




ITINERARY

EXPLORE GEORGIA – Among Traditions & Legends

Being at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia is an amazing cluster of religions and cultures, beautiful landscapes and historical monuments, legends and ancient history, folklore and fabulous feasting traditions. One of the most popular among the legends is about God, who was distributing lands to the different nations. Georgians came late because they were feasting – drinking toasts to God and missed their turn. God gave them what was left – the land which he had kept for himself...

<p>Day 01</p> 	<p>ARRIVAL IN TBILISI Meeting at the airport and transfer. Hotel accommodation. Tbilisi is the capital of Georgia. It was founded in the 5th century by Vakhtang Gorgasali, the Georgian King of Kartli (Iberia), and made into a capital in the 6th century. Located strategically at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and lying along the historic Silk Road routes, Tbilisi has often been a point of contention between various rival powers and empires. The history of the city can be seen by its architecture, where the Rustaveli Avenue and downtown are blended with the narrower streets of old Tbilisi district. Despite being overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian, Tbilisi is one of the few places in the world where a synagogue and a mosque are located next to each other in the ancient Bath district, several hundred meters from the Metekhi Church. Welcome dinner in Georgian restaurant with national folk song/dancing. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 02</p> 	<p>TBILISI – MTSKHETA – TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Tbilisi and Mtskheta full day tour. A moderate combination of sightseeing and walking tour of Tbilisi will start by visiting an important historic part of the city – Abanot-ubani, the place, where according to a legend the King Vakhtang Gorgasali’s pheasant fell, leading to a discovery of the hot springs and, subsequently, to founding of a new capital. Continue with excursion in old Tbilisi and visit Narikala Fortress, Sioni Cathedral, Anchiskhati Basilica, Metekhi church and Sameba Cathedral; after a short coffee-break at café-streets of Shardeni and Erekle with their fascinating atmosphere and souvenir shopping possibility, a walk along the Rustaveli Avenue (downtown) will give visitors the opportunity to experience fully the rhythm and the beauty of the capital of Georgia. Visit to Georgian National Museum. Proceed to Mtskheta – the ancient capital of Georgia, the important religious centre and a museum city that is on the list of the world sights of UNESCO. It is situated at the convergence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers. There are a number of very significant archaeological and religious monuments in and around the town: Svetitskhoveli (11th c.)-a grandiose cathedral of cross-dome design, known as the burial site of Christ’s mantle and a masterpiece built by architect Konstantine Arskidze; Jvari Monastery (6th c.)-standing on the rocky mountaintop, with its architectural forms and decorative elements, Jvari is harmoniously connected with the landscape and overlooks Mtskheta. Return to Tbilisi and overnight.</p>
<p>Day 03</p> 	<p>TBILISI – KAZBEGI - TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Kazbegi. Drive 157km from Tbilisi, on the south slopes of Caucasus main range, along the Georgian military highway to Kazbegi. This ancient route through the Caucasus has been much celebrated by everyone from poets to guidebook writers. It’s remarkable for the landscapes; flora and fauna, people and history, and many travelers to Georgia will regard this place as a highlight of their visit. On the way all sightseeing including Ananuri fortified ensemble – built in the 16th century, once belonging to the Duke of Aragvi, located on the left bank of the Aragvi River. It incorporates a circuit wall with turrets, a porch, a Church of Virgin, a minor Church of Gvtaeba, a tower with a stepped pyramidal roof of Svanetian type, a single-nave Church Mkurnali, tower Sheupovari, a bell-tower and a reservoir. Arrive in Kazbegi - a small town in Khevi (historical part of Georgia) situated at the mountain bottom Kazbegi (5047 m), which is considered to be one of the highest points in all Caucasus. The legend goes that Prometheus was chained here by the Greek Gods for stealing their knowledge. These places are glorified by their nature with high mountains, gorges, passes, lakes and small rivers. Khevi is populated by ethnical Georgians, they are called Mokheveebi. Centuries ago, they lived in patriarchal communities where the leader, who was the oldest and the most honored person of the gorge, acted as a judge, a priest and a military leader at the same time. The population of Khevi had kept some of its medieval traditions until now. Walk up the mountain to Gergeti Sameba church (optional), with beautiful panoramic views of Caucasus, including mount Kazbegi. Tasting famous “Khinkali” of Khevi in local restaurant. Return to Tbilisi</p>

<p>Day 04</p> 	<p>TBILISI – BOLNISI – DMANISI – TBILISI</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Full-day Bolnisi Sioni and the ancient city of Dmanisi tour.</p> <p>Bolnisi Sioni, a 5th c. basilica, is significant for three main reasons: it is one of the most monumental churches of its time; it has interesting ornamentation inside, and on the facade were found the earliest examples of Georgian writing known in the country itself. It is built of what is known as bolnisi tufa, a stone with a green tint. Bolnisi is a three-nave basilica, but it has an open ambulatory on the north side, a porch to the south-west and a baptismal chapel in the southeast, all features of the original building. In the middle ages, the Ancient city of Dmanisi was one of the main towns on the caravan road from Georgia and Armenia to the Middle East. However the basilica dates from the 7th c. and it was the seat of a bishop. The ruins cover a large area divided into two parts, 13 hectares on the hill above the Mashaveri River to the north, and 12 hectares of suburbs by the Pinezauri River to the south. Recent excavations of Dmanisi have revealed an extraordinary record of the earliest hominid dispersal beyond Africa (1, 75 million years ago). It is widely recognized that Dmanisi discoveries have changed scientist's knowledge concerning the migration of homo from Africa to the European continent. Return to Tbilisi. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 05</p> 	<p>TBILISI – TELAVI (Kakheti Region)</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Sightseeing tour of Kakheti region.</p> <p>Kakheti is synonymous with wine. Drive through the beautiful landscape of vineyards and wine-producing villages of this region and arrive in Telavi - one of the oldest cities of Georgia, located in the most beautiful Alazani valley and famous for its numerous monuments of historic and archaeological significance that are found in and outskirts of the city. After the city tour, visits to: Alaverdi Cathedral (11th c.) –the second tallest religious building in Georgia with a height of over 55 meters and the outstanding example of medieval Georgian architecture, located on the Alazani Valley, 20 km from Telavi; and Tsinandali – a village noted for the estate and its historic winery which once belonged to the 19th-century aristocratic poet Alexander Chavchavadze. An excursion in the family museum and a walk in the park beautifully laid out in an English style with fine views and exotic plants leave unforgettable memories to the visitors. Proceed to the historic village of Nafareuli, located under the slopes of Caucasus Mountains, where river Lopota joins river Alazani. Visit the “Old Cellar”, the restored ancestral wine cellar of twin brothers and taste “Bio wine” from the pitcher at the moment of opening it and enjoy traditional Kakhetian feast with a toast-maker called “Tamada” and in the company of folk-song singers near the fireplace. Overnight at a local hotel.</p>
<p>Day 06</p> 	<p>TELAVI – KVARELI – SIGNAGI</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Drive to Kvarlesi.</p> <p>Kvarlesi, one of the most beautiful cities of Georgia, has a rich history. Historical records and archeological findings prove that the territory of this part of the country has been inhabited since the time immemorial. There are many legends on how Kvarlesi was founded. According to one of them, the king liked the surroundings of the Duruji grooves (the present days Kvarlesi territories) while hunting and ordered to build a village on that lovely (“sa-kvarlesi” in Georgian) place. The unique and ancient historical monuments can be visited here: The Nekresi Monastery (4th – 17th c.c.) is of vital importance as one of the ancient, a 4th century church remains there. Nekresi, as the cultural and religious center, played an important role in the early and medieval ages. Not only within the region but also in the whole country one of the unique monuments are the ruins of the medieval capital of Kakheti – Gremi with the cult constructions preserved up to date and with the magnificent church of the Archangel. Proceed to Signagi – a rare example of historic city which kept its style during the centuries with open traditional balconies, unique fortress with churches and towers built in it and narrow beautiful streets to walk along. Signagi, also known as “a city of love”, overlooks the Alazani valley and opens to visitors the magnificent views of the Great Caucasus Range. The other important site to visit here is the Monastery of Bodbe – the final resting place of Saint Nino, “Enlightener of Georgians”. As Legend tells, St. Nino from Cappadocia came to Georgia carrying a cross of vine branches bound together with strands of her own hair. As a result of her mission in 337 king Mirian declared Christianity as an official religion of Georgia. Hotel accommodation and overnight in Signagi.</p>
<p>Day 07</p> 	<p>SIGNAGI – DAVIT GAREJA – TBILISI</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Drive to David Gareja Monastery.</p> <p>David Gareja Monastery is a remarkable rock-hewn monastery complex located on the half-desert slopes of Mount Gareja, some 70 km southeast of Tbilisi. The first monastery was founded by Davit, one of the 13 Syrian Fathers, who came to Georgia for strengthening Christian faith in the 6th c. Later, altogether 19 rocky monasteries were established. The best known is Larva Monastery that, according to a legend, shelters a part of the spiritual treasure from Jerusalem. The complex includes hundreds of cells, churches, chapels, refectories and living quarters hollowed out of the rock face. The healthy 35 minutes climb uphill to limestone caves is worth it as when reaching the peak the breathtaking views are disclosed from there. The view seems endless, towards the south are the plains of Azerbaijan and down below is the huge canyon in which resides the main area of Davit Gareja. Drive to Tbilisi. Hotel accommodation. Leisure time in the evening.</p>

<p>Day 08</p> 	<p>TBILISI – GORI - AMBROLAURI – KUTAISI</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Drive towards Ambrolauri (Racha Region).</p> <p>On the way to Ambrolauri we will make a stop and sightseeing tour in Gori - an ancient city which is also linked to being the birthplace of Joseph Stalin where he lived until the age of 15. After passing rich agricultural lowlands of Kartli and beautiful landscapes of Rikoti Pass which divides East and West parts of Georgia, arrive to Racha - a historic province and one of the most beautiful highland regions in the northwestern part of Georgia. Historical sources first mention this region in the 6th century BC; it was a part of the early Georgian Kingdom, the Colchis Kingdom, which was created in the 7-6th centuries BC and was known to be wealthy and strong. Cultural monuments and strong traditions have been passed down through the generations in Racha. Its people are known for their dedication to work, love for wine, calm character and ability to sing. They still maintain ancient traditions of vineyards and winemaking, just as they were described in ancient Greek and Roman writing. Racha, especially the lowlands of Ablorauli, is famous for growing Aleksandrouli, Tetra and Mojuretuli grapes, the basis, among others, for the Khvanchkara semi-sweet red wine.</p> <p>The main places of tourists' interests concentrated here are: Nikortsinda – a domed church built in 1010-1014 by King Bagrat III and the peak of sculptural decoration of Georgian cathedrals and Barakoni church - a domed cruciform church and one of the last important monuments in the tradition of medieval Georgian architecture. Drive to Kutaisi via Nakerala Pass and splendid Shaori Lake, at which visitors can enjoy a short rest on fresh air and magnificent views of the lake itself.</p> <p>Hotel accommodation and overnight in Kutaisi.</p>
<p>Day 09</p> 	<p>KUTAISI (Imereti Region)</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Kutaisi full-day tour.</p> <p>Kutaisi is one of the most beautiful and ancient Georgian cities situated in West Georgia on both banks of the picturesque Rioni river. The river Rioni is mentioned in the myths of the Golden Fleece as local residents used to extract gold there. The symbol of a sheep skin covered with gold was later named the Golden Fleece. Unique masterpieces of Georgian architecture are located in and around Kutaisi – Bagrati Cathedral (the cross-domed, tri-conch Cathedral located on the top of Ukimerioni Hill, built in the 11th century. The cathedral is distinguished for its elegant proportions, grand size, facade composition, ornaments and relief carvings); Gelati Monastery Complex (once a major centre of enlightenment in Georgia, founded by King Davit Aghmashenebeli (David the Builder) in 1106 that represents the flourishing medieval architecture in Georgia. The tomb of Davit Aghmashenebeli is located in the porch to the south of the precinct wall); both of these monuments are protected by UNESCO. Not far from Kutaisi there is a unique Sataplia Reserve skillfully hidden in the mountains. It is a rare monument with complex character and famous by its most beautiful caves. The karstic cave of Sataplia features spectacular stalactites and stalagmites and is 890 meters long, 10 m high and 12 m wide. The real traces of ancient reptiles printed in huge stones are clearly visible on the Dinosaur Plateau nearby.</p> <p>Dinner in local restaurant with traditional Imeretian feasting. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 10</p> 	<p>KUTAISI – ZUGDIDI – MESTIA (Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region)</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Zugdidi. Excursion to Dadiani Palace in Zugdidi.</p> <p>Zugdidi is a city in the Western Georgian historical province of Samegrelo and serves as centre of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. Megrelians are vivacious and talented. Samegrelo has produced many outstanding scientist and cultural representatives. The treasure of Zugdidi is a graceful patrimonial palace of Dadiani princes with its unique park. Dadiani were an ancient aristocratic family known for their relationship with Napoleon Bonaparte. The Palace now is a museum in which the extraordinary historic collections are exhibited. For example, some personal things and pieces of furniture of the Emperor and one of his death masks (two others are in France and England). There is here even a more significant relic – the Blessed Virgin shroud. According the legend the shroud was taken from Byzantium to Western Georgia by the ancestors of Dadiani princes in the 15th century. The shroud can be seen only during the big church holidays.</p> <p>Proceed to Mestia (Svaneti). Accommodation and overnight in Mestia.</p>
<p>Day 11</p> 	<p>MESTIA – USHGULI - MESTIA</p> <p>Breakfast at the hotel. Svaneti sightseeing, excursion to Ushguli (by 4X4).</p> <p>The Zemo Svaneti region of Georgia is an exceptional example of mountain scenery with medieval-type villages and tower-houses. Its characteristic landscape is formed by small settlements with a natural environment of gorges and alpine valleys and a backdrop of snow-covered mountains. During the numerous raids of various invaders, the kings of Georgia hid sacred treasure and valuable manuscripts in Svaneti. Here embossed icons, relief crosses and the oldest Georgian manuscripts of the Bible are preserved. The most notable feature of the settlements in this corner of Georgia is the abundance of towers, especially in Mestia and the frontier villages, such as Ushguli which is located at the head of the Enguri gorge and is the highest permanently inhabited village in Europe. The harsh climate and mountains had its influence in forming the character of the people living in Svaneti - they are proud and very laconic and keep a number of their religious and cultural traditions virtually intact.</p> <p>Return to Mestia. Dinner with traditional Svanetian feasting and folk songs. Overnight.</p>

<p>Day 12</p> 	<p>MESTIA - BATUMI (Adjara Region) Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Batumi. City tour. Adjara is the southernmost coastline region of Georgia, once part of the Kolkheti Kingdom, which had close relations with Ancient Greece and Rome. Batumi is an administrative center of Adjara and is situated by the Black Sea and is the land and marine gateway to Georgia with its largest sea port. Primary information about Batumi appeared in works of the fourth century B.C. Greek philosopher Aristotle. He named the city situated by the Black Sea in Colcha 'Bathus'- derived from the Greek phrase meaning "deep harbour". The main sights of modern Batumi are the oldest historic-architectural monuments, places of rest and culture and great variety of subtropical plants. A favorite rest and entertainment place is the famous Seaside Park (Boulevard) that is stretched along the beaches, occupying 5 km of area with its infrastructure. On the north of the city of Batumi, along the Black Sea, is situated the Batumi Botanical Gardens – Unique among the gardens of the world. Another site to visit in Batumi is Gonio-Apsaros Fortress, situated 12 km north from the city. The fortress was once a very strategic, political and economic centre belonging to the eastern part of the Roman Empire. It is mentioned in the ancient Greek and Roman documents; the chronicles provide an argument that the Gonio fortress has a close connection with Greek antique Myth of Argonauts. Adjara is also famous for its folklore and for Adjarian Khachapuri with baked eggs and cheese and Achma, a delightful layered cheese pie – these adjarian meals should certainly be tasted, as they are most unique and delicious. Hotel accommodation and overnight in Batumi.</p>
<p>Day 13</p> 	<p>BATUMI – BORJOMI (Samtskhe-Javakheti Region) Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Samtskhe-Javakheti Region. Borjomi tour. Borjomi is a resort town and one of the districts of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region and is situated in the northwestern part of the region in the picturesque Borjomi Gorge on the eastern edge of the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park. The town is famous for its mineral water industry, the Romanov summer palace in Likani, and the WWF-site Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park. Borjomi is also home to the most extensive ecologically-themed amusement park in the Caucasus. In the Middle Ages, the area of what is now Borjomi was part of the Tori province and was populated by a series of forts guarding the strategic crossroad of routes leading to the western, eastern, and southern provinces of Georgia. Three important forts – those of "Gogia", "Petra", and "Sali" – still overlook the town from nearby hills. Hotel accommodation and overnight in Borjomi.</p>
<p>Day 14</p> 	<p>BORJOMI - VARDZIA - TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Vardzia. During centuries Samtskhe-Javakheti, this ancient region of Georgia, and the home of the great Georgian poet of the 12th century, Shota Rustaveli, served as a barrier separating the rest of the country from the Moslem world which surrounded this almost single Christian state in this part of the world from the south and south-west; it was a place of numerous military operations, and accordingly was used for the assembly of all Georgian troops. That is why the King Giorgi III (1156-1184) decided to build there a town-fortress Vardzia. The construction was brought to an end by his daughter Queen Tamar, Georgia's first female sovereign, however, not as a military town, as had been designed, but as a huge fortified cave monastery dug into the side of the Erusheli mountain, on the left bank of the River Mtkvari. The city included a church, a throne room, and a complex irrigation system watering terraced farmlands and consisted of over six thousand apartments in a thirteen story complex. The only access to the complex was through some well hidden tunnels near the Mtkvari River. An earthquake in Samtskhe destroyed approximately two thirds of the city in 1283, exposing the caves to outside view and collapsing the irrigation system. The place is maintained by a small group of monks and can be visited for a small fee. Drive to Tbilisi. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 15</p>	<p>DEPARTURE FROM TBILISI</p>

SAMPLE ITINERARY: SUBJECT TO CHANGES.

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