



Culture



Georgia

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A place like no other I've ever seen.

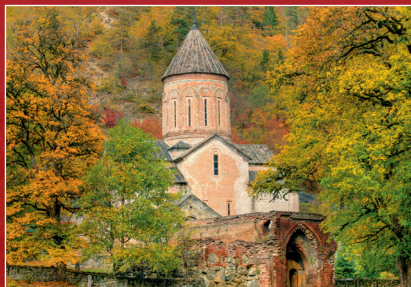


Welcome to Georgia!

You are about to discover a country rich in history, tradition, pride, and friendship. A land so pleasant, rich and fertile that it is home to the earliest remains of modern man found outside of Africa, dated to be nearly 2 million years old.

From these early Georgians, living in the shadows of the mighty Caucasus Mountains, to the Ancient Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts search for the golden fleece, the Kings and Queen that converted Georgia to Christianity in the 4th century AD, the events of the 20th and 21st centuries, Georgia has an amazing story to tell.

Whether you visit our ancient cave cities, marvel at the highest settlements in Europe or experience the sights and sounds of our amazing theatre, food, arts, wine and music, Georgia will capture a place in your heart forever.





A Golden Ancient History

Many countries have ancient beginnings. But very few can, like Georgia, trace their history back nearly two million years. The discovery of 1.8 million year old remains in the hills just south of Tbilisi provides the missing link in human expansion between Africa and Europe.

There are many reasons to come to Georgia, and gold is just one of them. Our museums and even stories are encased with gold: gold statues and figurines, belts and crowns from ancient tribes and peoples, like the Colchis.

It was the Colchis, Georgia's ancient people, who are widely believed to have inspired some of our most famous visitors: Jason and the Argonauts. According to a legend, the Colchis owned a famous, superb Golden Fleece and Jason and the Argonauts were sent to claim it and bring



it back to Greece. The fleece itself was probably inspired by the practice of sifting for gold in the high, fast flowing mountain rivers of Georgia by leaving a sheep's fleece in the river overnight. When taken out of the river, hung from a tree and dried out, the gold can literally be brushed out. The whole story of Jason's quest for the fleece and his meeting with the Georgian princess Medea, the famous sorceress daughter of Aetes, King of Colchis, can still be enjoyed today in a poem of The Odyssey by Homer.



Religion

As one of the first countries in the world to convert to Christianity, in just the 4th century AD, today Georgia is proud to provide for full religious freedom. While the majority of the country is Christian, Georgia is one of the few countries where churches, mosques, synagogues and chapels co-exist peacefully, side by side. Wandering through Tbilisi, one can lose count of the number of religious buildings and memorials, but they never feel intrusive.



Churches & Fortresses

Georgia has a magnificent 1,300 year old tradition of architecture, which is one of the most significant expressions of the nation's artistic vision and heritage. The famous cupola structures that dominate Georgian ecclesiastic architecture can be traced back to domestic dwellings.

Two major forms of ecclesiastical architecture was developed in Georgia; the central domed structure and the basilica. The basilica form came to Georgia through the influence of the Roman and Hellenistic worlds.

The turn of the seventh century was an epoch of extraordinary architectural achievement. The tetraconch Church of Djvari, original in design and conception, soon became an inspirational model for many other architects.

The eighth and ninth centuries were an interesting transitional period of hybrid forms such as the fusion of the central

domed church and the triple-church basilica. The most notable surviving successes of this kind include the domed Church of Vachnadziani and the double-domed Church of Kvelatsminda in Gurdjaani. This period is known as the Golden Age of Georgia.

Another outstanding gem of architectural heritage is The Alaverdi Saint Giorgi Church which was founded by one of the 13 Syrian Fathers, Joseb Alaverdeli in the 6th century and was constructed as an Episcopal Church in the 11th century.

By the 15th-16th centuries the Realm of Kakheti reached the peak of its power and its capital city was Gremi, built by King Levan and one of the most important trading and economic centers of the Feudal Era. The unique castle of Gremi with its church of the Archangel, is a must-see in Georgia.

Another example of great architectural and artistic accomplishments is Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, the most interesting being the one on 'the pillar' painted by the Georgian painters under the leadership of Grigol Guljavarsashvili (17th century).



Svetitskhoveli is also a burial ground of the Bagrationi Royal family members and church dignitaries.

Driving from Tbilisi to the North, the Ananuri Architectural Complex can be seen from afar; an impressive, elegant, 16th-17th century fortified complex of the local lords. Inside of the complex there is also a tower built in local, Khevsureti style.

Bagrati Cathedral

The Bagrati Cathedral of the Dormition (11th century) is located on the Ukimerioni Hill in Kutaisi. As per the inscription on the Cathedral's wall itself, the floor was laid in the year 1003, during the reign of King Bagrat III. A real masterpiece of medieval architecture, the cathedral has been in ruins for a long time without the cupola and ceiling. The reconstruction works on the site began in the last century and are still underway.

Gelati Complex

The Gelati complex is one of the most significant wonders in Georgia. It contains the Church of the Virgin founded by the greatest King of Georgia, David the Builder in 1106, the 13th century churches of St George and St Nicholas and the Academy building. Wonderful mosaics and wall paintings are well preserved in the main cathedral. King David the Builder is buried here.

Khertvisi Fortress

Khertvisi fortress is situated on a high rocky hill at the confluence of the river Javakheti and the Mtkvari in Artaani, 46 km from Akhaltsikhe, on the way to Vardzia. Khertvisi Fortress is the symbol of the many battles for independence and honour of the Georgian nation. It also symbolises strength and independence of all Georgians.

Cave Towns

Among the few notable cave towns in the world, the ones in Georgia are of very special interest. Uplistsikhe, David Gareja monastery, and the world-famous cave city of Vardzia are nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Uplistsikhe 'the fortress of the Lord' can be dated back to the early Iron Age, and is located on a high rocky escarpment overlooking the bank of the Mtkvari river.

Cut from natural sandy stone, the 8 hectares of cave-town have survived millions of people, erosion, years and even earthquakes but remains a good example of the mixture of pagan & Christian architecture.

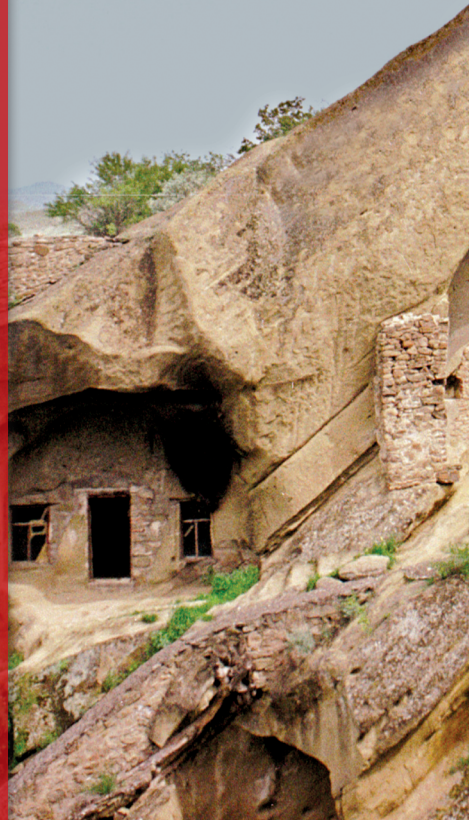
David Gareja monastery was founded in the 6th century on the slopes of the Gareja hills by one of the thirteen Syrian Fathers, Father David (Garejeli). They were missionaries from Mesopotamia promoting and spreading Christianity and are the respected founders of many monasteries and holy places around Georgia. The frescoes here are quite superb. Some of them date as far back as the 9th and 10th centuries. The Golden Age of Georgia is directly reflected in the amazing 11th-13th century frescoes.

The incredible town of Vardzia dates back to Queen Tamar's reign, nearly a thousand years ago. Her father, King George III started the foundation of the complex, while Queen Tamar continued its construction. Many frescoes date back to the beginning of the 12th century and the complex consists of small chapels, bell towers, secret tunnels, monks' caves as well as a fully

functioning monastery to this day. Set in the most serene and stunning countryside, its beautiful location captures your imagination and transports you back to the era of her reign.



Some of the oldest structures I've ever seen up close.







Georgian Music

Georgia's polyphonic music tradition is world-renowned and calls upon an enchanting combination of ancient and modern harmonies. In 2001 UNESCO acknowledged this music as "a masterpiece of the world's intangible cultural heritage" and its unique, slightly dissonant style has not changed for centuries. The Greek historian Strabo recorded the multi-voiced chants of Georgians riding into a battle as early as the 1st century BC.

The songs, made up of three-part-harmonies, are still the life blood of modern society. They can be heard in churches and monasteries across the country; down Tbilisi's back-streets of an early evening; or across the village fields during the summer. They are also very much a part of the Georgian feast, or supra.



Ballet

The Tbilisi Ballet has recently undergone a major refurbishment, thanks to the return and inspiration of Nino Ananiashvili, former Principal Ballerina at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Performances are mastered and presented at the highest level and continue the tradition of dance forged by the former great Georgian choreographers like George Balanchine.



Georgian Dance

Georgian dance, like its polyphonic songs, remains a major cultural export and The Georgian State Dance company tours the world all year round.

The vigorous, vibrant men leap high in the air; clash swords amidst flying sparks and razor sharp daggers are thrown into the floor in a frenetic, breathless choreography. All this contrasts with the women's graceful, elegant and lightweight

dances.

Add our fabulous multi-coloured costumes from the many mountain villages, wild drumming, accompanying pipes and accordions, and the overall effect is mesmeric and truly unforgettable.

For culture like this, join us for the best moments of your life...

Travel information

Visa Requirements

Valid passports are required for visitors of all nationalities. Georgia has a liberal visa regime; with visa waiver for the citizens of 94 countries for short-term visits (Not exceeding 90 calendar days in any 180-day period).

For more information please visit the website of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia:

www.geoconsul.gov.ge

Getting There

By air

Direct flights to Tbilisi are available from Batumi and Kutaisi, as well as from many European and Asian cities. Non-stop flights can be taken from Amsterdam, Munich, Riga, Vienna, Paris, Warsaw, Istanbul, Dubai, Tel-Aviv, Baku, Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Kiev, Minsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Alma-Ata, Aktau, Urumqi, Doha, Erbil, Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah, Sharm el-Sheikh, Sharjah and Najaf.

Batumi International Airport

Direct flights to Batumi are available from Tbilisi, Moscow, Kiev, Istanbul, Minsk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.

Kutaisi International Airport

Direct flights to Kutaisi are available from Tbilisi, Kiev, Warsaw, Moscow, Minsk, Budapest and Vilnius.

By land

Daily buses mainly to Tbilisi depart from Baku, Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon, Yerevan and Athens.

By Train

Georgia is connected to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Trains from Baku are available every day and for more information and timetables, please visit: www.railway.ge

By Sea

Georgia can be accessed by weekly ferries from Ukrainian ports of Ilychevsk and Odessa.

Accommodation

Major cities like Tbilisi and Batumi offer hotels of all categories from international four-star, to home-stays. In rural regions accommodation is primarily three-star family hotels, bed and breakfast and home-stays.

Cuisine

There are many excellent restaurants in Tbilisi serving both traditional Georgian and international cuisine, while restaurants in different regions of the country mainly offer traditional dishes.

Climate

The climate of the country is extremely diverse, considering the nation's small size. The Greater Caucasus Mountain Range plays an important role in moderating Georgia's climate, protecting the nation against cold air from the north, while the Lesser Caucasus Mountains protect against from the very dry, hot air from the south. Average temperatures in summer range from 19 °C to 22 °C, and in winter from 1.5 °C to 3 °C.

Currency

The official currency in Georgia is the Georgian Lari usually indicated as GEL. Lari is subdivided into 100 Tetri. Major hotels accept credit cards, but please check outside the main cities. Cash point machines are available throughout major towns and cities.

Electricity

Electrical current - 220 Volts, 50 Hz. EU standard plugs work throughout Georgia.

Communications

The country code is +995 and the area code for Tbilisi is 322. Georgian mobile operators (Geocell, Magticom and Beeline) cover almost the whole territory of the country and there are many WI-FI zones that enable visitors to use the internet for free.

Health

For the emergency services please call 112 - the Emergency Management Department.

For more information please visit: www.georgia.travel



www.georgia.travel

Hotline (24 hrs.)

☎ 0 800 800 909

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