

ITINERARY

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ARGONAUTS – Searching for Golden Fleece

Explore the ancient Kingdom of Colchis (now Western Georgia) and follow the footsteps of the Argonauts according to the famous epic Myth and live the adventure of trekking and rafting from the beautiful mountainous regions of Georgia down to the Black Sea.

<p>Day 01</p>	<p>ARRIVAL IN TBILISI Meeting at the airport and transfer. Hotel accommodation. Tbilisi night city tour (optional). 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: excursion in old Tbilisi, visits to Narikala Fortress, Sioni Cathedral, Metekhi church, Sameba Cathedral, coffee-break at café-streets of Shardeni and Erekle with their fascinating atmosphere and souvenir shopping possibility, a walk along the Rustaveli Avenue - will give visitors the opportunity to experience fully the rhythm and the beauty of the capital of Georgia. Proceed to Mtskheta - the ancient capital of Georgia and the important religious centre. 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: 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; Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11th c.) - a grandiose cathedral of cross-dome design, known as the burial site of Christ's mantle and one of the major Orthodox Georgian temples. On the way back, visit to Tbilisi Open Air Ethnographic Museum - which exposes 14 ethnographic zones of Georgia with its architectural monuments and ethnographic materials - different kinds of tools, textile and ceramics. It occupies 65 hectares of land and is located to the west of famous "Turtle Lake". Free time. Return to the hotel and overnight.</p>
<p>Day 03</p> 	<p>TBILISI - NIKORTSMINDA – UTSERA Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Racha region, lunch en route: Drive to West Georgia, the famous Land of the Golden Fleece, and arrive to Racha - a historic province and one of the most beautiful highland regions in the northwestern part of Georgia. This region boasts a diverse landscape of mountain forests and meadows. The main places of tourists' interests are concentrated here as well. One of them is Nikortsminda, a domed church built in 1010-1014 by King Bagrat III and the peak of sculptural decoration of Georgian cathedrals. It was built in the name of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Maker and contains many examples of old Georgian script. Proceed to Utsera – known for its mineral water and health resort/spa. The village is located 1500 m above sea level and boasts the usual medieval churches and the 800-year-old "alley of trees". Accommodation in local guesthouse or camping overnight in the Gorge of Rioni River</p>
<p>Day 04</p>	<p>Full day of rafting and search for the adventure on the Rioni River. Overnight</p>
<p>Day 05</p> 	<p>KUTAISI Proceed to Kutaisi (Imereti region). En route enjoy the views of splendid Shaori lake. 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. Full-day Kutaisi tour: 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; Motsameta Monastery Complex (8th-11th c.c.); Overnight in Kutaisi.</p>

<p>Day 06</p>  	<p>KUTAISI – NOKALAKEVI - ZUGDIDI Breakfast at the hotel. Drive to Nokalakevi. Nokalakevi is a village and archeological site of Samegrelo. It is located in the district of Senaki and presumably was the location of the mythical city of Aia, capital of the Kingdom of Colchis. The Golden Fleece was said to be kept in this very place. Archeological excavations have unearthed different valuable archeological materials on its territory. The ruins of ancient palaces, Christian churches, baths, and tunnels have also been identified and preserved. Proceed to Zugdidi. Excursion to Dadiani Palace. Zugdidi is a city in the Western Georgian historical province of Samegrelo and serves as centre of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. The treasure of Zugdidi is a graceful patrimonial palace of Dadiani prince 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. Accommodation and overnight in Zugdidi.</p>
<p>Day 07</p>  	<p>ZUGDIDI - MESTIA Breakfast at the hotel. Drive to Svaneti. <u>En route visit Enguri Dam</u> (the height 271 meters, the highest dam of this type in the world), that makes a water-storage reservoir in the picturesque gorges of Samegrelo and Svaneti mountains. 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. Local sightseeing and overnight in Mestia.</p>
<p>Day 08</p> 	<p>MESTIA – USHGULI - MESTIA Breakfast at the hotel. Svaneti sightseeing, excursion to Ushguli (by 4X4). The day starts with the excursion to the Ethnographic Museum of Mestia, St. George and St. Kvirike Churches. Proceed to Ushguli (2200 m) and visit the tower of Love (12th c.) en route. Ushguli and generally the whole Upper Svaneti region is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Besides the abundance of towers, Ushguli is also famous for the view of the highest mountain in Georgia - Mt. Shkhara (5201 m.). Return to Mestia. Overnight.</p>
<p>Day 09</p> 	<p>MESTIA – POTI Breakfast at the hotel. Proceed to Poti. The ancient Greek historian Strabo wrote about Poti: "In Phasis there are people speaking 60 different languages". Today this ancient city is as lively and busy as it was centuries ago, when it laid on the Silk Road. Nowadays it still represents the main port and trade centre of Georgia. After the accommodation in Poti, you will be given the opportunity to visit and enjoy easy trekking through Kolkheti National Park, which covers the eastern zone of the Black Sea coast and the basin of Paliastomi Lake and is famous for its abundant bird life and unique scenery. Overnight in Poti.</p>
<p>Day 10</p>   	<p>POTI - 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. Hotel accommodation and overnight in Batumi.</p>

Day 11	BATUMI - TBILISI Breakfast at the hotel. Drive to Tbilisi. Lunch en route. Arrive in Tbilisi. Evening for leisure. Overnight.
Day 12	DEPARTURE FROM TBILISI