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meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Classic Georgia – Tailormade

Tour Duration – 8 Days



Tour Rating

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

Tour Pace

Moderate/Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Wander through the delightful old streets of Tbilisi
- ✓ Imbibe the majesty of the summits and valleys of the High Caucasus range
- ✓ Optional walks for all levels in amongst spectacular mountain scenery
- ✓ Enjoy degustation of excellent wine in one of the world's oldest wine growing regions
- ✓ Marvel at the spectacular sight of Alaverdi Cathedral at the foot of the Caucasus range





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Tour Map – Classic Georgia - Tailormade



Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	Mix of simple but comfortable hotels with private bathrooms
Included Meals:	Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size:	Private Tailormade tour
Start Point:	Tbilisi – You can arrive anytime on Day 1
End Point:	Tbilisi – You can depart anytime on Day 8
Transport:	Private air-conditioned vehicle
Country visited:	Georgia



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Classic Georgia

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 short tour will give you a fantastic insight into the best of this enigmatic nation. First we spend time in atmospheric 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 then snake our way into the High Caucasus at Kazbegi and walk up to the dramatically perched Gergeti Sameba church. Explore the remote and mystical land of Svaneti, home to an intriguing culture and some of Europe's most remote villages overlooked by imposing stone-built watchtowers. After returning from the mountains, the tour culminates in the fertile Kakheti Valley in the foothills of the Caucasus range. Here you will visit charming hilltop towns, the magnificent Alaverdi Cathedral and enjoy being immersed in one of the truly ancient wine growing regions and taste some of Georgia's best wines before returning to Tbilisi. Georgia is renowned for its local hospitality so travel with us, and discover this intriguing and stunning country where few outsiders have yet to 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. For a tour of 2 persons you will be accompanied by a professional English-speaking driver/guide. Larger private parties may need to have a driver and guide. 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 with no guided activities. Your accommodation is situated right in the middle of the old town, great for access to the thriving restaurant scene in Tbilisi. Overnight Hotel Kalasi. No meals or guided activities today included.

Note – *As this is a tailor-made tour, we can arrange different accommodation options in Tbilisi.*

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.



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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 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 Sightseeing

Today you will meet your guide for a shot tour briefing at 08:30am at the hotel. Afterwards, embark on 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 Narikala citadel, Metekhi Temple and Sioni Cathedral. Visit Sarajishvili Brandy Factory and take the opportunity to try some high-quality Georgian brandy. After the brandy tasting, visit Rustaveli Avenue and Freedom Square. Later this afternoon you can enjoy some leisure time to amble through the delightful streets of old Tbilisi. Alternatively, you may wish to take the funicular for panoramic views over the city. This evening is at your own leisure and your local guide will be able to make dinner recommendations. Overnight Hotel Kalasi or similar. (B)

Day 3: Tbilisi – Mtskheta – Ananauri - Stepantsminda (Kazbegi) (Approximate total driving time today is 4 hours)

Leaving the capital, we drive to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia and a site of immense historical and cultural significance. Mtskheta is packed full of historical monuments and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore the 11th century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and the 6th century Jvari Monastery. Later we join the Georgian Military Highway and snake our way up into the Higher Caucasus range. En route we stop at the castle complex of Ananauri, situated on the Aragvi River, before continuing the climb through dramatic scenery and over the spectacular Jvari Pass where we can stop to imbibe the interesting contours of the surrounding peaks and valleys. Take the 1.5 hour hike to the iconic Gergeti Sameba church situated at 2150 metres underneath the brooding presence of Mt Kazbek (5054 metres). Finally continue to Kazbegi, now officially named Stepantsminda. Overnight Hotel Stancia, or similar. (B)

Note – for clients not wishing to hike to the Gergeti Sameba church, it is possible to arrange a jeep to transport you for approximately USD 30.

Mtskheta

Pronounced like 'skater' with the first two letters silent, Mtskheta is Georgia's spiritual heartland. Occupied for over 3,000 years, there is evidence of Greek, Hittite and Sumerian civilizations, and the hilltops around the town were the setting of several pagan shrines, which in later years had churches built upon the sites. The main cathedral of Sveti Tskhoveli was built in 1010 AD, but the first church on the site was constructed of wood in the 4th century AD. All the other churches in the town are on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Ananauri

The Georgian Military Highway has existed as a route since ancient times, but until the 19th century it was little more than a track. The Russians made it into a major road as an aid to suppressing rebellious tribes in the Caucasus, and the highway bores through mountains in a sequence of tunnels and climbs over passes frequently blocked by snow in winter. A viaduct leads to the churches of Ananauri, the larger of which was built in 1689, with elaborate carvings decorating the exterior. Overlooking the church is a 12th century watchtower.



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Stepantsminda (Kazbegi)

A historic corner of the modern Kazbegi district, the most sizeable and capital town is Stepantsminda which boasts a mere 1,300 inhabitants. Just a short drive from the Russian border, the locals still refer to the small town as Kazbegi and it lies at the heart of a deeply isolated rural population, surrounded by glaciers and providing the base for a plethora of trekking opportunities. However, the real draw locally is the Holy Trinity Church, sitting high on a ridge overshadowed by the looming bulk of Mount Kazbek, third-highest in Georgia with a summit reaching 5,047m. A cable car was constructed in 1988 but did not have the support of the local population, who saw it as an assault on the sanctity of the church, and it has since fallen into disrepair. The church itself is surprisingly large given the location – it sits 2,170m above sea level – and the main body of it was constructed in the 14th century, the tower added in later years. Throughout its history it has served as a sanctuary for religious and political refugees who have fled to its inaccessible fort-like pinnacle.

Day 4: Sno Valley and Juta (Approximate total driving time today is 1.5 hours)

Spend the morning in the glorious surrounds of the High Caucasus Mountains, exploring the Sno Valley and the tiny settlement of Juta. Depending on the conditions and how long you wish to walk for, there will be a number of beautiful walks open to you, ranging from an hour to 4 hours to give you an appreciation of the splendid isolation of this area. Return to Kazbegi / Stepantsminda for lunch and then the afternoon can be spent at your own leisure. If you wish to continue exploring you will be able to visit the gorge of Dariali Canyon situated close to the Georgia-Russia border, a spectacular 13 kilometre long gash carved out by the Telek into the granite, filled with pounding waterfalls and plummeting to a depth of nearly 1,800m in places and said to be the site of Alexander the Great's Iron Gates pass. Overnight Hotel Stancia, or similar. (B)

Day 5: Kazbegi – Kakheti region (Approximate total driving time today is 5 hours)

After a leisurely breakfast, you leave the high peaks in the rear-view mirror and once again cross the Jvari Pass. Continue to the fertile wine growing region of Kakheti. Arrive at your accommodation by mid-afternoon where you will have the option to tour the on-site winery if you wish or just relax after the journey. Overnight Chateau Kvareli, or similar. (B)

Day 6: Kakheti region including Sighnaghi (Approximate driving time today is 2 hours)

Visit the picturesque hill top town of Sighnaghi and take a leisurely stroll through this beautiful town admiring the fabulous views towards the High Caucasus range in the distance. Continue to a local cellar producing artisanal natural wines according to ancient Georgian traditions, where tasting will be offered with light snacks. The afternoon will be at your own leisure. Early this evening we visit the Wine Yard №1, a local farmer's house in the village of Akhalsopeli. You will be invited into this welcoming local establishment to enjoy organic food and wine and take part in the famous Supra, a feast led by the Tamada (the toastmaster). The experience here will allow you to be immersed in the food and wine of Kakheti and learn about folklore and agricultural traditions. Overnight at Hotel Chateau Kvareli, or similar. (BD)

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.



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Day 7: Kakheti region including Alaverdi Cathedral (Approximate overall driving time today is 4 hours)

After breakfast we visit Nekresi Monastery, founded in the 4th Century and Gremi architectural complex dating from the 16th Century. This will be followed by a visit to the family run Chelti winery where we enjoy tasting with light snacks. Continue to spectacular Alaverdi Cathedral dating from the 11th Century located impressively in the shadow of the Greater Caucasus range. Also visit the Apiary located nearby to Alaverdi Monastery where you will be able to taste natural local honey. Later return to Tbilisi for your final night in Georgia and your local guide will ensure you have a good recommendation for a final feast of local Georgian fare. Overnight Hotel Kalasi, or similar. (B)

Day 8: Departure from Tbilisi

At the appropriate time, transfer to the airport for your onward flight. (B)

Note – if you prefer to have some additional time in Tbilisi then we can arrange this for you or if you wish to visit other parts of Georgia or perhaps a visit to neighbouring Armenia or Azerbaijan. Contact us to discuss the many possible options in the Caucasus region.

Tour inclusions/exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation as per the itinerary (different options can be booked)
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Wine tasting where mentioned
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary
Private transport on tour

Excluded:

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

Important Information

Foreign Government Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). 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.





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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 in the day and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

The tour is designed with a simple but comfortable level of accommodation in mind. All accommodation has private bathrooms.

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.

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 - £5

Dinner - £7 - £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 - £2

Bottle of Water £0.30 - £0.50

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is commonly recognised as a way of rewarding guides and drivers for good service. A reasonable tipping guide for a driver/guide would be USD 5 – 10 per person per day.





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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: GBP or USD

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 '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 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. Please ensure your insurance covers you for all activities and also being at altitude. The maximum altitude you will be at on this tour is around 2400 metres above sea level.

Visa Information

UK, EU and US visitors do not require a visa for entry to Georgia. We recommend that you check with your nearest embassy for the most up to date details.

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 your country.

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



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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.

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

The tour is best enjoyed from late April until late October. In the early and late extents of this range you may expect cold weather up in the mountains but you will also probably enjoy snow on the peaks. May and June can be lovely times to enjoy the wildflowers and there should still be snow on the peaks. July and August represent the best time for hiking in the high mountains but it can be excruciatingly hot at lower elevations. September and October are also generally great times to be in Georgia and early October usually coincides with the grape harvest.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. Particularly in early and late season you may also need warmer clothes during the day. 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.

Driving times

The driving times stated in the itinerary are given in the best of faith. Driving times may on occasion be longer due to unforeseen circumstances such as poor weather, road construction activity, mechanical problems etc. The roads in general on this tour are of a reasonable standard.

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. For bird lovers, a pair of binoculars would be a good additional item.

Footwear

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



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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.

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 26th June 2020.

