

# The Journey of a Lifetime: Looking Inside *The Stone Garden Guide to Armenia and Karabagh*

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Special to Asbarez Daily  
September 2, 2006

An author often spends a mere few weeks while traveling in a certain region, relying on what he encounters in that limited time to compose a full-fledged guidebook. This, however, is not the case with the newly-released Second Edition of “The Stone Garden Guide: Armenia and Karabagh.”

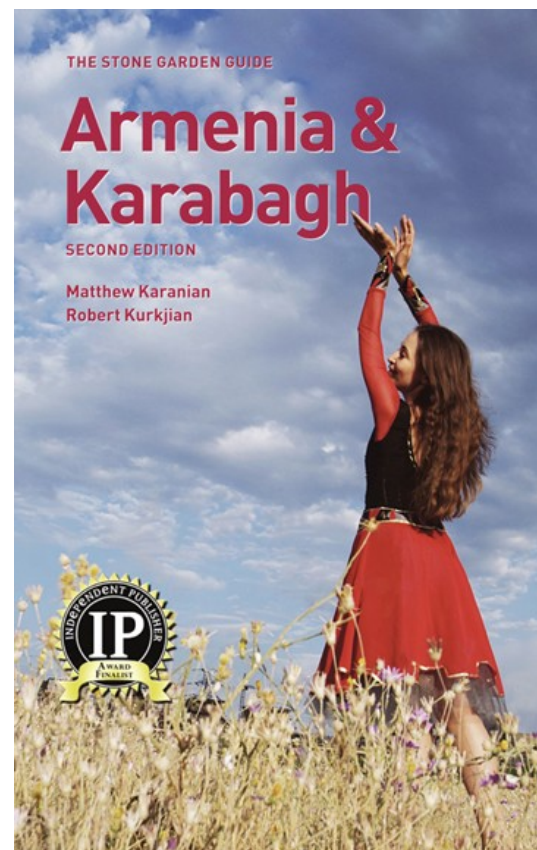
Co-authors Matthew Karanian and Robert Kurkjian have each spent 12 years living, working, and traveling throughout Armenia and Karabagh, making them **trustworthy experts** on guiding the traveler to both historic and recreational sites in the region.

The co-authors first traveled to the region in 1995, where they were both to take positions at the American University of Armenia as professors. They were not acquainted at the time, nor did they know that the pictures they were taking of this former Soviet country would soon become the basis for their first travel guidebook, “The Edge of Time: Traveling in Armenia and Karabagh.”

This book, which was first published in 2001, became widely successful, noteworthy as the first travel guide ever written in the English language about Armenia and Karabagh. According to Karanian, the book flew off the shelves, and after a second printing in 2002, the

authors decided that Armenia needed a full-fledged comprehensive guidebook that was “just as big as any book on Italy or Germany.”

As a result, Karanian and Kurkjian expanded upon the information they already had, and in 2004 the finished product was the First Edition of “The Stone Garden Guide: Armenia and Karabagh.” They published a revised second edition this month [September 2006].



The travel guide provides extensive information not only about all the popular historic sites frequently visited by tourists, but also takes a look at the more remote locations commonly disregarded by guided tours.

It also goes a step further than any guided tour, providing **trusted information and advice on all aspects of Armenia and Karabagh**, from Yerevan's best nightclubs, to the best route to take to the Lori region.

"Everything we wrote about, we saw and witnesses. We're not just going by what other people have told us," Karanian says.

"We lived there, and we lived there for years," he adds. The authors visited every location that is listed in the book, and they were sure to be as honest as possible. "We're not paid by the Armenian government to make it seem like a great place," Karanian said. "If something is bad, we say it. We're writing as if the reader is our friend."

And that's exactly what the authors did. Along with a list of the best hotels to stay at, Karanian and Kurkjian also mention some of the worst, one being a hotel in Karabagh, which, according to the authors, "offers 19 dark and Spartan rooms. Not recommended, except in an emergency."

Although they do take feedback from fellow travelers, Karanian and Kurkjian stress the fact that all the research for the book is original and first hand.

The 135 color photographs illustrated throughout the book are also original and

taken by the authors themselves. Through these photographs, Kurkjian and Karanian shatter any myths that depict Armenia as being impoverished and backwards. Instead, they capture the modernity of the country, while at the same time promoting Armenia's traditional, historic sites.

"We're showing Armenia is not just an ancient country with a lot of historic sites, but that there are also a lot of young people," Karanian says. To capture the thriving youth of Armenia, the guidebook includes photographs of a young woman shopping in Yerevan, another taking a dip in Lake Sevan, and a group of young dancers dressed in traditional costume.

The authors, of course, also portray a more traditional Armenia and Karabagh through **brehtaking pictures** of ancient historic sites, such as Garni Temple and Echmiadzin Cathedral.

Karanian and Kurkjian show the balance of Armenia's two sides as well, depicting a young jet skier having fun, while an ancient monastery sits on a tall mountain in the background. Through such photographs, the guidebook shows that Armenia is not unproductive, as some have speculated it to be, and instead, reveals that it has grown to be an ideal place to travel.

And an ideal place to travel it has become.

Armenia has not only seen an increase of tourism in the Diaspora, but also among non-Armenians. The authors know that the majority of travelers to the region are from the Diaspora, but at the same time

also realize that the book can successfully promote travel of non-Armenians.

The authors therefore triumphantly reach out to different types of readers, from the young Armenian-Americans wanting to see Mt. Ararat for the first time, to the old American couple hoping to explore and experience a new culture.

The guidebook provides a list of volunteer opportunities that young Armenian-Americans would love to take, and even a glossary that will help non-Armenian speakers make their way through the region.

With “The Stone Garden Guide,” Karanian and Kurkjian also hope to see a boost in the level of tourism to Karabagh. The book puts Karabagh on the same level as Armenia, reserving a full section to the mountainous region itself.

According to Karanian, putting Karabagh on the same level as Armenia “is probably the single biggest thing that has been done [in publishing] to promote actual travel to Karabagh.”

The guidebook thoroughly describes the different historic locations, providing a brief, but touching history of each site visited. **The authors describe Karabagh magnificently**, urging the reader to consider making a full trip of just visiting Karabagh.

As Karanian describes, there is “so much to explore, so much to see. All of it untouched.” **Very few tourists actually make it to Karabagh, but with “The Stone Garden Guide: Armenia and Karabagh,” that might soon change.**

Whether you have any plans to travel to the region, or if you are merely interested in obtaining a brief, but accurate history of the country and its culture, the Second Edition of “The Stone Garden Guide: Armenia and Karabagh” is the book you are looking for.

Karanian and Kurkjian have each spent years living in the region, proving **they are worthy candidates to guide the actual traveler, as well as the armchair traveler, through the region.**

“With this book,” Karanian points out, “you’ll know about places tour guides don’t know about.” The book will act as your friend who has lived in the area for years, allowing you to explore regions of Armenia and Mountainous Karabagh that guided tours would never dream of showing you.

And, don’t worry....

As Armenia and Karabagh continue to prosper and grow, so will the book. “As Armenia grows,” says Karanian, “the book will continue to be updated and revised, and this book will always be in print.” With such a book in print, Armenia and Karabagh should not only expect improvement in their tourism industry, but in their economy as well.

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### At a Glance

**Title:** The Stone Garden Guide: Armenia and Karabagh, Second Edition

**Authors:** M. Karanian and R. Kurkjian

**Publisher:** Stone Garden Productions

**ISBN** 0-9672120-9-X

**Published Price:** \$24.95

**Publication Date:** September 2006

