

THE TREASURES OF GEORGIA

7 - 18 April 2024



FROM
£3,780
PER PERSON

Tour Leader: Bridget Wheeler


The Ultimate
TRAVEL COMPANY

RICH HERITAGE, MEDIEVAL HISTORY & NATURAL BEAUTY



Situated between the subtropical Black Sea coast, the Caspian Sea and the snowy peaks of the Caucasus, the state of Georgia sits at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Georgia's rich heritage has been hugely influenced by both Byzantine and Persian cultures. With Russia (and Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkar, North Osetia-Alania) to the north, Turkey to the west, Armenia and Iran to the south and Azerbaijan to the east, Georgia remains a fiercely independent nation after years of oppression by the Russian Tsars and the Soviet Union. Georgia's mix of natural beauty and medieval history has made this small country one of Eastern Europe's most fascinating destinations.



Uplistsikhe



Bodbe Monastery



Alazani Valley

12-DAY ITINERARY, DEPARTING 7 APRIL 2024

7 April London / Tbilisi

Suggested flights (not included in the cost of the tour) Air France AF 1681 departing London Heathrow at 09.00 hrs arriving Paris Charles de Gaulle at 11.20 hrs. Connect to AF 1052 departing Paris at 13.00 hrs arriving Tbilisi at 19.45 hrs. Transfer and check into the centrally located 5* Biltmore Hotel where three nights are spent. A snack meal will be available in your room upon arrival.

8 April Tbilisi

Morning walking tour of the vibrant Tbilisi Old Town. Hidden in its labyrinthine streets are monuments, churches, art galleries, museums and theatres, sulphur bath houses and buildings with gaping holes in their facades that have their own stories to tell. Begin with the Georgian Synagogue, a Jewish house which was built with bricks, in an eclectic style, between 1895 and 1903. Continue to Sioni Cathedral, which is one of the most remarkable examples of Georgian medieval architecture, richly decorated with frescoes and icons in gold and dark turquoise colours. This is followed by Anchiskhati Basilica, the oldest church in Tbilisi, dating back to the 6th century. End at Narikala Fortress, the main citadel of the city where you can enjoy the wonderful views of Tbilisi.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Visit Metekhi Church of the Assumption, the Orthodox church which was built by the Georgian King St. Demetrius II in the 13th century. Visit one of the

city's historic sulphur bath houses for which Tbilisi is renowned. The city has an abundance of hot springs, high in sulphurs and other minerals, with a constant temperature of 38C to 40C, and the waters have long been used as a therapeutic aid for a range of ailments including skin conditions and arthritis. Dinner at a local restaurant.

9 April Tbilisi

Visit the Georgian National Museum, the largest museum complex in the country. Here visit the Museum of Georgia which contains a collection of magnificent medieval Christian art, including stunning gold and silver jewellery from the ancient land of Colchis, spectacular modern and contemporary paintings by Georgian artists and masterpieces of Oriental, Western European and Russian decorative arts. Visit Rustaveli Avenue, the central avenue in Tbilisi named after the medieval Georgian poet, Shota Rustaveli.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Visit Sameba Cathedral, the main cathedral of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the Armenian Quarter. Return to the Georgian National Museum complex to visit the National Gallery, established in 1920 by Dimitri Shevardnadze which houses various exhibitions of fine arts. Dinner at a local restaurant.

10 April Tbilisi / Bodbe / Signaghi / Lopota

Depart by coach for Kakheti (105 kms) and explore what locals call

'the motherland of wine', the fertile Alazani Valley with its medieval monasteries and unique wineries. The eastern region of Georgia is surrounded by picturesque mountains and filled with historical sights. Visit Bodbe Nunnery, just outside Signaghi. In the 4th century, after Georgia converted to Christianity, Saint Nino, the queen responsible for the conversion, withdrew to Bodbe Gorge where she died. She wanted to be buried in a church in Bodbe rather than being taken away to be buried elsewhere by the king. Legend has it that the king came with 200 horsemen but could not move her, so he ordered that a small monastery be built for her to be buried in. The monastery is now a convent for nuns. Visit Signaghi, located in the most easterly region of Georgia. It is unique for being surrounded by fortress walls which have been well preserved and is famous for its wine and carpet making culture. The houses within Signaghi's walls date from the 18th and 19th centuries. Walk through the narrow, cobbled streets of the town in the shadow of richly decorated wooden balconies and enjoy the breathtaking views of the Kizikhi area.

Lunch at local winery. Drive to Lopota and check into the Lopota Lake Resort for two nights. Dinner at the hotel.

11 April Lopota / Nekresi / Gremi / Tsinandali / Lopota

Depart by coach for Nekresi Monastery Complex. Drive to Gremi architectural complex.



Old City wall around Signaghi



Metekhi Church



Proceed to Kakheti for a cooking demonstration, where you can learn how to prepare a famous Georgian pork barbecue 'Mtsvadi' and participate in the making of Churchkhela. Churchkhela is a traditional Georgian sweet snack made of walnuts and grape juice.

Lunch with wine tasting with a local family. Visit Tsinandali Family Estate which once belonged to the 19th century aristocratic poet Alexander Chavchavadze. The complex comprises a memorial house, a landscape garden, a historical winery, wine cellar, hotel and a café. Drive back to Lopota. Dinner at the hotel.

12 April Lopota / Alaverdi / Ikalto / Tbilisi

Depart by coach for Alaverdi Monastery. The monastery was founded by the Assyrian monk Joseph (Yoseb, Amba) Alaverdeli, who came from Antioch and settled in Alaverdi, then a small village and former pagan religious centre dedicated to the Moon. At a height of over 55 metres, Alaverdi Cathedral is the second tallest religious building in Georgia, after Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi, which was consecrated in 2004. Visit Ikalto Monastery Complex. The monastery was the first in Kakheti region; it was built in the 6th century by a Christian preacher, Zenon of Ikalto, who was one of the Assyrian fathers settled in Georgia to preach Christianity. Zenon lived in the monastery, preached and healed. He had disciples and followers which led to the expansion of the monastery.

Zenon Ikalto was buried under one of the churches of the complex.

Proceed to Kakheti for a cooking demonstration, where you can see how Georgian bread is baked. Lunch with wine tasting with a local family. Drive back to Tbilisi, check into the Biltmore Hotel where one night is spent. Evening at leisure. Dinner at a local restaurant.

13 April Tbilisi / Mtskheta / Ananuri / Kazbegi

Drive to Mtskheta, the ancient capital located at the confluence of the Aragvi and Mtkvari rivers. See the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Jvari, a cross-shaped monastery which dates to the 6th century, located at the top of a hill.

Lunch at a local restaurant outside Tbilisi. Visit the grand 11th-century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, a masterpiece of medieval Georgian architecture with stunning views over the Kura and Aragvi Rivers, set on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. Drive along the Georgian Military Highway and visit Ananuri Fortress, a former residence of the Dukes of the Aragvi region. This complex features churches and towers dating back to the 14th-18th centuries, overlooking the beautiful Jinali lake, in a picturesque landscape. Continue your journey and explore Khevi Province, the heart of the country, known for its severe scenery and numerous architectural monuments and archaeological sites. Check into Hotel Kazbegi for two nights. Dinner at the hotel.

14 April Kazbegi

Morning visit to Kazbegi, a small town with views of Mt. Kazbek, the seventh highest peak in the Caucasus Mountains. Mt. Kazbek is associated with the myth of Prometheus. According to legend he was chained on the mountain as a punishment for having stolen fire from the Gods and given it to mortals. Take a four-wheel drive to 14th-century Gergeti Holy Trinity Church which is located at a height of 2,170 metres under Mt. Kazbegi.

Experience making 'Khinkali', Georgian dumplings filled with minced meat in dough which originated in the Georgian mountain regions, followed by lunch with a local family. Drive towards the Russian border, enjoying the views of the dramatic Dariali Gorge followed by a hike to Gveleti Waterfall. Dinner at the hotel.

15 April Kazbegi / Gori / Uplistsikhe / Kutaisi

Drive to Gori (190 kms) and visit the Joseph Stalin Museum, devoted to the most famous native of the city, who became head of the government and led the Soviet Union from 1925 to 1953.

Lunch at a local restaurant in Gori. Visit Uplistsikhe, known as 'God's Fortress' the remarkable ancient cave city, all hewn out of rock. The city played a significant role in Georgian history over a period of approximately 3,000 years.



Jinvali Water Reservoir, Georgia

Archaeological excavations have revealed extraordinary artifacts dating from the late Bronze Age up to the late Middle Ages. The ancient cave city was built on a rocky bank of the Mtkvari River, approximately 15 kilometres east of the town of Gori. Between the 6th century BC and 11th century AD, it was one of the most important political, religious, and cultural centres of pre-Christian Kartli, one of the predecessors of the Georgian state and flourished until it was ravaged by the Mongols in the 13th century. Continue your journey to Kutaisi (170 kms) and check into the Newport Hotel where two nights are spent. Dinner at a local restaurant.

16 April Kutaisi

Visit Bagrati Cathedral, the 11th-century cathedral, built during the reign of King Bagrat III and known as 'the symbol of united Georgia'. The Cathedral was officially rebuilt on 16 September 2012. Visit Gelati Monastery, founded in 1106, by the famous king of Georgia, Davit the Builder. Gelati Complex includes an academy and remained for a long time one of the main centres in the country for cultural enlightenment. The monastery has a great number of preserved manuscripts dating back to the 12th century and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Visit the Prometheus Caves located in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. This 1.2 km-long cave complex provides breathtaking examples of

stalactites, stalagmites, curtains, petrified waterfalls, cave pearls, underground rivers, and lakes. Its unique features include a variety of halls and a diversity of landscapes. Dinner at a local restaurant.

17 April Kutaisi / Tbilisi

Depart for Tbilisi (180 kms), with a visit enroute to Ubisi, home of the 9th-century St. George's monastery famous for its beautiful frescos.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Check into the Biltmore Hotel where one night is spent. Afternoon at leisure. Farewell dinner at a local restaurant with a Georgian folk show.

18 April Tbilisi / London

Transfer to Tbilisi airport. Suggested flights (not included) Air France AF 1053 departing Tbilisi at 08.40 hrs arriving Paris Charles de Gaulle at 11.55 hrs connecting to AF 1780 departing Paris at 13.20 hrs arriving London Heathrow at 13.45 hrs.

TOUR PRICES PER PERSON

Tour Price	£3,780
Single Supplement	£890

PRICE INCLUDES

- Accommodation throughout as shown in the itinerary
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner daily
- All entrance fees, visits, excursions and transportation as per the itinerary
- Gratuities to guide(s)
- Gratuities to driver(s)
- Gratuities in restaurants for included meals
- Portage
- Local English-speaking guide/s
- The services of your tour leader throughout

PRICE EXCLUDES

- International flights
- Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages
- Travel insurance
- Items of personal expenditure (e.g. telephone calls / laundry etc.)
- Government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 18/05/23

Please note we have not included the cost of flights in the tour price. Please contact us for prices should you wish to book them through us.



Old Meidan Square, Tbilisi



YOUR TOUR LEADER



BRIDGET WHEELER

Bridget has worked in the travel industry for 35 years. After obtaining a degree from London University she started her career at Montpelier Travel before setting up Riverside Travel in the late 1990s, which then amalgamated with The Ultimate Travel Company in the early 2000s. She now divides her time between her office in Hampshire and The Ultimate Travel Company in Fulham. She has travelled extensively and has led numerous groups to various diverse destinations including Ethiopia, Cuba, Jordan, the Baltic States and Georgia.



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