45-minute stop, sometimes this may be reduced slightly.

In the larger towns, we schedule much longer stays of up to half a day to give guests plenty of opportunity to explore or take part in one of our many excursions.

KATHRYN BEADLE, Managing Director, Hurtigruten, Ltd., 3 Shortlands, London W6 8NE, U.K.

Athens stay From a trip my husband, Ed, and I took to Greece, I really recommend the following.

In Athens we stayed at the **Athenian Callirhoe** (32 Kallirois Ave. & Petmeza, GR-117 43 Athens,

Greece; phone +30 210 9215353, <http://atheniancallirhoe.athenshotels.it>). This lovely, small hotel was well situated only two blocks from the new Acropolis Museum, and we stayed there Sept. 30-Oct. 4, 2010. (Rates run €142 [near \$201] for a single to €235 [\$333] junior suite.)

The front desk staff was very helpful. Our first day in Athens, an ATM ate our debit card. The staff made calls and found a real, live person with whom we could discuss the problem. Also, we were given free, unlimited access to the lobby computer e-mail so we could get the problem resolved back in the States.

While we loved many of the restaurants in the Plaka, we found a darling one around the corner from our hotel. **Smile Café Restaurant** (Tsokri Part 1, Syngrou Ave., Athens) made the BEST moussaka I ever had. For moussaka, salad, bread and a glass of wine, it cost about €10 (\$14). An extra carafe of wine cost about €5.

Smile Café is run by a woman who grew up in Chicago and returned to Athens to marry. She was wonderful, giving us the best advice on where to go and what to see — especially helpful, since the

Chinese prime minister was visiting Athens and everything was at a standstill.

Homeric Tours (HQ in Greece, with US office in Hicksville, NY; 516/935-3400, www.homeric-tours.com) arranged our tour of the Greek mainland, except for Athens, which we did on our own. They were very flexible to work with; we could pick and choose where to go and what to see.

NANCY NORBERG
Mount Pleasant, SC

Turkey with

Argeus My wife and I took a 14-day tour of Istanbul and western Turkey, Sept. 18-Oct. 2, 2010. The tour with **Argeus Tourism & Travel** (Istiklal Cad. No. 47, Ürgüp/Nevsehir, Turkey; phone +90 384 341 4688, www.argues.com.tr) was more expensive than similar tours of other companies we investigated, but we thought the quality more than compensated for the cost.

The land price, \$3,970, included everything except wine at dinner and tips to the guide and driver.

Argeus limits its groups to 10 people (we had eight) and, on our tour, used a very comfortable Mercedes-Benz van in which we could go places the huge tour buses could not. Generally, we stayed in smaller boutique hotels and ate in local restaurants.

Our guide, Erkut, was extraordinary. He spoke fluent English and

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was knowledgeable about history, art, architecture, politics and everything else relating to Turkey. He navigated us around large tour groups so we never felt we were part of a mob. Although he packed a lot into each day's schedule, we never felt rushed.

We flew Turkish Airlines business class from New York to Istanbul and can highly recommend them. The modern, clean plane had individual "pods" in business class with fold-flat beds. Food and service were extremely good.

CHARLES W. SCHELKE
Philadelphia, PA

Turkey with

Treasures Not just about ancient cities and monuments but also on the ethnic/cultural background of each place visited, our three-week tour "Eastern Turkey & the Black Sea" was a memorable experience. My husband, Tom, and I traveled with Umit Dogan, owner of Treasures of Travel (Edmonds, WA; 800/572-0526, www.treasuresoftravel.com), May 6-26, 2010. The land price was \$3,600 each.

Umit is extremely knowledgeable about Turkey, both past and present, plus he is charming, kind and just plain fun to be with. The pace of the tour was such that we could "stop and smell the roses."

We enjoyed the people we met and the delicious food. The topography was stunning, from desert to mountains to the beautiful Black Sea.

PEGGY ROBINSON
Centennial, CO

Caucasus with

MIR I took an extraordinary tour, "Treasures of the Trans-Caucasus: Classic Survey of Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia," with MIR Corp. (Seattle, WA; 800/424-7289, www.mircorp.com), May 4-18, 2010. The trip cost \$6,395, land, and visas for Armenia and Azerbaijan added \$246. (US citizens do not need a visa to enter Georgia.)

Our 13-person group began the tour in Baku, Azerbaijan, on the Caspian coast. At the end of an important oil pipeline, Baku is the center of the Caspian oil industry. South of Baku, we visited the Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, where there are petroglyphs from 5,000 to 40,000 years old.

In Sheki we visited mosques, mausoleums and markets, listened to Azeri music as we dined in a caravanserai, and spoke with three Peace Corps volunteers working in Azerbaijan.

We traveled toward Georgia, one of the first countries to adopt the Christian faith (in the early fourth century). As we climbed higher into the snow-covered Caucasus Mountains, the stunning views became more dramatic.

In Gurjaani, we experienced traditional Georgian hospitality at a wine tasting, where the *tamada* (toastmaster) raised a glass to health, world peace and safe travels. Folk singers enhanced our enjoyment of an abundant feast.

In addition to showing us Tbilisi, the cave town Uplistsikhe, the Gudauri ski resort and Gori (Stalin's hometown), MIR arranged a private concert at the home-turned-museum of Georgian artist Elene Akhvediani (1898-1975).

Another highlight was the David Gareja monastery, considered the

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