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meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Georgia – Wild Tusheti

Tour Duration – 10 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ●○○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Truly head off the beaten track in wonderfully scenic Tusheti province
- ✓ Walks and village visits in the shadow of the High Caucasus mountains
- ✓ Explore the impressive rock-hewn Georgian Orthodox monastery complex of David Gareji
- ✓ Visit the magnificent cathedral of Alaverdi
- ✓ Wander through the delightful old town of Tbilisi
- ✓ Enjoy the friendly local hospitality of Georgian family run guesthouses



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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	Mix of comfortable hotels and a simple locally run guesthouse (private bathrooms)
Included Meals:	Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size:	Maximum of 12
Start Point:	Tbilisi – You can arrive anytime on Day 1
End Point:	Tbilisi – You can depart anytime on Day 10
Transport:	DeliCa Style vehicles for Tusheti and Minibus for the rest of the tour
Country visited:	Georgia



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Georgia – Wild Tusheti

Georgia is one of the least known nations of Europe – in fact most people aren't entirely sure whether it is actually in Europe. Hidden away and often eclipsed by its monumental neighbour it hides a wealth of diverse secrets. This trip encompasses the very best of the country: we spend time in Tbilisi and marvel at the numerous and diverse cultures that have left their mark on this city, from Ancient Persia and Medieval European crusaders to Imperial Russia and Ottoman Turkey and explore its delightful old city. We travel into the High Caucasus to the wild and untamed province of Tusheti where age old traditions are still entrenched into the culture. We explore the cave monasteries of David Gareji where 14 centuries of Georgian Christians have crafted an impressive rock-hewn monastic foundation. For lovers of wine we will also visit the ancient wine region of Kakheti, arguably the original home of all viticulture and taste the exquisite wines produced there. Our travels then take us over the dizzying heights of the Abano Pass, only seasonally open and a gateway to some of Europe's most isolated villages. We spend time getting to know and understand the area and its tenacious and proudly isolated people, enjoying the wholehearted hospitality of family run guesthouses. Our exploration of the incredibly isolated and often seasonal Tush villages will include the option of some relatively straightforward, but highly rewarding walks where the beauty of the alpine-meadows contrasts with the awe-inspiring mountain scenery. Georgia is renowned for its local hospitality so travel with us on this cultural and historical adventure and discover the furthest reaches of this intriguing and stunning country where few outsiders tread.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not merely passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies, it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK: we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip, but on occasions it may be advantageous to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Tbilisi

Arrive in Tbilisi and transfer to the hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure. You will stay in a central location near the old town where you can explore the delightful streets of Old Tbilisi. Overnight Hotel Kalasi or similar. No meals included.

Tbilisi

Surrounded by mountains on three sides, Georgia's capital feels neither European nor Asian, but rather an invigorating fusion of both. Founded in the 4th century by King Vakhtang Gorgasali on the site of its warm mineral-water springs, it rapidly developed into the principal city of the Caucasus. By the 12th century Tbilisi was one of the most important political, economic and cultural centres of the region. It stood as a key station on the famous Silk Road – right on the border between Europe and Asia. The city has a vaguely southern feel to it, with a relaxed atmosphere and an easy charm. In the old town, known as the Maidan, wooden houses with a distinctly Balkan feel overlook the stately Mtkvari River which dissects the city, at times through a deep gorge, and in the city centre there are imposing neo-classical and Art Nouveau buildings mingling incongruously with the inevitable Soviet-era concrete blocks. Gorgasali Square, on the opposite bank of the



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river to the Metekhi Church, was once the site of the old bazaar, and is an ideal place to start a walk taking in the sights of the city. A road from the Armenian Church on the south side of the square leads to the Narikala Citadel, built in 360 AD by the Persians, indicating the significant Middle Eastern influences here; it was severely hit by an earthquake in the 19th century. You can walk along the battlements of the citadel which offer rewarding views across the city. Tbilisi has a good range of restaurants and cafes strung out along both the left and right banks of the river where you can sample some of the local delicacies and watch the life of the city pass you by.

Day 2: Tbilisi

A guided walking tour around old Tbilisi, taking in the fascinating history of this long-overlooked region. You spend the day discovering sites such as the National Museum, home to many of the treasures that inspired the legend of the Golden Fleece, as well as the Narikala citadel, Metekhi Temple and the Sioni Cathedral, among other sites. Later this afternoon you will have the opportunity to explore the atmospheric streets at leisure. Tonight, enjoy traditional Georgian food at a local restaurant. Overnight Hotel Kalasi or similar. (BLD)

Day 3: Tbilisi – Signagi – Kakheti – Telavi (Drive: 4 hours in total)

An early start today at 8am. Drive to Signagi, with its defensive wall of megalithic proportions, built in 17th - 18th centuries. Visit Kakheti, Georgia's famous wine district which lies due east from Tbilisi in a land dotted with grandiose old churches and vineyard after vineyard. After enjoying a lunch with delicious home-made food, you also visit a winery and taste some of Georgia's best wine. We visit Tsinandali Estate, the residence of the 19th century noble family. Continue to Telavi. Overnight Old Telavi or similar. (BLD)

Wine in Georgia

Even for those who regard their wine knowledge as broad and inclusive, the vines of Georgia will, in all probability, have largely escaped them. Incredibly, there is much evidence to suggest that Transcaucasian wine making may date back over 8,000 years, making it the probable home of the cultivation of grapes and production of wine – in fact the Georgian word 'gvino' gives us our modern name for the drink. Families widely produce wine on a small scale and the original Georgian method of underground fermentation in 'kvevri' – large earthenware storage vessels is having a renaissance. Georgia now annually produces 150 million litres of wine in 18 specified areas, of which Kakheti is by far the largest and boasts the most celebrated and prized bottlings, including the excellent Kindzmarauli. Both whites and reds have traditionally veered towards the sweet, but this is evolving as the wine industry grows in influence and a wide range of styles and preferences are now catered for. International interest in Georgian wines is burgeoning, but you will certainly have access to a range of tastings which have yet to emerge beyond the region's borders.

Day 4: Telavi – Alaverdi – Omalo (Tusheti) (Drive: approximately 5 hours in total)

Your departure will be early at around 8am and the journey heads into the spectacular Greater Caucasus range. Before the climb into the mountains, visit the magnificent Alaverdi Cathedral (11th Century), noted for its glorious high dome. You then continue into the foothills: quickly the journey becomes incredibly scenic and you will stop at various points to stretch your legs and soak up the views and also to enjoy a picnic lunch. The journey into Tusheti is a true adventure passing first through lush forests, then gorges and canyons carved by raging torrents. There are also numerous waterfalls to admire and in Spring endless carpets of a myriad of wildflower species. After crossing the spectacular and vertiginous Abano Pass (2927m), you continue down into Tusheti. Approaching Omalo, the sheer beauty of this wild region is immediately apparent. On arrival in Upper Omalo check in to the guesthouse and then take some time to explore the imposing medieval watchtowers that stand sentinel over the valley. Later enjoy an evening meal of traditional Georgian fare, prepared by your local hosts. Overnight guesthouse. (BLD)

Note - the guesthouse in Omalo is simple but comfortable but phone reception is patchy and at the time of inspection there is no WiFi.



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Tusheti National Park

Only accessible since the 1980s and a relatively new national park covering over 16,000 Hectares, Tusheti has to be one of the most remote and wild places in Europe. The region is only accessible during the late spring and summer, and by late September snow once again redoubtably closes the door on the Abano Pass. The villages of Tusheti are home to the Tush people, an extremely resilient and hospitable people who live off the land herding sheep and cows. You will see them often herding their livestock on horseback flanked to the front and rear by a number of protective Caucasus dogs. Don't be surprised at some point during your visit if you are welcomed into a Tush home. The scenery in Tusheti is quite magnificent with outstanding vistas of 4000m plus peaks around every corner. Birdlife here is also very compelling so bring your binoculars. Exploring the enchanting and mystical isolation of the valleys and villages of Tusheti is an experience one is unlikely to ever forget.

Note – the road into Tusheti is not sealed and in places is rough. We will be using suitable 4WD vehicles for this terrain and experienced drivers. The road in places has sheer drops and so may not be suitable for those with vertigo.

Omalo

Comprising of a lower and upper part, Omalo is the main gateway to exploring the valleys of Tusheti. Approaching the village, wide open meadows predominate, often sumptuously spread with wildflowers in June. On the approach to Upper Omalo, atmospheric medieval watchtowers loom over the village. Sunset is a particularly good time to take the invigoratingly steep but short walk up to towers. Good footwear is required. From the towers, one is treated to breath-taking sweeping 360-degree panoramas.

Day 5: Shenako and Diklo (Walk: approximately 4 hours; Drive: 1 hour)

Today you start to explore this incredibly beautiful and wild region. Your walk from Omalo takes you through the delightful village of Shenako and on to Diklo. In these remote villages you can truly appreciate the traditional architecture and the stupendous views of the High Caucasus. From Diklo, continue for a short distance to the old fortress which is about as close as you can get to the border with Russia. Later you return to the guesthouse for dinner. (BLD)

Note – for those that do not wish to walk to Diklo then you can be driven there via Shenako with the driver.

Shenako and Diklo

Situated at 2050 metres, Shenako is a diminutive village most notable for a beautiful 16th century church. Diklo is magnificently overlooked by 4285m peak of Diklo to the north and is only a few kilometres from the border with its huge neighbour, Russia. The approach to Diklo is through yet another wonderful alpine-style meadow which in June is often a blanket of floral colour.

Day 6: Omalo – Dartlo – Parsma – Omalo (Walk: approximately 1½ hours in total)

This morning journey into a different valley to the village of Dartlo, situated at 1900 metres. Admire the interesting architecture of the local houses and the watchtower. There is a cafe next to a picturesque stream where you can take some tea and coffee amidst the splendour of the surroundings. Continue by car to the next village of Chesho and start a beautifully scenic walk to the village of Parsma through the valley. The walk follows a stunning river and also affords views of many medieval watchtowers that were built to warn of invaders from the Northern Caucasus. At Parsma enjoy a picnic lunch before returning by car to Dartlo. Back in Dartlo, it is possible to visit an abandoned village, clinging tenaciously to the mountainside above Dartlo with an eerie watchtower precariously teetering over the abyss. The views from here are tremendous. Return to Omalo by car. Overnight guesthouse. (BLD)

Walking guidance (Parsma) – the walk to the village of Parsma is an easy grade, following a dirt road through the valley. The return journey distance on foot is around 5km and of course there will be plenty of



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time for stops to admire the wonderful scenery. The last 5-10 minutes involves a moderate ascent into the village of Parsma.

Walking guidance (Dartlo) – the optional walk from Dartlo to the abandoned village is a constant steep incline and takes around 40 minutes up and around 25 minutes down. Only those with good fitness and good footwear should attempt it. It is also not suitable for those with vertigo issues. Those that do not wish to do this walk can relax in Dartlo.

Day 7: Omalo

Today you have the option to simply enjoy the peace and tranquillity of Upper Omalo; perhaps take your camera up to the watchtowers and immerse yourself in the ever-changing light and cloud formations. For those that wish to be more active, it will be possible to do a walk and this can be discussed with the guide. Our hosts at the guesthouse will also provide a demonstration of traditional Georgian cookery. Overnight local guesthouse. (BLD)

Day 8: Tusheti National Park – Tbilisi (Drive: 7-8 hours)

Depart early at around 8am for the journey back to Tbilisi once again traversing the majestic Abano Pass. Depending on the road conditions, expect to arrive back in the Alazani Valley by approximately 1pm. Lunch will be taken in a local restaurant overlooking the valley before continuing through fine scenery and over the Gombori Pass back to Tbilisi. Tonight, enjoy local Georgian food at a local restaurant in Tbilisi. Overnight Kalasi Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 9: Tbilisi

Today is a final day at leisure for you to enjoy wonderful Tbilisi at leisure and reflect on the epic trip into Tusheti. Overnight Kalasi Hotel or similar. (B)

Note – Please let us know if you would like to an extra day guided sightseeing and we can provide options and prices on request.

Day 10: Departure from Georgia

On due time, transfer to the airport for your onward journey. (B)

Tour inclusions/exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Travel Insurance
Visas if applicable
Drinks
Items of a personal nature
Tips (Discretionary)





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Important Information

Foreign Government Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At this time there are no warnings in place for areas we travel to on our small group tour to Georgia. It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable accommodation. Private bathrooms will be available throughout the tour. Most hotels will have a restaurant and bar. The guesthouse in Tusheti is simple but comfortable and has a basic bar where you can usually buy beer, water and soft drinks. You may wish to bring some wine from Kakheti to the guesthouse. Note that sometimes in Tusheti hot water supply may be sporadic. Please bear in mind this is a very remote destination.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that on occasion lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.



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Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch - £7

Dinner - £10

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1.50 - £3

Bottle of Water £0.50 - £0.70

Glass of wine £2 - £4

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is commonly recognised as a way of rewarding guides and drivers for good service. A reasonable amount to bring for tips would be around \$50-60, split between the guides and drivers, if you are travelling on a group tour. For private tours, you should allow more.

Waiters and bar staff in the region are generally low paid and it is common practice to leave a small tip – around 10% of the bill.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Tbilisi and larger towns are well equipped with ATMs for obtaining money

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are widely accepted in the main cities in larger restaurants and hotels

Local Currency: Lari (GEL)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollar

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure.

In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been





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advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals do not require a visa for a short-term tourist visit to Georgia.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance. Contact details can be found by visiting the following websites.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages for each country, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively, UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for travel to Georgia. However, we recommend that you speak with your doctor for the most up to date advice regarding any vaccinations that may be recommended.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on best practice when travelling with medicines. For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.



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Travelling with medicines in Georgia

You should carry a doctor's prescription if you intend to travel with prescription medicine and declare the items on your Customs Declaration Form. Possession of these items, even with a doctor's prescription could, if not declared, or if the quantity held exceeds legal limits, lead to administrative or even criminal proceedings. Check legal quantities of medicines before you travel with the [Georgian Embassy London](#).

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Generally speaking, the best time to visit the Caucasus region is between May to October. It can get very hot in the middle of summer at lower altitudes in places like Tbilisi. Temperatures in the mountainous region of Tusheti are somewhat cooler and at night it can be quite cold. Rain showers can be expected at any time of year. Spring is a lovely time for wildflowers. July and August is great in the High Caucasus Mountains but very hot at lower elevations. September and tends to be the busiest time for tourists but also is generally the driest time of the year with pleasant temperatures. It is not possible to visit Tusheti after September as the Abano pass is closed due to snow.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. In Tusheti the weather is unpredictable and a layered approach is best. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy. Please note that it can get quite cool in the mountains in the evening and first thing in the morning.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. It is usually advisable to bring a torch/head torch in case of any electricity outages.

Road conditions and driving times

The road into Tusheti is not sealed and in places is rough. We will be using suitable 4WD vehicles for this terrain and experienced drivers. The road in places has sheer drops and so may not be suitable for those with vertigo. Approximate driving times are given in the best of faith but may differ due to uncontrollable situations such as bad weather and associated poor road conditions. We ask for your understanding as Tusheti is still a very off the beaten track location.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended. When we are travelling between places sandals or other comfortable footwear is fine.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two round pins.



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Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 2 December 2022

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