

GLORIOUS GEORGIA

An in-depth escorted tour visiting the treasures of Georgia
28th April to 11th May & 29th September to 12th October 2020

NOBLE CALEDONIA

The former Kingdom of Georgia lies to the north east of Turkey in a particularly beautiful part of the world where green valleys are spread with vineyards and old churches and watchtowers perch in fantastic mountain scenery. We begin our tour with a two night stay in the ancient and captivating city of Istanbul from where we fly to Tbilisi, capital of Georgia to begin our exploration of this stunning and diverse country.



Discover the many facets of this ancient land including Tbilisi, one of the world's oldest settlements and a beguiling mix of natural beauty and disheveled charm, the eastern winemaking region of Kakheti and journey along the famed Georgian Military Highway to the border town of Kazbegi. We will see mysterious cave cities and many beautiful early Christian monuments along the way, remembering that Georgia embraced Christianity as far back as the 3rd century AD, before descending to the waters of the Black Sea and the seaside city of Batumi.

Georgia's complicated history is one of invasions and yet the country has survived with its own unique identity and a wonderful heritage of architecture and arts. Despite the long years of Soviet occupation, it is a country moving forward in the 21st century with an ever-improving tourist infrastructure and for our stay we have selected modern, comfortable hotels. The road surfaces are not always perfect and some of the travel distances long, but there is very little traffic and beautiful scenery to admire as we journey along.

We do hope that you can join us for what promises to be a fascinating tour of this beautiful country that remains off the usual tourist trail despite its warm hospitable people, delicious food and wealth of cultural and historic treasures on offer.

The Itinerary

Day 1 London to Istanbul, Turkey. Fly by scheduled flight. Arrive this afternoon and transfer to the Hotel Marmara Pera for a two night stay. The remainder of the day is free for independent exploration before we meet for dinner this evening. (D)

Day 2 Istanbul. With a history embracing almost three millennia, Turkey's largest metropolis is also one of the world's oldest existing cities. Tour the city's highlights including Topkapi Palace, the Hippodrome, Blue Mosque and Grand Bazaar. Return to the hotel for an evening at leisure. (B, L)

Day 3 Istanbul to Tbilisi, Georgia. After breakfast in the hotel return to the airport for our scheduled flight to Tbilisi. On arrival we will meet our guide and driver and transfer to the Marriott

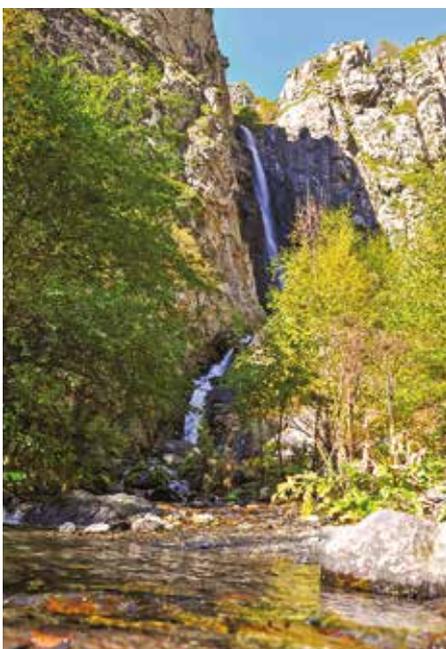
Hotel, our base for the next three nights. After free time to settle into the hotel or explore the local area, we will meet for dinner tonight. (B, D)

Day 4 Tbilisi. Today we have a full day to explore Tbilisi. In over 1500 years since becoming the capital of Georgia, the city has been destroyed and rebuilt on nearly 30 different occasions. The city has rebounded in recent years to become one of the most lively and cosmopolitan cities in the Caucasus. It is difficult to find another city in which an Orthodox church, a mosque, a synagogue and a Roman Catholic church are built in the same quarter. We visit some of these as well as the National Museum, the Narikala Fortress and the Sulphur Baths. This evening we will enjoy an after-hours visit to one of the museums for a private dinner with local entertainment. (B, L, D)

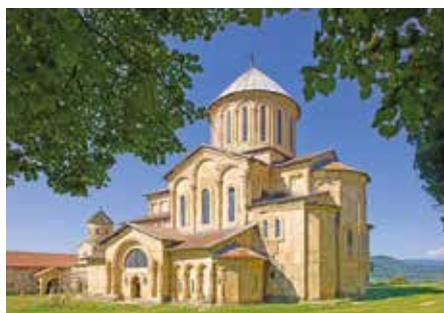
Day 5 Kakheti & Tsinandali. Today we will explore the picturesque region of Kakheti, which borders the Great Caucasus range and was the birthplace of viticulture and wine-making in Georgia. Here the rich land has developed about 500 varieties of vine. Our first stop will be at the Tsinandali Family Estate and wine cellar. This impressive estate once belonged to the 19th century aristocratic poet Alexander Chavchavadze and was frequented by many intellectuals of arts and sciences including Pushkin and Alexander Dumas. The complex now incorporates a landscaped garden, museum and cellar containing many vintage bottles of wine. We will continue to a local winery for a tasting and a traditional barbeque lunch. After lunch we return to Tbilisi and spend the remainder of the day and evening at leisure. (B, L)

Day 6 Mtskheta, Ananuri & Gudauri. Today's drive takes us north along the famed Georgian Military Highway. Our first stop is in sacred Mtskheta, the ancient capital of eastern Georgia. Visit several of its historic monuments including the beautiful 6th century Church of Jvari perched on a cliff overlooking the city and Svetitshoveli Cathedral, the first Christian church in Georgia. We continue our drive to Ananuri to see the incredible 16th century fortress complex, built by the warring dukes of Aragvi to control the main road, and then continue to Gudauri, the highest village along the route and a popular winter mountain resort. On arrival we will check in to the Marco Polo Hotel for our two night stay. (B, L, D)

Day 7 Kazbegi. This morning we continue to drive north towards the Russian border and the town of Kazbegi located in sight of Mount Kazbek. Here we will visit the isolated 14th century Gergeti Holy Trinity Church, surrounded by mountains at an elevation of 2170 metres. We will have the option for a strenuous walk or to join the four-wheel drive to the peak. Enjoy lunch with a local family before driving along the dramatic Dariali Gorge and taking a walk to the Gveleti waterfalls. (B, L, D)



Gveleti Waterfall, Kazbegi



Gelati Monastery, Kutaisi



Ancient cave town of Uplistsikhe



Interior of the Blue Mosque, Istanbul



Vineyards of the Kakheti region



Gergeti Holy Trinity Church (Tsminda Sameba) in Kazbegi

Day 8 Gori, Uplistsikhe & Borjomi. We begin our descent today from the mountains, stopping for lunch in a local restaurant in Gori, the birthplace of Joseph Stalin. We will visit the Stalin Museum designed around the house where he was born together with his private railway carriage. Continue to nearby Uplistsikhe, an ancient cave town dating from the first half of the 1st millennium BC. The entire town is a complex of rock-cut streets, residences, early churches, secret tunnels, water passages, markets and the oldest theatre in Georgia. We end the day in Borjomi, a town famed for its mineral water industry, and check in for our two night stay at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. (B, L, D)

Day 9 Borjomi, Akhaltsikhe & Vardzia. Today we explore the Samtskhe-Javakheti region which is located towards the Turkish and Armenian borders and is named after two of the original Georgian tribes - the Meskh and Javakhs. It is considered as the cradle of Georgian culture. The road leads past arid and stone-terraced landscapes and green valleys littered with centuries-old fortresses. In Akhaltsikhe we will see Rabati Castle, developed under the influence of different cultures and which includes a church, mosque, minaret and synagogue. After lunch we will continue to the Vardzia Cave Complex. Founded in the 12th century, during the reign of Giorgi III and Queen Tamar, the complex became a well-fortified monastery, which had a significant role in the political, cultural, educational and spiritual life of Georgia. For those that prefer a more leisurely day there will be the option to stay in Borjomi and visit the mineral park and Timotesubani Monastery. (B, L, D)

Day 10 Kutaisi. Drive via the picturesque Rikoti Pass to Kutaisi which is known to have existed as early as the 7th century BC as a town in the Greek colony of Miletus. It was its enviable position that allowed it to flourish as an important trade centre on the caravan route from Greece to India. We will see Bagrati Cathedral,

the 11th century cathedral built during the reign of King Bagrat III and known as "the symbol of united Georgia", and the Gelati Monastery. This UNESCO World Heritage Site was founded in 1106 by the famous King of Georgia, David the Builder, and the Gelati Complex includes an academy that has preserved a great number of manuscripts dating back to the 12th century. Transfer to the Best Western Hotel, our base for the next two nights and enjoy some free time before we meet for dinner this evening. (B, L, D)

Day 11 Prometheus Caves & Martvili. Our first call today will be at the Prometheus Caves, a 1.2 kilometre-long cave complex providing breathtaking examples of stalactites, stalagmites, petrified waterfalls, underground rivers, and lakes which we will explore by small boat. Afterwards we will drive the short distance to Martvili, a stunning combination of unique natural wonders and historical monuments. Return to Kutaisi for an evening at leisure and the chance to find a local restaurant for dinner. (B, L)

Day 12 Batumi. After breakfast in the hotel we will drive to the port city of Batumi, located on the Black Sea. Its seaside location with a sweeping cornice, a backdrop of mountains and 19th century architecture, make it very different from any other place in the country. Batumi existed as a small town as far back as the time of the Greeks when it was known as one of the Black Sea's principal ports, and then under the Ottomans, but it was under the Russians that it grew in both size and importance and was the Black Sea outlet for oil from the Caspian. Visit the Batumi Botanical Garden, set over 111 hectares with views of the Black Sea and made up of plants from as far afield as New Zealand, Australia, Himalaya, East Asia and South America. Continue to the old city and wander the streets seeing Piazza Square, the statue of Medea and Seaside Park. Check in to the Sheraton Hotel this afternoon for our two night stay and meet for dinner this evening. (B, L, D)

Day 13 Batumi. The Autonomous Republic of Ajara, in which Batumi lies, is in the extreme southwest of Georgia on the border with Turkey. Twelfth century bridges and cult constructions from the time of Queen Tamar have survived and we will visit Gonio, the fortress-city of the early Feudal period, that towers majestically over the vicinity. Gonio fortress is closely connected to the Myth of the Argonauts. According to the legend, this is a site where King Ayet buried his son Apsaros, who was killed by Jason. Return to the hotel and enjoy a free afternoon to explore at your own pace before we meet for a farewell dinner this evening. (B, D)

Day 14 Batumi to London. After breakfast in the hotel we will transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight to London via Istanbul. Arrive this afternoon. (B)

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

Twin: **£3295** Single: **£3995**

Group Size: We are restricting the group size to just 25 participants.

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • Two nights accommodation in Istanbul • 11 nights hotel accommodation in Georgia • Meals as indicated (B-Breakfast, L-Lunch, D-Dinner) • Wine, beer & soft drinks with lunch & dinner • Excursions as described • English speaking local guide • Tour Manager • Gratuities • Transfers.
Not Included: Travel insurance.

NB. Some of the excursions, particularly those on days 7, 8 & 9, will involve extended periods of walking including steps and over uneven terrain. We therefore do not recommend this tour for those with walking difficulties. Please also note that we will be staying at a number of different hotels as travelling long distances is required to visit the country's main highlights.

YOUR ACCOMMODATION

We have selected some of the best accommodation available for our tour and will be staying at the following properties:



View from the rooftop Mikla Bar



Guest Room

Hotel Marmara Pera, Istanbul - Two nights

Located in a fantastic elevated position in the historic Pera District, close to the shopping and entertainment hub of Istiklal Street, the Marmara Pera Hotel is the ideal starting point for us to discover the fascinating city of Istanbul. The hotel facilities include a rooftop pool with stunning views over the Bosphorus and Suntanahmet as well as a fitness centre and various dining options. All of the rooms are air-conditioned with private bathrooms, mini-bar, tea and coffee making facilities, satellite TV and a safe.



Hotel exterior



Guest Room

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Borjomi – Two nights

Situated in the heart of Borjomi, nestled between the hills and a small river, Crowne Plaza Borjomi features 101 guest rooms with Wi-Fi, tea and coffee making facilities and satellite television. Dining options include all day dining on the terrace, or lunch and dinner may be enjoyed in the à la carte restaurant followed by some Georgian specialities in the Wine Bar or Lobby Bar. For relaxation, visit the large Spa & Wellness Centre with swimming pool, steam rooms, floating baths and a yoga room.



Guest Room



Parnas Cafe

Marriott Hotel, Tbilisi – Three nights

With a city centre location and modern amenities, the Tbilisi Marriott Hotel is an ideal base from which to explore Georgia's unique capital city. Located in an elegant historical building, there is an atrium-style lobby with striking crystal chandeliers and the immaculately appointed air-conditioned rooms offers deluxe bedding, a marble bathroom, safe and satellite television. Hotel facilities include the Parnas Cafe, Lounge & Restaurant and Majestic Lounge & Bar and there is also a 24-hour gym with sauna and massage.



Restaurant Terrace



Guest Room

Best Western Hotel, Kutaisi – Two nights

Located in the heart of Kutaisi, the Best Western Hotel is only a couple of steps away from the historic centre of the city. Designed to offer a modern feel, while at the same time respecting Georgian culture, the hotel offers exceptional customer service that perfectly blends with local hospitality. Offering contemporary interiors and premium amenities, the 45 bedrooms each offer free wireless high-speed Internet access, satellite television, safe and air-conditioning. There are two restaurants and wonderful views can be enjoyed from the rooftop terrace.



Lobby



Guest Room

Marco Polo Hotel, Gudauri – Two nights

This hotel is situated in the mountains around the Gudauri ski resort. There are 123 rooms, all tastefully decorated in neutral colours with minibar, desk, flat-screen TV and complimentary Wi-Fi. There is also a private bathroom in which slippers, bathrobes and toiletries are provided. The hotel facilities include a fitness centre and spa area with an indoor pool, sauna and hot tub. A variety of European and Caucasian specialities are served in the classic-style restaurant, and the cosy bar features a fireplace.



Guest Room



Pool

Sheraton Hotel, Batumi – Two nights

Sheraton Batumi is located in the heart of the city, next to the famous Batumi Boulevard and the Black Sea beach, and just a few minutes walking distance to the historic centre. All of the 45 spacious, air-conditioned rooms feature comfortable beds, tea and coffee making facilities, safe and satellite television. Lunch, dinner and drinks can be taken at the 360 Sky Bar, providing 360-degree panoramas over the city and the Black Sea, whilst the breakfast buffet is served in the Sunflower Restaurant. Onsite facilities include a spa, 24-hour gym and indoor pool.

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Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations and are available on request.
Cover image: Ananuri Fortress Complex