

AIMGA Overseas Medical Conference 2019

This year AIMGA held its annual overseas conference from 6 October 2019 to 18 October 2019 and had it spread over three countries – Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia.



21 Delegates participated and of these 16 were medical doctors and 5 were non-medical practitioners. We departed Sydney in three groups but assembled in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan on 7 October 2019.

Delegates proceeded to lunch directly from the airport and after a sumptuous lunch we visited the fire temple. Interestingly there were Shiva followers in Baku many centuries ago and we actually saw two Ganesha statues in that temple.

Baku is a very beautiful city. Very well developed with fine large buildings & wide roads. Azerbaijan produces

a lot of oil and the government has spent revenues from it wisely building a beautiful city even though the average annual income per person is only about US \$ 6000.

The first medical conference was held on the morning of 8 October in a conference room at Baku Hilton hotel. Prof Ganapathi Murugesan, A/Prof Smita Shah, Dr Sudarshan Sachdev and Dr Sanjay Sinha presented wide ranging talks. Following the presentations stimulating panel discussions were held with the active participation of all Delegates. These conference sessions were chaired and facilitated by Dr Prabha Chandra.



After lunch at the hotel we went on a city tour. The highlight of the afternoon for the delegation was a high tea Reception hosted by Indian Ambassador to Azerbaijan His Excellency B. Vanlalvawna and his wife Dr Rosy Khuma. During his tenure in Sydney AIMGA had developed very cordial relations with Shri Vanlalvawna and Dr Rosy and the AIMGA Delegation was very graciously received by the couple. They had also invited some local doctors to interact with us. Dr Rosy Khuma had prepared many delectable and tasty snacks and we spent more than 90 minutes at their luxurious residence. The delegation felt very honoured by the courtesy and hospitality of the Ambassador and his wife. This is the first time that an AIMGA Overseas Conference Delegation has been hosted by the local Indian Ambassador!

The day was concluded with further tours of the city and the next day we visited Gobustan National Park which boasts thousand-year old stone carvings, and cave paintings and mud volcanoes. Our second conference was held in the bus from Baku to Sheki. This is an innovative feature of our overseas tours and has been undertaken over the last few of AIMGA's Overseas Conferences and been complimented by everyone. It has the benefits of relaxed but active involvement all delegates and moreover the long travel times become easier and are used very productively.

Drs Ralf Itzwert, Channappa Jayadev and Sandra Morell and Prof Ganapathi Murugesan presented at these sessions which were chaired and facilitated by Dr Anil Gupta.

We reached Sheki that night. Sheki is one of the most ancient settlements in Azerbaijan and is famous for its summer palace. The next day was the road trip to Tbilisi, capital of Georgia. Crossing the border was an interesting experience and we had to walk 1.3 km uphill dragging our luggage - I believe this must be another first for delegates at an AIMGA Overseas Conference!

Georgia seems poorer than Azerbaijan. We walked along narrow streets of Tbilisi and enjoyed the experience of tasting home-made wines at a restaurant with the poetic name Signaghi. It is very common for Georgians to produce their wines at home.

After Tbilisi, we moved on to Mtskheta and Gori. Gori is the birthplace of Joseph Stalin. We visited the Stalin museum, his childhood house and the train he used to travel in as the head of Russia. From Gori we travelled to Uplistsikhe and then on to Kutaisi.

The next morning we visited the famous Martivil Canyons. This was a spectacular sight. Following rains the previous day, the river & the falls were in full majestic flow. We walked 2.4km along the walkway which is built hanging on to the cliff and high above the canyon. The walk involved 500 steps going down & 300 steps going up. All of us did the trip and felt rather proud of the achievement of doing so despite our age!

Next day we took the road trip back to Tbilisi from Kutaisi. This long journey back on the bus was once again used productively to host the third part of the Overseas Conference.

These sessions were chaired and facilitated by A/Prof Smita Shah and interesting talks were presented by Mr Derek Morell, Dr Anil Gupta and Dr Prabha Chandra followed by interactive discussions with the participation of all delegates. The tired but content delegates spent a comfortable night at the Tbilisi Marriott.

The next morning we departed for Armenia. On the way we visited Haghartish monastery built between the 10th and 13th centuries. The border crossing this time was less arduous physically with no hassles of having to drag luggage but nonetheless still rather taxing because the immigration computer broke down and we had to wait an extra half hour while their server was fixed!

Armenia although not very rich financially, is full of ancient history. Apart from enjoying historical sites we also visited Lake Sevan – one of the highest as well as one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. This vast body of water occupies a fifth of Armenia. After the lake we visited the peaceful Sevanavank monastery. We spent the night at Radisson Blue Hotel in Yerevan, capital of Armenia. Next morning we drove to Garni and Geghard via the picturesque Avon Canyon. We visited a well-preserved Pagan temple which was built in the 1st century. Dinner that night was at an Indian restaurant.

The last morning we visited Khor Virap, Areni & Noravak. Areni cave boasts the earliest known shoe, discovered in January 2011. This straw shoe dates back to 3900 BC. Also discovered in the same cave was the oldest straw skirt and a preserved brain.

We returned to the hotel that night and had our farewell dinner before delegates went their separate ways.

All the Delegates reported that they had a great time and complimented AIMGA for the excellent organisation of the overseas medical conference and the tours.

Dr Prabha Chandra
Chair, Overseas Conference Sub Committee, AIMGA.