

WORLD ABOUT GEORGIA





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Located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia - Georgia has seamlessly integrated aspects of various cultures, while at the same time retaining its own unparalleled identity. The country is renowned for its fascinating history, majestic Caucasus Mountains, curative climate, healing mineral waters, national parks and UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Aforementioned diversity and Georgia's ranking among the safest countries in the world have turned it into a premier travel destination in the region; with almost 6 million visitors traveling to the country.

We don't simply strive to make the country an attractive destination; we endeavor to make every trip a magnificent experience. The substance of our endeavor is well reflected in this brochure and we are both honored and privileged to share it with the world.

This publication does not reflect the entirety of the media attention that was dedicated to Georgia, and I wish to use this opportunity to express our most sincere gratitude to all the publications and media outlets which have brought Georgia to millions of readers and viewers across the world; your efforts, interest and enthusiasm are highly valuable for us.

GEORGE CHOGOVDZE

Head of the Georgian National Tourism Administration



**New York
Times**



New York Times - Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, has an ancient wine culture, thermal baths, excellent food — and an unlikely electronic music scene. Party on.

Back when Georgia — a country bordered by the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains — was behind the Iron Curtain, it was fancied the California of the U.S.S.R. Slightly smaller in size than South Carolina, but with impressively diverse terrain, this fertile country had a reputation for producing exceptional fruits and vegetables, superb wines and talented filmmakers. “When I was studying in Leningrad in the ‘70s,” says Ambassador Ian C. Kelly, currently stationed in Georgia, “a group of us were taken to Tbilisi. Arriving there was like arriving in Oz — suddenly everything went from black and white to color.” The Georgia-born designer Demna Gvasalia lent a glamourized cool to the country last year when he was appointed the director of Balenciaga, but what’s increasingly attracting visitors is Georgia’s gutsy little capital. Having survived civil war in the early ‘90s, then a peaceful, pro-Western revolution in the aughts, Tbilisi has rebounded mightily, and newfound ambition is visible everywhere. You can see it on the leafy, Paris-style boulevards that parallel the Kura River, now spanned by Michele De Lucchi’s bow-shaped showpiece, the Bridge of Peace; in the proliferation of new restaurants featuring the country’s Persian- and Asian-inspired dishes; and in an electronic music scene that some say rivals Berlin’s. (Homophobia remains a serious issue, but the flood of young, international tourists is increasing open-mindedness.) According to legend, Tbilisi was founded in the fifth century on thermal springs, and its cobbled streets are still scented by sulfur, though only a handful of the traditional bathhouses remain in the ancient neighborhood of Old Town. The city is a fanciful, often romantic hodgepodge of architectural influences that offers a brick-by-brick timeline of occupiers: Persians, Byzantines,

Ottomans, Russians and Soviets. A medieval fortress looks out over Art Nouveau mansions, Brutalist monuments and the modern villas of billionaires, some floating above the city like U.F.O.s. The roots of the local cuisine stretch back almost as far, to the sixth century, when Tbilisi was a trade stop on the Silk Road. You can taste the world in the local dishes; the more traditional flatbread is baked in clay ovens, similar to a tandoor, and khinkali, broth-filled dumplings, rival Hong Kong’s. Georgia’s grapes are even older — the oldest known location of cultivated vines is in the South Caucasus — and several winemakers are bringing back and refining the 8,000-year-old kvevri method of production, which involves storing wine, often underground, in clay vessels. The amber-hued wines in particular, made from fermenting white grapes with their skins, are gaining attention from international connoisseurs. You will not drink alone. Georgians have, it seems, a congenital need to party and all are welcome, particularly the robust. On a balmy Saturday afternoon, at the newly opened Khasheria, a restaurant across from the domes of the Royal Bath, Georgian socialites and artists, including the award-winning director Levan Koguashvili, were sharing wine and chikhirtma, a ramen-like broth made with chicken, eggs, lime and mint. “Georgian cuisine is essentially refined hangover food,” says the chef and owner, Tekuna Gachechiladze. “Most of this crowd will be back again tomorrow, drinking, singing and telling stories.”STAY

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EAT

Kakhelebi

For a taste of authentic Georgian cuisine (including khachapuri, the addictive eye-shaped cheese bread) you can’t do better than this celebrated family-owned restaurant, which grows its own produce in its garden. It isn’t far from the airport, which means that you can make it your first meal and your last.

Cafe Littera

American-trained chef Tekuna Gachechiladze opened this spot a year ago, with a menu that offers modern takes on classic Georgian dishes. Set in a walled garden behind a majestic Art Deco mansion, there is no lovelier place for dining in Tbilisi — particularly at night, when the dozen or so tables, scattered among beds of crawling ivy, are lit by candles.

Vino Underground

Opened by eight of Georgia’s leading natural winemakers, tiny Vino Underground, with just a half-dozen tables, is always packed. (Seated at one table on a recent afternoon: the award-winning cookbook author Olia Hercules, researching Georgian wine regions.) The subterranean bar and shop, with its low, arched stone ceilings, serves and sells a wide range of labels including artisanal cellars unknown outside of Georgia.

SEE

Chaos Concept Store

Around the corner from Rooms, this store offers fashion

stylist Nini Nebieridze’s playful, curated mix of Georgian and international street style (printed bombers from GCDS, colorful trousers from House of Holland, stylish shoes from Maryam Nassir Zadeh). Designed to feel more living room than retail space, there’s even a new cafe, the better to fuel your spree.

Dry Bridge Flea Market

Anyone can set up a blanket at this market, so the pickings are hit or miss. But when the goods are good, they’re very good. Depending on your definition of treasure, you are likely to find Soviet maps and posters, old coins, toy soldiers, amber necklaces, fur hats, vintage children’s books and antique silverware. Open from sunrise to sunset every day, unless it rains. Dedaena Park.

Cafe Gallery

International techno stars tend to play cavernous clubs such as Bassiani. Homegrown talent, like Gogi Dzodzuashvili of Post Industrial Boys and Tomma Chaladze, prefer the more alternative vibe of this cozy cafe. The space turns into a bohemian, gay-friendly, 24-hour nightclub on weekends after midnight, with the night owls heading home just as the late morning crowd arrives.

Popiashvili Gvaberidze Window Project

Tbilisi’s many grand historical institutions and museums are impressive and well maintained, but there are few platforms for contemporary art. This gallery, run by art instigators Irena Popiashvili and Tamuna Gvaberidze, features the best of a small but thriving scene that includes photographer Marika –Asatiani and the sculptor Giorgi Khaniasvili.

Culinary Backstreets

The American expat journalist Paul Rimple takes small groups on these lively, well-priced full-day tours exploring the city’s food stalls and markets

■ By Gisela Williams, August 18, 2016

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CNN



CNN: 9 reasons to visit Georgia now

Out on the fringes of Europe, the former Soviet Republic of Georgia is a country shrouded in mystery. Sandwiched between the Caucasus Mountains to the north, the Black Sea to the west and dry deserts to the south, this small country, which borders Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey, is not only a crossroads of cultures, but has a wealth of spectacular landscapes. Until recently, many would have struggled to place the country of Georgia on the map (or at least mistake it for the U.S. state of the same name), but it's quickly becoming one of Europe's hottest new destinations. Here are nine reasons to visit Georgia now.

1. Tbilisi: An eclectic melting pot

From the hanging balconies in the crumbling Old Tbilisi district and the Persian-style sulfur baths clad in turquoise mosaics, to unique art nouveau buildings falling into disrepair sitting side by side with futuristic glass structures, Tbilisi is a city that inspires.

The Georgian capital lies on the banks of the Mtkvari River and is surrounded by mountains on all three sides.

Archeologists trace the first settlement in today's Tbilisi to the 4th millennium B.C. Its position on the old Silk Road turned it into a multicultural hub, reflected today in the city's ethnic diversity and eclectic architecture.

The baths in Abanotubani follow the Persian tradition, only the thermal water bubbles up naturally from the ground below. Tbilisi gets its name from the Old Georgian word

"tbili," meaning warm, due to its hot, sulfurous water.

Moving away from Abanotubani, a walk into the Old Town reveals old Georgian and Armenian churches, mosques and synagogues and even the ruins of the most northern Zoroastrian fire temple.

2. Ushguli: Europe's highest village

Way up in the Caucasus Mountains around 2,200 meters above sea level, this small village is Europe's highest continuously inhabited settlement. Sitting at the foot of Mount Shkhara, Georgia's highest point, Ushguli is famous for the medieval defensive towers connected to each house. It's deep in the Svaneti region, known for its unique culture that was once cut off from the rest of the country.

The main town of Mestia is on its way to becoming the Georgian equivalent of a Swiss resort but Ushguli has been saved by its poor transport routes, which have helped preserve the village's timeless feel.

Young men gallop through the dirt tracks on horseback between the crumbling towers, dodging the livestock in the street.

3. The birthplace of wine.

When we think of the origin of wine we tend to think of France, Italy, Greece or Persia, but Georgia is in fact one of the world's oldest wine regions. In 2003, archaeologists found evidence that Stone Age people were producing wine here up to 8,000 years ago. Since then, wine has played a core



part in Georgia's national identity. The country's ancient tradition of fermenting grape juice in clay vessels, known as kvevris, has made it onto UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. There are hundreds of indigenous grape varieties, and Georgian wine is slowly gaining recognition globally. While some of the homemade varieties aren't particularly palatable, there are some excellent vineyards in Georgia producing premium wines. A good place to start is with a red wine aged in oak barrels made from the Saperavi grape from Mukuzani in the wine region of Kakheti, such as those from Teliani Valley, or a white Tsindali, made from a blend of Rkatsteli and Mtvani grapes.

Soviet dictator and Georgian native Joseph Stalin was a fan of Khvanchkara, a sweet red wine from the Racha mountain region in the Caucasus.

4. Mysterious cave cities

Georgia is home to some of the most unusual cave cities in Europe. By themselves, they're reason alone to visit the country. The oldest is Uplistsikhe, an ancient settlement that resembles a lunar landscape. Others include Davit Gareja, a vast monastic complex carved into the rock of Mount Gareja, and Vardzia, a spectacular underground city that once housed 2,000 monks.

5. Supra: A traditional Georgian feast

One of the best ways to get to know the country is through its food. In fact, if you haven't tried a Georgian supra, or feast, you haven't experienced Georgia.

The local cheese bread is called khachapuri, the most famous being the Adjara variety.

It's a baked bread boat filled with gooey, melted, tangy sulguni cheese, a whole egg yolk and some slivers of butter. Yes, it's heart stopping, but so delicious.

Khinkhali dumplings come with a spiced meat filling that releases its juices when cooked, so you have to suck out the stock before eating. Then there are delectable walnut dressing salads, bean stews cooked with fragrant cilantro and shashlik, tender marinated meat cooked on a kebab skewer. They're best enjoyed, of course, with some excellent Georgian wine.

6. Remote mountain villages

The remote regions of Khevsureti and Tusheti in the Caucasus Mountains are home to spectacular medieval villages with small communities that still retain their ancient pagan traditions. The roads going up here are an adrenaline rush in themselves. The ruined fortress of Mutso and the settlement of Shatili in Khevsureti look like something described by J.R.R. Tolkien. Set dramatically against the mountains, they're so close to Chechnya you can see the border guards walking up and down the ridge. Tusheti is a cluster of communities, kind of like a Georgian Shangri La, full of old towers, churches, villages and spectacular mountain scenery with wild flowers and trees with leaves that almost look golden. Tusheti has numerous hiking trails and the locals are known for their generous mountain



hospitality. The village of Omalo in Tusheti is only accessible via the Abano Pass, at an altitude of 2,850 meters.

7. Europe's most surreal museum

To learn about the life of Old Joe, visit Stalin's hometown, Gori, and the bizarre Joseph Stalin Museum.

You might know Stalin as a dictator responsible for millions of deaths, but in this hometown attraction there is a sense of pride about the "local boy made good."

There aren't any references to his purges beyond a small backroom that doesn't feature on the tour, but there are pictures aplenty of Stalin, including one of the leader voting for himself. There are also various statues, his death mask, carpets and frescoes featuring the dear leader's face, his personal green railway carriage and -- the star attraction -- his one-bedroom childhood home preserved in perfect condition. The museum has been criticized for being a "falsification of history" and an example of "Soviet propaganda."

There were plans to transform the museum into a museum of Russian aggression, but so far this is limited to a little room hidden beside the entrance.

The museum is worth visiting as it captures the essence of Stalin, including his own self-glorification and propaganda, even if that was not its intended purpose.

8. Beautiful and ancient churches

Georgia adopted Christianity back in 324 AD and the country is full of spectacular churches and cathedrals in incredible locations. Whether it's the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Mtskheta's Svetitskhoveli Cathedral or Kutaisi's Bagrati Cathedral, or the dramatic hill top position of the church in Kazbegi, Georgia's churches never fail to paint a pretty picture. Kazbegi is also home to one of the world's most spectacular marathon routes.

9. The people and Georgian hospitality

Georgians might appear a serious bunch at first, but most are kind and welcoming. For Georgians, a guest is a sacred thing, and they will often go out of their way to help you. Their generosity and hospitality will often take the form of lots of food and even more drink.

As they say in Georgia, "Gaumarjos!" (Cheers!).

■ By Jennifer Walker, May 17, 2016



The Guardian 

The Guardian: Where to go on holiday in 2016 – Georgia, Caucasian Adventure

Since the collapse of the USSR 25 years ago, Georgia has emerged as a promising destination for off-the-beaten track adventure in a landscape of mountains and lakes. “Georgia is less crowded than much of Europe but offers much more bang for your buck. Flights are cheap and Pegasus’s route to Batumi makes access to the Caucasus mountains much easier,” says Imaginative Traveller’s Helen Youngman. New for 2016 is a 14-day Highlights of Georgia and Armenia tour, from £1,299pp.

The capital, Tbilisi, is on a roll, with several new five-, four-

and three- star hotels (the key one being a brand new Design Hotels property called Rooms), revamped restaurants and a burgeoning hip wine bar revolution with the likes of Bottle Shock and Vino Underground tasting room showcasing Georgia’s famous viticulture. For culture buffs, the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre reopened in December, having been closed for six years for renovations.

■ January 1, 2016



Lost With
Purpose



Lost With Purpose: Why travel to Georgia?

The last few weeks in Georgia have been a whirlwind of snowy mountains, cheesy breads, and dangerously hospitable people. We're already looking forward to coming back! (Though next time, in summer. We do not handle freezing our asses off well.) The country is a place that any traveler must visit, but I won't leave you hanging with just a simple recommendation. So, why travel to Georgia?

The landscape is insane.

The landscape, to put it simply, is epic as fuck, and beautiful to boot. When people think of epic landscapes, they instantly think of New Zealand or Iceland, perhaps Patagonia or the west coast of the United States.

Newsflash! Most of those places are quite far away from the vast majority of people, and once you've gotten over the financial stress of getting there, it's still expensive to travel there. Georgia, on the other hand, is close to Europe, Asia, and Africa, and is an Atlantic hop and a bit away from the western hemisphere. It has epic mountains for hiking and/or skiing, mere hours away from warm beaches and rolling hills covered with vineyards.

Georgia is cheap. Like, really cheap.

It's almost not fair how cheap Georgia is. In the three weeks that we were in Georgia, I took out €300 from my bank account.

Yes, you read that correctly.

With that €300, we had private rooms with bathrooms and mountain views, piles of delicious Georgian foodstuffs, many alcoholic beverages (a pint of beer is 50 cents!), loads of hours of transport all up and down the country, and first class train rides, some with wi-fi, some with beds.

We pondered prices often, and realized that traveling in Georgia was just as cheap as travel in Southeast Asia. Cheaper if you add in the fact that one meal in Georgia will last you for several hours, as opposed to the 30 minutes a bowl of noodles gets you in Asia. (That is not to say that noodle soup is bad. Don't worry baby, I still love you more than anything!). If you don't believe me and/or want to see more details about precisely how much we spent, we tracked our expenses and the average costs of each city.

The country has a rich history

Georgia sits at a convergence point of the East and West, being an important stop along the Silk Road, and it housed many great civilizations throughout history. Though its past (like any country) is troubled at times, the meeting and clashing of cultures has resulted in a country rich in influences, from Georgian and Armenian to Turkish to Persian to Russian.

The people are the greatest, and the country is super safe.

The people of Georgia are, by far, some of the most hospitable people we've met in our travels.



It's hard to explain how—all countries have hospitable people, if you look long enough, and many cultures are Orthodox churches sit on hilltops minutes away from Roman ruins, and cave cities are decorated with Byzantine-esque frescoes. Foods are richly spiced, despite there not being many spices grown in Georgia, and in places you can just as easily find a Turkish teahouse or a Russian kitchen as you can a Georgian restaurant. naturally welcoming. So, why are the Georgians so great? I'd venture to say that it's because they're always willing to take the extra step to help you out, or make you feel at home. A good example is asking for directions. I'd ask people for directions in very (very) broken Russian. Even if they had no idea what I'd said, or weren't able to respond and have me understand, they'd still take us and walk with us all the way, until we found where we needed to go. Even taxi drivers, who can be notorious for giving false information, or refusing to help unless you pay for a ride, were helpful. Sure, they first say that they'll drive you there, but when you refuse, they're just as helpful as any other person on the street. Georgians say that this is because they are all Christian, that they want to help to the best of their abilities, and it would be un-Christian not to. Note to world: this is what religion is supposed to be like, remember? Because of this mindset, Georgia is quite safe. You won't find people trying to steal your things while you

look in the other direction, no hands will be pilfering the contents of your pockets while you're taking photos, and it was common to see people leave their cars unlocked and unattended, while the keys were still in the ignition. Uh, what? We'd be hard-pressed to come up with other countries where this would be possible.

Georgia needs tourism

After being shafted by the Ottomans and Soviets for too long of a time, Georgia is hurting as a country. They have no real exports, there aren't enough jobs (people be sitting on the street doing nothing all day errday), and poverty runs rampant. Georgia relies on tourism for much of their economy, but often lose out to more popular destinations like Turkey or other countries in Eastern Europe.

Despite that, many cities and regions are making efforts to become more tourist-friendly. There are plenty of signs in English, tourist information offices in each city (that are... usually open), a plethora of guesthouses and cafes, and road signs are all doubly in Georgian and English, for those of a driving mindset. Plus, as I already said, the people themselves are the most valuable resource, and much of the younger generation is versed in English.

Give them some love, yo! They need it, but more importantly, they deserve it.

■ By Alex and Sebastiaan, March 20, 2016



**NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
CREATIVE**



National Geographic: Why Tbilisi's One of My Favorite Cities in the World

Georgia's capital is anything but orderly. Despite this—or because of it—it's one of the best, most strikingly original cities in the world.

There are cities that make sense. The streets glide along straight, clean lines, their names uniform from start to finish. Bridges are crossable. Signs point in the proper direction. Then there's Tbilisi.

Riotous and anarchic, the capital of Georgia is anything but organized. Locals use Soviet-era street names—Leselidze, Davitashvili, Perovskaya—found only on decades-old maps. Wine is sold in repurposed Coca-Cola bottles for a dollar a liter from boulevard underpasses. The electricity still cuts out in the heart of the “Kala,” Tbilisi's historic old town.

Despite this—maybe even because of it—this city is one of the best, most strikingly original travel destinations in Europe or Asia, if not the world.

Pop into an unmarked courtyard near the Armenian Norashen Church—overgrown with ripe pomegranates—and find yourself among well-fed stray cats in a bohemian artist's studio (one of the workers may invite you for home-brewed, noxiously alcoholic chacha; he will not let you refuse, nor should you wish to).

Sneak into the basement of the red-brick seminary across from Sioni Cathedral and buy Tbilisi's best bread—dough thrown against the scalding sides of a circular tone oven—from an elderly kerchief-wearing woman for 30 cents a loaf. Head up a slanting set of town house stairs in the fin de siècle neighborhood of Sololaki and find yourself in a speakeasy-style apartment café called Linville, where tables hide behind vines on wrought iron balconies and afternoon tango milongas take place under decorative Victorian parasols.

Slip across the Dry Bridge, past the ruined frescoes of the former Grand Hotel, to the flea market and bargain with bearded ex-professors for wooden icons, Soviet-era gas masks, and Turkish tea glasses. Come more than once and the vendors will remember you (I buy my jewelry—traditional Georgian enameling—from the same seller every year; she recalls not just my taste, but that of the mother and grandmother I purchased gifts for).

The cliché, of course, is that Tbilisi represents the epitome of East meets West: a Silk Road crossroads where Arab, Ottoman, Mongol, and Russian imperial forces each left their own distinctive cultural mark. And in the heart of the



old town, where rugs dangle from whitewashed wooden balconies and bearded Georgian Orthodox priests jostle with tourists on narrow cobblestone streets, it's a compelling fantasy.

But the city's reality is far more complicated—and intoxicating.

"East" and "West" are all but meaningless terms here, where the ancient fortress lording over old town has been used both by and against each set of conquerors, where the horizon—and the snowcapped Caucasus beyond—is punctuated by smoky Soviet tower blocks.

On Grishashvili Street, near the sulfur bathhouses—traditionally staffed not by ethnic Georgians, the by-far majority in this famously tolerant city, but by Muslim Azeris—a half-hidden chaikhana, or teahouse, serves baklava at carpeted banquettes before an open fire. A five-minute walk along the Kura River leads to Tartine—a French brasserie popular with expats and well-heeled locals alike—and café au lait delivered in gargantuan bowls. And at KGB, a restaurant whose tagline is "We're still watching you," Soviet kitsch takes on a hipster vibe.

Not all locals are as gleefully tongue-in-cheek about their city's past, however. Shopping at the bazroba (bazaar), or feasting on caraway-spiced khinkali meat dumplings in wood-paneled working men's taverns, you're as likely as not to be dragooned into someone's rhapsodic ode—in a mixture of Russian, Georgian, English, and fervently

expressive gesturing—to the beauty of the mountains, the Virgin Mary, Mother Georgia, the tradition of hospitality, or women who happen to be in the vicinity.

Still, if Tbilisi has an aesthetic, it's "retro collage." Hidden bars like O ModaModa—which doubles as a vintage clothing atelier—offer mulled wine and cocktails alongside traditional tarragon lemonade and syrupy Lagidze nectars served from massive soda fountains. Tbilisi's most iconic eatery, Purpur, is a collection of mismatched tablecloths, 19th-century lamp shades, and crumbling flea market bric-a-brac.

But few places capture Tbilisi's energy like the city's hottest new restaurant, Café Littéra—brainchild of new celebrity chef Tekuna Gachechiladze—located in the palatial mansion that once housed the Soviet Writers' Union. The food—chakapuli stew made with mussels instead of the traditional lamb, pomegranate-dusted river trout served à la tartare, classic badzhe sauce made, all but blasphemously, with almonds instead of the customary walnuts—reflects the best of Tbilisi's breathless fusion culture.

Sure, the electricity might still go out at times.

But Georgians will light candles, shrug, and pour you another drink.

■ By Tara Isabella Burton, June 9, 2016
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE



The
New York
Times



NY Times: Georgia's Emerging, Avant-Garde Designers to Know

From their own ancient Southern Caucasus heritage to layer upon layer of conquerors' imprints — the Romans, the Persians, the Ottomans, the Russians, the internet — the two women are voracious in their often avant-garde and frequently ironic interpretation of history. In their hands, Georgia is the center of the universe, and the universe is gorgeously in flux. "There is so much here," says Janberidze, "and everything is changing very fast."

The resurrection of Tbilisi itself is a major chapter in their story. A city of 1.1 million that is among the economic

success stories of Eastern Europe, it has rapidly become a mecca for adventurous tourists over the past few years. It has a pleasant climate, eclectic architecture, throaty wines, innovative cuisine and an art scene reminiscent of Prague in the 1990s. While at the beginning of their collaboration the two women felt a bit isolated, they are now part of a local aesthetic moment, a sort of - Williamsburg-on-the-Kura, to name the river that runs through Tbilisi.

■ By Nancy Hass, October 10, 2016

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Mirror: Traces of 5,000 year old grapes from world's first vineyard discovered

Wine making began in the East European country of Georgia at least 5,000 years ago, suggests new research. Traces of grape pollen from the world's first vineyard have been discovered inside an animal-shaped ceramic jar used in ritual ceremonies.

It was dug up at an archaeological site called Aradeti Orgora - 62 miles (100 km) west of the Georgian capital Tbilisi. The pottery dates to around 3,000BC and would have been used by an enigmatic village based people called the Kura-Araxes to ferment the fruit.

The discovery adds further weight to Georgia's long-cherished and championed belief that it is the birthplace of wine making. The first evidence of domesticated grapes in the form of pips have also been unearthed in the south west of the country and date back 6,000 years.

It means Georgia really was the cradle of viticulture from where the technology spread to the so-called 'Fertile Crescent' of Mesopotamia and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The vessel has an animal-shaped body with three small feet and a pouring hole on the back. The head is missing.

It was found with a second similar vessel and a Kura-Araxes jar on the burnt floor of a large rectangular area with rounded corners - arguably a sort of shrine used for religious activities.

Scientists used a technique called radiometric (C14) analyses which dates specimens by determining proportions of chemicals to show they go back to 3000-2900 BC.

The vessel was examined at the Georgian Museum of Tbilisi by palynologist Dr Elis Kvavadze.

She found it contains numerous well-preserved grains of pollen of *Vitis vinifera* - a common grape vine that is still used to make wine today.

Dr Kvavadze said it shows wine's strategic role in the Kura-Araxes culture for ritual libations.

The ritual pourings would have been offered to a god

or spirit or in memory of those who have died. They were common in many religions of antiquity and continue to be offered in various cultures today. Various substances have been used for libations - most commonly wine or olive oil, and in India, ghee.

The vessels used in the ritual often had a significant form which differentiated them from secular ones. The libation could be poured onto something of religious significance, such as an altar, or into the earth.

The animals on both Georgian vessels could have represented gods and are a unique discovery in the region. Professor Elena Rova, of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, described it as a significant piece of history.

She said: "The context of discovery suggests wine was drawn from the jar and offered to the gods or commonly consumed by the participants to the ceremony." The researchers said it's a key-finding for Georgia, where wine culture still continues in the course of traditional banquets called the Supra.

This is a spirited, lively and overwhelming feast where wine is consumed from vessels derived from animal horns in the context of elaborated ritual toasts. The Kura-Araxes is the only prehistoric culture of the Southern Caucasus which spread over large areas of the Near East - reaching Iran and the Syro-Palestinian region.

Their pottery was distinctive and spread along trade routes into surrounding cultures. It was painted black and red using geometric designs. Examples have been found as far south as Syria and Israel, and as far north as Dagestan and Chechnya.

The people are also remarkable for the production of wheeled vehicles - wagons and carts - which were sometimes included in burials.

■ By Mark Waghorn, June 19, 2016



BBC Travel: How to survive a Georgian feast

“Do you want to try Stalin’s favourite wine?” asked my Georgian friend Nino.

After a three-day hiking trip in Georgia’s stunning northwestern region of Racha, my two travelling companions and I were excited by the bizarre offer. Produced since the beginning of the 20th Century, the grapes for the semi-sweet red wine called khvanchkara – reportedly Stalin’s wine of choice – are only grown in one very small area of the Racha region, also called Khvanchkara.

Upon our arrival at the Aleksandrouli winery, Nino’s friend Dato led us on a brief tour of its stainless steel fermentation vats, the modern counterpart to the nation’s still-used ancient tradition of underground fermentation in kvevris (large clay vessels). We ambled about the warehouse, admiring the sexy, Italian-designed bottles of khvanchkara, and tried the wine, which tasted a bit like raspberry syrup. Dato stood smoking a cigarette, looking out at the low vine-covered hills behind us.

“Follow me,” Dato said suddenly. “I would like to invite you to eat with us.”

I had only heard stories about the famous Georgian supra, the traditional feast offered spontaneously to only the luckiest of visitors. I’d been told that the incredibly generous villagers ply guests with local dishes and endless pours of strong, homemade wine, accompanied by countless long, nostalgic and heartfelt toasts. I couldn’t believe that we might get the chance to attend.

As we drove to a nearby small restaurant, Dato called ahead

to let them know we were coming. My stomach growled and we all grinned widely at each other in giddy anticipation.

It was 3 pm when we arrived. Dato’s friend, Mamuka, was waiting in the parking lot, and there were no other customers in the dim restaurant space. A woman with a bored expression smoked and sat behind the cashier’s desk, and a man leaned on the counter, his back to us.

Plates, silverware and glasses had already been set for six in the small private dining room. The centre of the table held two plates piled with pizza-sized triangles of golden, flaky khachapuri (traditional stuffed breads), some filled with ground beef, some with soft imeruli, a fresh cow’s cheese from the adjacent Imereti region. There were bowls of chunky tomato-cucumber salad with fresh parsley, plates piled with thick slabs of additional imeruli and platters of glistening fried potatoes.

We took our seats slowly, eyes glued to the food. Dato sat at the head of the table. A short-haired, stoic-faced waitress walked in briskly and set down two giant pitchers of mustard-coloured tetra, a homemade, semi-sweet white wine made from the tsulukudze tetra grape, which only grows in the Racha region. This was the fuel for our supra fire. Wine was poured generously as Dato embarked upon his first toast. With Nino translating, he told us how happy he was to celebrate and drink with us. “We don’t sit here and eat this much food and drink this much wine for no reason – we share it with you, our guests, to know each other better. So let us drink to tradition.” Nodding in giddy agreement



and straining our arms to clink our sweating glasses with every person at the table, we took our first drink of the refreshingly bitter tetra wine (we sipped, our hosts chugged the entire glass). As soon as we saw Dato and Mamuka begin to eat, we quickly attacked the food. Amid the sounds of chewing and gulping, the waitress returned again and again, carrying platters of grilled sturgeon garnished with silky stalks of dill; small ceramic bowls of narsharab (a deep-red pomegranate sauce); and two more bowls filled to the brim with khashlama, a clear stew of boiled lamb, cabbage, tomato and onion. To my left, a cast iron skillet appeared, packed with juicy mushrooms grilled in a ketsi (clay oven). Near the head of the table, a white plate was stacked with mtsvadi (shashlik), long, metal skewers loaded with fat chunks of barbecued pork. We each grabbed a skewer, not waiting for our hosts this time, and slid the meat onto our plates to devour.

There was also a glass bottle of tarhun, a popular carbonated drink named after its tarragon flavour. As we poured the fizzy, neon-green liquid, a strong but sweet, herbal scent hit our noses.

“Eat! Eat! Drink! Drink!” Dato pushed us with his raised glass. But nearly every time I tried to sip my wine, he or Mamuka plunged into another speech.

One long toast discussed how the Greek myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece actually took place in Georgia. Another turned into a recital of a famous Georgian poem, which Nino said she had no idea how to translate. Yet another was a toast to women.

Then came a toast announced as mandatory, a tribute to the past, to those who were no longer with us. But since it’s forbidden for this particular toast to be the last toast of the evening, Dato and Mamuka ventured on, wishing us much happiness in our travels and success in our lives.

By toast number eight or nine, things seemed as though they would never end. Our host and Mamuka had laughed so hard that their faces had turned red. We could only make laughing sounds from our throats as our mouths were constantly full of food. We’d been feasting for at least three hours by then — anything less could not be called a feast. Finally, I leaned over to tap Nino on the shoulder. “We have to leave. It will be too late.”

Our sense of immense gratitude to Dato and Mamuka conflicted with our desire to get back on the road, a desire very much dimmed by heavy stomachs, strong wine and palates still tingling with a taste of pomegranate sauce.

We watched Nino gracefully negotiate our departure with big smiles and laughter. But group photos still had to be taken, so we shuffled ourselves into position, smiling sleepily into a few different cameras.

In the parking lot, we shook hands and hugged heartily in place of words, stumbling over madloba, the Georgian word for thank you. Nino translated our promises to return again, and we all laughed at the possibility. I’d be lucky to be a part of another supra – that is, of course, if I was ever hungry again.

■ By Suchi Rudra, May 5, 2016



euronews.



Euronews: Meet your hominid ancestors in Georgia

Archaeological findings including fossilised bones and artefacts covering almost two million years of human evolution are on show at the Georgian National Museum as part of its exhibition 'Stone Age Georgia'.

Besides the fossils, visitors can also see realistic reconstructions of early hominids.

Over 500 Paleolithic sites have been discovered in Georgia, which is considered a crossroad of cultures due to its location in the South Caucasus. Dmanisi, southeast of the capital Tbilisi, is considered one of the most significant sites. "Exactly twenty five years ago we found a human jaw in Dmanisi – this was big sensation. It was impossible to imagine that you could have 1.8 million year-old fossils out of Africa. Since this discovery we have discovered another fossil. Now we have five skulls, four with jaws, different anatomical elements as well as animal bones and stone tools. Now, we could say that we have the best collection in the world of the early Homo out of Africa," explains David

Lordkipanidze, general director of the Georgian National Museum.

The Dmanisi skull is the most complete ancient hominid skull found to date. Known as Skull 5, it was discovered alongside the remains of four other early human ancestors, animal fossils and stone tools – all believed to be from the same time period – which makes the find truly unique.

"It's the first evidence of humans moving out of Africa – very simple stone tools, brains literally a third of size of modern humans, but nonetheless they were able to exist in an environment with large saber-tooth cats and hyenas and other dangerous animals. It's quite incredible," says Nicholas Toth, co-director of the Stone Age Institute in Indiana.

The finding has forced scientists to rethink the story of early human evolution, as it could mean that rather than several Homo species, only a single species – able to cope with a variety of ecosystems – emerged from the African continent.

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Euronews: GEM Fest: a hedonistic jewel in the Georgian crown

The Georgian Black Sea resort of Anaklia hosts the GEM Fest short for the 'Georgian Electronic Music Festival'. The festival is supported by the Georgian government and is ongoing project. Some 30,000 heads got down to latest sounds and the revelers got happy:

"The people gathered here, look at them! The crowd, they are having fun, that's it! They just need music! Yeah. You just provide music. They are going to dance," roared one.

Another was attracted by the acts: "When I heard about the line-up I thought I have to go to this event because the craziest DJs are coming here!"

Grammy-winning Paul van Dyk headlined the GEM Fest backed by acclaimed electronic performers such as Paul Kalkbrenner, Fedde Le Grand and GusGus.

The hedonistic electronic hot spot is organised by Giorgi Sigua: "My friends and I we decided to create our Georgian brand of an electronic music festival but we wanted to make it very multicultural and multi-functional. Different styles of music, different activities, different styles blending together in one place, in the last village of Georgia."

DJ's from all over Europe got up and performed at the Fest

including the French act Lamine: "The people here react to the music in a positive way that makes me want to keep on playing non-stop."

And that includes individuals with broken limbs; "I am having a lot of fun, this is really the kind of festival we need here in the country. You know what: I have a broken arm, but never mind. The atmosphere is still great, the DJs really good and I am so enjoying my time here."

The festival site backs onto Abkhazia a break-away region of Georgia, which won a war of secession in 1992-93 and formally declared independence in 1999. Festival organisers, in a gesture of friendship, offer free admission to Abkhazians, the festival also hosted a number of Iranians who danced the night away with Armenians and Azeris.

Euronews reporter Sebastian Saam got an invite to the party: "The organisers have high hopes for the GEM Fest, they see a rival to Ibiza, but what is really special about this festival is that it creates a free space for enjoyment in a part of the world where such events are rare."

■ By Chris Cummins, August 30, 2016



**HUFFINGTON
POST**



Huffington Post: Is Georgia Europe's Hidden Gem?

I've just returned from an incredible week in Georgia in eastern Europe. The trip coincided with the UNWTO's first conference on wine tourism, for which Georgia is famous. Naturally, we drank our weight in Georgia's delicious amber and black wines, but what I quickly discovered is that there's so much more here for any traveler willing to look a little deeper.

Want to travel to Georgia?

Here are some things you might not know about this incredible country, including what made me totally and completely fall in love with it:

Wine is a Way to Enjoy Life Here

Georgians have a history of winemaking that goes back, literally, more than 8,000 years. For centuries, families have been making and enjoying wine via a variety of methods, including in clay qvevis (clay pots) which are buried in the ground and used for fermentation. Today, wine is made either in the traditional way (qvevis in the ground, unfiltered) or via more modern means, and the wine is produced by more than 425 different varieties of grapes which are grown here.

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The Terrain Is Vast and Varied

The actual land in Georgia varies from region to region which means you'll go from seeing flat lands to incredibly scenic, jagged mountains in the clouds. We mostly explored the central regions of the country, including the capital city of Tbilisi and the northern mountain city of Kazbegi. If I had it to do over, I'd spend more time in Kazbegi and would also visit Borjomi and towns along the Black Sea coastline like Batumi.

Let's Talk About The Food

If you're anything like me, much of your perception of a place is based on how good its food is, and I'm really happy to tell you that the eatin' is good in Georgia. I will be writing an entirely separate post on the food in Georgia, but for now, let



me give the basic rundown: Georgian cuisine incorporates a lot of elements-most meals included cheese and bread and salad (tomatoes and cucumber, but this would depend on whats in season) as well as pkhali, a series of vegetable pates with ground walnut. Main courses always included meats like pork, chicken or beef (sometimes all three) and dessert was typically fresh fruit like watermelon, plums or grapes. All in all, I feel like this is the first trip I've taken in a long time where I've actually lost weight. A happy side effect, mostly due to the fact that we were eating small portions of lots of different things, walking a lot and drinking lots of water + wine. Wine = weight loss, right?

Tbilisi is Awesome

I fell completely in love with Georgia's capital city, which has a laid-back, low-key vibe despite the fact that its home to more than 1 million people. The cobblestone streets of the old town and the important historical monuments throughout the city, combined with the modern feel of life here and the rich nightlife made me think: I could actually live here. Perhaps one day I will! If you're coming here to stay for a few days, I highly recommend staying at the Rooms Hotel in Tbilisi, the only design hotel chain in the country

with two locations: Tbilisi and Kazbegi. I also recommend linking up with a guide who can take you around and explain some of the history of this place.

We Must Not Forget the History

You can't come to Georgia and not understand or appreciate the vast and diverse history this nation has endured. The land has been conquered over the centuries by the Persians, the Mongols and most recently, Russia, which they declared independence from in 1991. For much of the 90s, the country struggled with economic and civil wars, but today, they have peace.

Throughout my trip, I was constantly asked if the country was safe to travel to. The answer is a resounding YES. The country felt calm and peaceful on my journey there, and there are no advisories against traveling here at the moment. My time in Georgia reminded me of exactly why I love travel: the people, the food, the wine, the conversation. I'm leaving the country with a better understanding of this incredible part of the world, and some new amazing friends.

■ By Kelly Lewis, September 29, 2016



LONELY
PLANET



Lonely Planet: Tbilisi's top 10 experiences

A compelling blend of European and Asian influences, the Georgian capital is a compact and surprising destination easily explored in a few days. Laneways meandering from the riverside Old Town lead to a spectacular hilltop fortress, and ground-breaking modern design counters stately avenues and heritage architecture. Meanwhile, culinary influences and flavours from the surrounding region filter through the city's restaurants and markets. Here are ten experiences you shouldn't miss on a trip to Tbilisi.

Marvelling at horizon-stretching views

Reached on a funicular railway that trundles up a vertigo-inducing cliff face, Tbilisi's best views are from atop Mt Mtatsminda. From the funicular's terminus, well-tended gardens and walkways continue to Mtatsminda Park where amusement park action includes a ferris wheel, but equally entertaining is lunch on the huge deck at the summit's Chelabistro. From this high it's easy to take in the city's diverse architecture, a unique combination of stately Georgian churches and contemporary design.

Immersing yourself in modern architecture

Tbilisi's architectural collage of faded Art Nouveau apartments, 19th-century wooden buildings and Soviet-era tower blocks has been enlivened over recent years with audacious modern structures. Stroll slowly across the Mtkvari River on the Peace Bridge (opened in 2010) and be cocooned in an elegant web of steel and glass, before continuing to Rike Park to see the two stunning tube-like structures designed by Italian architect Massimiliano Fuksas. The twin metallic buildings are used as an exhibition centre and concert hall. Fuksas also created the nearby Tbilisi Public Service Hall, featuring an innovative roof of overlapping panels.

Meeting Mother Georgia

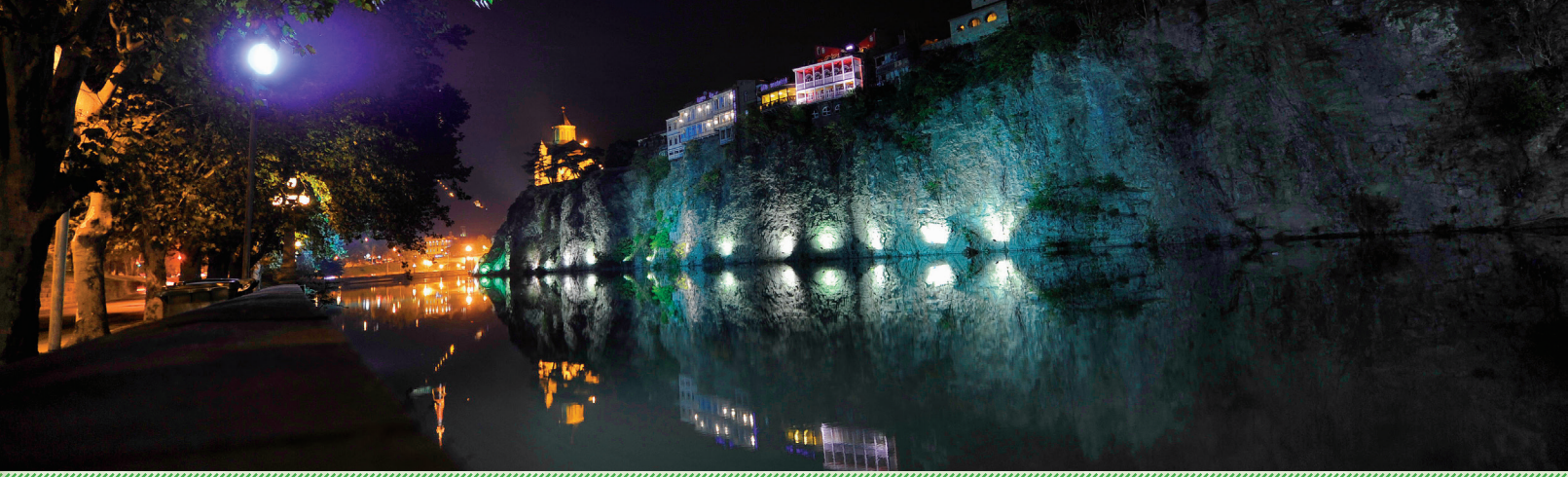
From the Mtkvari's northern bank, a gondola system swings lazily over the river and soars above the Old Town to the Narikala Fortress. The craggy remains of the castle are a combination of 4th-century Persian and 8th-century Arab fortifications, and a cliff-top path continues past purveyors of freshly-squeezed pomegranate juice to KartlisDeda (Mother Georgia). Offering a cup of wine – but also armed with a threatening sword – the 20m-high statue is a classic metaphor for the Georgian character – welcoming of visitors but also ready to defend against invaders.

Wandering the Old Town's meandering streets

Winding lazily downhill from Freedom Square, Tbilisi's atmospheric Old Town is characterised by wooden structures with carved verandas and narrow shopfronts filled with cafes, wine bars and art galleries. Some tentative gentrification is taking place, but a subtle detour of just a few blocks reveals a more traditional scene: the aroma of freshly-baked bread wafts from underground neighbourhood bakeries, and vendors set up sidewalk markets under decades-old plane trees to sell spices, homemade wine and seasonal produce from Tbilisi's agricultural hinterland.

Uncovering a centuries-old wine tradition

With a wine-making culture stretching back 8000 years, Georgia is renowned as one of the original cradles of viticulture. Wine is still aged in beeswax-lined terracotta urns called qvevri, which are buried in the ground to promote fermentation under naturally stable conditions, and the practice of incorporating grape skins produces fragrant and flavoursome wines with a rusty hue. The brick-lined cellar of the Old Town's Vino Underground is the perfect place to begin exploring the unique characteristics of Georgian



wine, and local culinary experts Taste Georgia (tastegeorgia.co) can arrange visits to family-owned vineyards in the nearby Kartli and Kakheti regions.

Tasting Silk Road-inspired cuisine

Strategically located on the ancient trading route linking Europe and Asia, the food of Georgia incorporates culinary influences from neighbouring countries. Traditionally eaten with beer, khinkhali are robust savoury dumplings similar to those served in Shanghai, while traditional breads and khachapuri (cheese pies) are often cooked in wood-fired ovens similar to an Indian tandoor. The influence of Iran informs fragrant chakapuli (meat stews) flavoured with dill, tarragon and sour plums. In Tbilisi's Old Town, the cosy Cafe Gabriadze serves traditional Georgian flavours with a modern spin.

Pausing for incense-infused reflection

First constructed in the 6th century and framed by a riverside garden in Tbilisi's Old Town, Anshikhvili Basilica is the city's most beautiful and atmospheric church. Shafts of afternoon light illuminate the centuries-old art treasures, icons and frescoes of the surprisingly compact interior, while slowly-burning incense creates a fragrant and heady ambience. If you're lucky you may chance upon worshippers performing the ethereal three-voice polyphonic chants of Georgian sacred music.

Hunting for treasure at the Dry Bridge Market

Poignant reminders of the Soviet era are scattered on the blankets and tarpaulins laid out daily at Tbilisi's Dry Bridge Market. Scores of enamel badges commemorating achievements big and small sit next to retro cameras., while

faded album covers spelling out the Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd in boxy Cyrillic characters line up beside portraits of Josef Stalin, the Soviet dictator born just an hour away in the town of Gori. Weekends offer the biggest selection of fascinating flea market fare, but there is still plenty to see from Monday to Friday.

Taking a journey through Georgia's past

Head to the Museum of Georgia for two essential exhibitions illuminating both ancient and recent history. Downstairs the Archeological Treasury has a superb display of delicate gold jewellery – some 5th century BC pieces reinforce the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece when the region was known as Colchis – while the top floor's Museum of the Soviet Occupation tells in compelling detail the story of the 70-year incursion (from 1921 to 1991) by Georgia's expansionist northern neighbour. Television footage of the 2008 war in Abkhazibetween Georgia and Russia – a region still claimed by Georgia – reinforces the contemporary relevance of the exhibition.

Revitalising at the sulphur baths

Tbilisi can be a hilly destination – especially around the narrow streets and back alleys of the Old Town – and the perfect coda to exploring the city is relaxing for a few hours in Tbilisi's famed Abanotubani sulphur baths. Within a complex topped by elegant brick domes, the experience ranges from shared, public baths to private options including sauna and massage sessions. Be sure to order tea to stay properly hydrated amid the steaming sulphur-infused pools.

■ By Brett Atkinson, July 2016



**GEORGE
RISHAN**



George Rishan: 7 REASONS TO VISIT GEORGIA RIGHT NOW

I have been to Georgia two times so far in 2012 and 2016 and I can safely say it is my favorite country to visit.

Here are some of the reasons why.

1. Food: This is an important aspect for me when visiting any country. Georgian cuisine carries some influences from other European and nearby Middle Eastern culinary traditions. Each historical province of Georgia has its own distinct culinary tradition, with variations such as Megrelian, Kakhetian, and Imeretian cuisines. Heavy on meat dishes, the Georgian cuisine also offers a variety of vegetarian dishes.

2. Mountains: What's the highest mountain range in Europe? The Alps? Wrong. It is the Caucasus Mountains marking the border between Georgia and Russia. While the highest peak is in Russia, Georgia lays claim to the second highest, Shkara, which at 5,193m (17,040 ft) beats Mont Blanc by nearly 400m (1,312 ft). Georgia is a mountainous country with rugged terrain which is why it is not that difficult to find beautiful mountain tops especially in the north. Did you know that the highest continuously inhabited village in Europe is in Georgia?

3. History: Georgia is steeped in history and was inhabited by Homo erectus since the Paleolithic Era. The proto-Georgian tribes first appear in written history in the 12th century BC. Did you know that Joseph Stalin was born in Georgia and you can visit his birthplace in Gori.

4. Beaches: Admittedly, that was not the first thought that

came to mind when I was planning my first Georgia trip, but I was intrigued by seeing the Black Sea. Enter, Batumi, a lovely city on the Georgian coast with contemporary architecture and high-profile hotels and beaches. Batumi is very different from the rest of Georgia and is likely to give you a cultural shock after touring the rest of the country.

5. Glaciers: Yes, this country has it all! The glaciers of Georgia are mainly located along the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range. According to the data of 2015 there are 637 glaciers in Georgia with a total area of 355.80 km².

6. Wine: You have not really experienced Georgia if you do not try the wine. Georgia is one of the oldest wine regions in the world. The fertile valleys of the South Caucasus house the source of the world's first cultivated grapevines and neolithic wine production, from over 8,000 years ago. Among the best-known regions of Georgia where wine is produced are Kakheti, Kartli, Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi and KvemoSvaneti, and Abkhazia.

7. People: The Georgian people are some of the friendliest in the world. Old or young and whether they spoke English enough to communicate or not, they are a very welcoming people. You would be in luck if you are ever invited to a traditional Georgian wedding or to a supra, a traditional Georgian feast and an important part of social culture.

■ By George Rishan, July 28, 2016



THE
GUARDIAN



The Guardian: Georgia's new Caucasus trail will link Black and Caspian seas

Founders hope project will become one of the world's great hikes, revealing the fascinating cultures and unexplored natural wonders of the Caucasus.

'Hiking the Caucasus for a few months would be incredible, like going across a continent in miniature. The spectacular terrain ranges from Georgia's dense forest and glaciers to the rugged pasturelands of Azerbaijan. But it's the hospitality of the locals that makes trekking here really special.'

Paul Stephens, co-founder of the new Transcaucasian Trail (TCT), is talking about why he thinks this will be one of the world's greatest hikes. He and a team of mappers and volunteers are in Georgia working on the first section of the route across the Caucasus.

The region is on the border of Europe and Asia, between the Black and Caspian seas. The eventual aim is to have two 1,500km trails – one running east to west, linking the seas, and the other running north to south, linking the Greater and Lesser Caucasus mountain ranges – largely paid for by crowdfunding.

The trail, a mix of existing routes and new paths, is being developed in stages and the first is the 200km section between Svaneti and Racha in north-west Georgia. Last year, Paul and co-founder Jeff Haack scouted and mapped

the route along an old trail that connects villages in Western Svaneti. Since July this year they have been working with volunteers to build the path, moving obstacles, building bridges and putting up trail markers.

'We've tried to make it less of a cow path and more of an easy-to-follow hiking trail,' says Paul. Volunteers from all over the world have spent up to eight weeks on the project, which ends for this year on 28 August. Once this first section is completed, mappers will make a guide and upload a GPS track ready for use in the autumn. 'The plan is to finish the 200km section, have a guide, get it out there and get people hiking it,' says Paul.

We've tried to make it less of a cow path and more of an easy-to-follow hiking trail

Paul Stephens, Transcaucasian Trail co-founder

The TCT will open up largely unexplored areas, giving access to historic sites and protected areas, such as Ushguli, the highest permanently inhabited village in Europe. It will also increase economic opportunities for local communities and link around two dozen national parks.

■ By Yvonne Gordon, August 27, 2016



Travel the World: Old Tbilisi Walking Tour of Architecture and Hidden Treasures

When I told the only other person I know who has traveled to Georgia that we were heading to this magnificent country, one of her many suggestions was to set aside time to walk through old Tbilisi to soak in the crumbling architecture and iconic Tbilisi balconies. So when our guide Anna offered to take us on an old Tbilisi walking tour to see the Art Nouveau architecture, we immediately said yes.

We were surprised to learn that there was more for tourists to Tbilisi to see than just what is visible from the street. If we hadn't had a guide, we would have never known that additional treasures were held inside the entryways of these

Art Nouveau homes. (By the way, in case your knowledge of architectural styles is as minimal as mine, Art Nouveau is a style of architecture and design with linear and curving designs that was popular from the late 19th century until World War I.) As many of them are now apartment buildings, it is sometimes possible to pass into the entryways where a few still retain their ornately painted ceilings, intricate stairway metalwork, and even wall decorations as well.

■ By Katherine and Romeo Belarmino, March 28, 2016



Forbes 

Forbes: The 30 Cheapest Places To Travel In 2017

This ancient European country is starting to grab the attention of travelers from all over the world. Georgia has so much to offer — beautiful scenery, unique culture and tradition everywhere you look, and the food will leave you drooling for more. Add to that the fact this country lays claim to being the birthplace of wine (winemaking here goes back 8,000 years) and you have the ultimate new travel destination. In Georgia, you can get a full meal plus copious amounts of wine for two people in a higher end restaurant, with live entertainment and still spend less than \$30 — total. But get there fast: Word is getting around about this

little gem and it won't be tourist-free for long. Shannon O'Donnell: This country flies under the radar for many tourists but has a favorable exchange rate, making it surprisingly budget friendly. The country has gorgeously rich cultural heritage and is perhaps best known for its culture hospitality. That said, the food, wine, dance, and mountainscapes will wow you, too. Within days of arriving in Tbilisi, Georgia topped the list of places in the world where I felt most welcomed.

■ By Laura Begley Bloom, November 30, 2016

From the Forbes Contributor Network and not necessarily the opinion of Forbes Media LLC.



Westofthemoon
Blog



Westofthemoon Blog - POETRY OF DAILY LIFE IN GEORGIA

Visiting a market is always a good way to get to know a place and the contents of these stalls told many tales. Colourful vegetables, fruits, meat, bread... anything and everything you could wish for. All the vegetables are of course Georgian grown and super fresh... You can really feel the distance from Western Europe – very traditional, designed for people who are watching their money (sauce in a plastic coca-cola bottles, honey in an old pickle jars, etc.)

The Georgians are remarkable characters! Being warm and welcoming they will invite you to their stalls to taste food, they will ask you where you from, will gladly pose for a picture and even invite to pose their fellow sellers to join for photograph, all smiling and laughing. Can you imagine this happening in any London market ?

■ By Erika Retkute, July 27, 2016



CNN: Top 16 up-and-coming destinations

The best stories arise from the road less traveled. As new routes launch, developing nations welcome tourism and closed-off regions emerge.

So what's hot in 2016? We asked an expert panel of pros who thrive and survive on travel to new frontiers...

Georgia. A land of medieval architecture, timeless culture and staggering scenery, Georgia is simply stunning.

Blessed with 750 miles of Southern Caucasus mountains, this canvas invites walkers, horse riders and skiers.

Snow-encrusted summits descend into vast valleys, where age-old villages are dotted with ancient churches and watchtowers, between rolling vineyards.

What's new?

Cheap flights, new routes and improved infrastructure and

accommodation confirm Georgia as big news for 2016.

Tbilisi, the capital, is a concoction of old and new, where balcony-studded houses and narrow cobbled alleyways mingle with galleries and cafes.

"This region could benefit from some of the turmoil in the Middle East, offering similar travel highlights, albeit in a different cultural and topological makeup," says Bealby of Wild Frontiers.

"We have seen a big rise [in visitors] to Georgia and are expecting that to increase in 2016."

When to visit: February to November. May 26 is Independence Day.

■ By Anisha Shah, December 23, 2016



Gourmandly: GEORGIA: CELEBRATING WINE, FOOD, AND FRIENDS

This wasn't our first trip to Georgia. Six years earlier, our plane touched down and we began a 27-month adventure as U.S. Peace Corps volunteers — one that has turned into a lifelong passion. We lived and worked in a small city, integrating into our community and experiencing firsthand the joys and challenges of life in a rapidly developing post-Soviet country. We also felt the magnetic appeal of Georgian hospitality for the first time — genuinely warm and inviting people, simple but delicious food, and a wine culture unparalleled in the world.

Returning home after our service and settling in Portland, Oregon, we soon found ourselves missing many of the dishes we had grown accustomed to eating in Georgia on an almost daily basis. Stuffed cheese bread called khachapuri, juicy khinkali dumplings and badrijani, grilled strips of eggplant wrapped up with walnut and garlic puree. Soon after, we opened a food cart in downtown Portland, which we named KargiGogo (meaning “good girl” in the Georgian language, a compliment and term of endearment used often). For nearly three years we poured our heart and soul into the food cart, introducing thousands of people to this food we loved — an exotic yet accessible mix of Eastern European, Mediterranean, and Persian flavors.

Last year we began importing high quality hard-to-find Georgian spices, making them available online to home cooks and professional chefs alike. As that business grew, we decided to close the food cart to give us the opportunity to pursue new adventures. One of those adventures was a trip back to Georgia for three months this spring to eat, drink, travel, and experience more of what makes this

country such a special place.

Thus, on a sunny April afternoon we found ourselves on a mountain road to Bakhmaro — a resort town famous for wooden houses on stilts, clean air, horse races, and lots of snow. The night before someone told us nine feet had fallen. Someone else said 21. Another claimed 27. The road itself is apparently completely impassable up to nine months out of the year.

Beso maneuvered the car around another corner, and we were met with a giant mound of snow. This, apparently, was the true end of the road, even though Bakhmaro itself was still many kilometers ahead. Everyone in the backseat breathed a collective sigh of relief and we spilled out of the car to take in the view.

One of the first things you'll notice about Georgia if you visit — which you should — is its stunning beauty. About the size of South Carolina, it packs an enormous amount of diverse scenery into its borders. In the far west, up and down the border of the Black Sea, you can expect rocky beaches, palm trees, and humidity that leaves you soaked with sweat in the summer and with rain in the winter. A few hours inland, you can be in the midst of some of the tallest mountains in Europe, high above the clouds, looking down on snow-capped peaks. Go further east and you'll find yourself surrounded by vineyards in the region of Kakheti, stretching out over flat swaths of land perfectly suited for carrying on the centuries-old traditions of what many archaeologists consider to be the birthplace of wine.

■ By Sean Fredericks, September 22, 2016



**A LITTLE
ADRIFT**



A Little Adrift: A Little Crush... Uncovering the Charms of Tbilisi, Georgia

Maybe it was the wine. Or perhaps it was the latticed balconies? The unfettered hospitality played a part. And the idyllic scenery was persuasive. For the life of me, I can't pin down precisely what made Tbilisi, Georgia so charming.

Since I left the country in late October, I took on the mantle of fangirl for the Republic of Georgia. I gush about it to any willing ear. I returned home late last year to holiday dinners and nights spent playing cards with friends. Between these engagements, I edited photos from my fall travels. Each night, with a swipe of the keyboard, a new image flashed on the screen. Like a slide projector warming up, memories flickered into my consciousness. Each cropped and straightened photo rekindled my crush on this beautiful little city in the far east of Europe.

Most international governments recognize that Georgia includes the two areas in blue and purple, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These are Russian occupied areas of the country and travelers should research current political issues if traveling around those areas.

Like any good crush, I immediately wanted to know my crush's backstory and history. Before I left for Georgia and Turkey, I showed my dad my route. His eyebrows shot to the sky and he released a single, skeptical "hmm." Now into my eighth year of travel, my parents have long accepted my decision. They don't always love the places I visit solo, but they trust my judgement. From his face, however, I could tell my dad was wavering. In the absence of context, it's hard to imagine what Georgia's like. On the edge of the Caucasus Mountains, the country is neighbored by cultures as varied as its topography. Once a stop on the Silk Road, the city became a confluence of the civilizations over the millennia. This peculiar positioning means Georgia is considered a part of Europe or Asia, depending on who you ask. And you would be forgiven for wondering if it's a part of the Middle East. But the actual vibe: It's European.

■ By Shannon O'Donnel, February 2016



Huffington Post: Georgia: Parties and Prayers

A top-notch Travel person wants their clients to have the best possible experience; one that is tailored to their expectations. To this end, there are FAM (familiarization) trips that give these professionals firsthand knowledge. This is how I found myself embedded in a group of dedicated travel specialists, all of whom were as curious as I was about Georgia and its attractions.

I was there primarily to experience the culture, with an emphasis on music, art and food, although of course, it is always wonderful to meet new people and to learn about their histories. I found an abundance of all these things in Georgia (BTW, Sakartvelo is the actual name for this country). I had already known about the fantastic polyphonic singing tradition, and so before I even committed to the trip I made sure that we would catch some, but I was unprepared for the beauty of the country, and –dare I say it?—the good vibes of the place. For a nation with a history of invasion, surrounded by encroaching empires, the people have a tremendous vivacity and pride.

I hope you will enjoy my memoir of the trip, and here are a few footnotes:

When I mention that Alexander Chavchavadze was an exceptional man, consider this: he was probably Georgia's most influential writer in the Romantic tradition, and a fervent nationalist. But as Georgia's precarious position made it fair game for the Persian and Turkish empires, it became politically expedient to align itself with Russia,

which if nothing else was also Christian. (Talk about a dangerous liaison!) Chavchavadze became a highly successful military commander. So much so that even after his patriotic actions landed him in a Russian jail on charges of treason, he was released so that he could continue to command the Tsars' armies! All this, and he was a famous winemaker, too. Fascinating stuff.

Speaking of wine, the wine making tradition in Georgia goes back 8,000 years. As a matter of fact, many of the grapes that we taste in our own traditional wines originated there. The fermentation process is quite different however. The juice of the grapes is poured into huge terra cotta jugs lined with beeswax, called qvevri, then buried and left to age. This process produces wines that are extremely clean in taste, and Georgian wines are gaining more and more of a place in the international market.

And ah, Tbilisi! This is truly a fond memory, of antiquity alongside striking modern architecture, and intriguing side streets vs. massive plazas. The glass dome you see in the video is a symbol for transparency in government, and the energy one feels in the streets is anything but tired! This is a city that small as it may be, offers cosmopolitan pleasures and stimulation. Everyone in our group wished we could stay longer, and that is saying something!

■ By Michal Shapiro, June 15, 2016



**CHICAGO
TRIBUNE**



Chicago Tribune: The best places to travel in September

Georgia's capital is a must-see destination for architecture buffs — the region straddles Europe and Asia, and its architecture influences include Persian, Soviet-era and

art nouveau. Stay at the Rooms Hotel Tbilisi, which has wonderful design and delicious restaurants.

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Arlington Magazine - Trendspotting: Khachapuri

On a recent trip to the Republic of Georgia, I considered for a moment whether I could smuggle an unfinished chunk of Acharuli khachapuri back to the States.

The dish — which comes from the words “khacho,” meaning fresh cheese and “puri,” meaning bread — turns crusty, hollowed out loaves into vessels for salty cheese, butter and still-soft egg. And it’s become a de facto ambassador for its small country of origin, which is sandwiched between Russia and Turkey on the Black Sea.

Thankfully, no smuggling was necessary. There are a growing number of restaurants in the D.C. area jumping into the khachapuri boat, including two in Arlington.

Bringing khachapuri stateside

This spring, restaurant owner Michael Landrum carved out a dimly lit portion of his Ray’s Hell Burger dining room to introduce the Tasty Dug-Out, an eight-table eatery whose menu is loosely based on the cuisines of Georgia, Russia and the Mediterranean. Tucked between Courthouse and Rosslyn, the restaurant is open Tuesday through Saturday evenings. The name is an ode to khachapuri bread’s resemblance to a dug-out canoe, and at Landrum’s place

those breads become vessels for all sorts of non-traditional toppings.

“I’m not trying to do Georgian,” says Landrum, who describes the restaurant’s fare as “modern Zemblan cuisine,” named after a fictional kingdom described in Russian author Vladimir Nobokov’s novels.

Landrum first discovered Georgian food where many traveling Americans do: in Russia. There, Georgian restaurants are as popular as, say, Italian restaurants are in the U.S. The restaurateur says he fell in love with the complex flavors, noting that countless incursions (Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Persians, Turks and Russians have all invaded Georgia at some point in time) have left behind spices and culinary traditions from other cultures.

Enchanting as it was, Georgian cuisine struck Landrum as “too complex, too broad” to tackle in its entirety for a restaurant concept. “So I took the two dishes I loved the most and wanted to have fun with,” he says.

Khachapuri — spelled khachapouri on Landrum’s menu (English spellings of Georgian dishes still vary widely) — was on that short list. The four versions that are featured on



the Tasty Dug-Out menu are \$11 to \$17 each and are made in the Acharuli or Adjarian regional style. (Other regions of Georgia offer quesadilla-like variations of khachapuri that fold the cheese between thinner pieces of bread.) Acharuli is the boat-of-cheese version that's most popular outside the country. Many American chefs are embracing it as a vessel to add their own twists.

Landrum's renditions add toppings such as steak tartare, smoked salmon and roasted mushrooms, though for a traditional taste, first-timers may want to start with the "classic," which features the simple but power-packed combination of briny cheese, butter, spices and a runny egg. (He also offers three "pizza dug-outs" with even more toppings.) Two dipping sauces prove to be worthy accompaniments. For a kick, try the spicy adjika sauce, which smacks of chili peppers, garlic and traditional Georgian herbs like coriander and fenugreek.

It's clear Landrum has done his homework, finding just the right mix of cheeses to represent the flavor profile of Georgian ingredients that are not available in the United States. His version mixes two types of feta, a mozzarella and

another pair of Italian cheeses to strike the right chord of creaminess. He intentionally makes the dough a bit sweeter (with milk rather than yogurt) than the traditional style, to offset the dish's briny middle.

To eat khachapuri, use a fork to break the soft yolk and thoroughly blend it with the pat of marigold butter and cheese. Then, tear pieces of the bread from the edges and dip them into the oozy center.

Where to dig in

The Tasty Dug-Out (1650 Wilson Blvd.) isn't the only Arlington restaurant serving what's become the gateway food for Georgian cuisine. Bistro 360 (1800 Wilson Blvd.) offers a longer, thinner khachapuri as one of two flatbreads on its menu with a sunny-side-up egg, for \$9.

In the District, \$14 khachapuris have become standouts on Compass Rose's international street food menu. The Russian restaurant Mari Vanna also offers two types of the cheese bread at \$18, including the quesadilla-esque Imeruli version with the cheese tucked inside

■ By Whitney Pipkin, July 21, 2016



**Go Travel Your
Way**



Go Travel Your Way: 8 reasons to travel to Georgia and Tbilisi

I really didn't know what to think about going to Georgia in the beginning but honestly this country absolutely blew my mind. It was literally something that I was waiting to discover. You have this dream about going somewhere and you just think "Yes that's the perfect place to be". It's a mix of everything I reckon. The warm-hearted people, the stunning countryside, Tbilisi's nightlife, maybe something else... It's hard to describe but I guess it's the mix of everything.

A journey into humanity and kindness. A gem between Europe and Asia and a place you will not regret visiting. This is all based on my personal experience and to date if someone asks me this very, very difficult question about the best country I have ever visited, well.... my answer hasn't changed in years and I still say it is Georgia, the country that has left a massive impact on my life as a traveller.

No.1 - The nature of Georgia... no words can describe it...

I have to say that I was pretty amazed when I saw the Caucasian Mountains for the first time. It was a beautiful Friday morning, no clouds, no noise. Just the sun, myself

and the mountains.

It doesn't matter where you go but Georgia's nature will keep you speechless. One specific region I will not forget is the Tusheti National Park, and it kinda reminded me of Scotland, just more beautiful and amazing. Also the highest peak of Europe can be found here, the Mount Elbrus which rises to a height of 5,642 metres. It is a once in a life time experience, don't miss out on it!

No.2 - The people of Georgia will conquer your heart...

What I experienced in Tbilisi will always remain as one of the greatest human interactions I have ever experienced. It was warm hearted and so touching that I couldn't believe that strangers who I'd just met can give so much to each other. Mankind can create such respect and love for each other and the bond between people can change the world.

No.3 - The little local markets...

You'll find them everywhere. Colourful vegetables, fruits, meat, bread... anything and everything you could wish for. It's fun to stroll around these markets and to check out all



the things you'll never find from your local Walmart, Tesco or Woolworths. All the vegetables are of course Georgian grown and super fresh...

No.4 - Tbilisi is one of the most unique capitals I know... Why is that? Probably because Georgia is surrounded by so many different cultures and therefore got all the good qualities from each neighbor. You won't find many western chains such as McDonalds or Burger King and the whole city is kept in a very traditional way. The nightlife is great, and you will see a lot of young people everywhere.

No.5 - The little streets of Tbilisi...

That was something I noticed when I walked through Tbilisi for the first time. Cute little alleys and streets all over the city. It definitely has its charm and you could almost say Tbilisi is the Paris of Eurasia. It's probably not written in any Lonely Planet and I doubt there is even one for Georgia but this is something you must do.

No.6 - The beer is good and cheap, so is the food...

In a normal trendy downtown bar you will get a pint for just two dollars and you'll love it. Georgian beer is as pure as it

can be and it is really delicious. The cuisine in Georgia is very unique, with both European and Middle Eastern influences. No.7 - You have to visit Kazbegi...

There was one church in particular that caught my attention, the Gergeti Trinity Church. It's a very famous landmark in Georgia. It's located next to Mount Kazbegi at 2170 meters above sea level. I couldn't have thought of a better location for a church... I couldn't have thought of a better location for a church...

No.8 - Batumi and the stunning Black Sea Coast...

I must admit that I have seen nicer beaches. I guess it's the combination of the mountains and the sea just so close to each other. Batumi has a subtropical climate and the weather is really nice, also in the winter. The city itself has a few architectural highlights. A few fancy hotels, a nice beach walk and many colourful lights all over the city. A lot of young people come here to spend some nice times at the sea. There are also a lot of good parties at the beach, don't miss out on them...

■ By Josh Cahill, February 6, 2017



**NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
CREATIVE**

National Geographic: PLACES THAT DESERVE MORE TRAVELERS

Discover the bohemian spirit of capital Tbilisi and the famed mountainous wine region nearby.

The Situation on the Ground: Revolution, chaos, revolution, war, upheaval. The years since the collapse of the Soviet Union have not been uniformly good to Georgia, the balmy, vineyard-dotted Caucasian country that once doubled as an artistic Grand Tour destination for Russia's literary élite.

Its once bandit-infested mountains are now awash with newly built ski slopes (and Swiss-style chalets); the crumbling art nouveau facades of its Black Sea port Batumi have been meticulously, and sometimes gaudily, restored. And with its resurgent activist arts (and nightlife) scenes, Tbilisi, its capital, has become one of Eastern Europe's most innovative cultural capitals.

Why Go Now: The winding dirt roads and collapsed fin de siècle palaces of early 2000's Tbilisi may have given way to a far more cosmopolitan and polished city, but Tbilisi's anarchically bohemian spirit still suffuses its historic districts, where repurposed 19th-century chandeliers hang over finger paintings in speakeasy-style apartment bars like Café Linville.

Don't Miss: A two-hour drive from Tbilisi, mountains give

way to vineyards in the region of Kakheti, Georgia's wine country. Boutique hotels like the funky Chateau Mere—where else could you find 19th-century armoires, a swimming pool, an imitation Colosseum in the garden, and photos of Fellini stars on the restaurant walls?—serve as the perfect vantage points from which to hike through the area's hilltop medieval monasteries or to drink homemade Georgian wines for as little as \$2 a bottle.

Practical Tip: Drinking in Georgia can prove a risky proposition, particularly for men, who may baffle or even offend well-meaning hosts by refusing to down every beverage offered. Hospitality culture here can border on the aggressive (think strangers abducting you to their restaurant table and insisting that you down 10 or more shots of moonshine), so be prepared to stand firm and risk disapproval if you intend to make it back to your hotel without falling over. Drinking and driving is also far too common here, so avoid driving at night—after most supra (feasts) have finished—or relying on the offer of a post-supra lift.

- By Tara Isabella Burton, June 9, 2016
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE



**THE
GUARDIAN**

The Guardian: Insider's guide to Tbilisi: protests, free wine and salted fish

Five-litre bottles of beer, country musicians and questionable modern architecture – scratch the surface of Tbilisi and you'll discover a Georgian city fiercely proud of its patchwork history, constantly trying to reinvent itself.

In five words

The city that loves you

Arriving at Tbilisi International Airport in tourist season, surprised visitors are handed a bottle of local wine at passport control and are greeted with billboards welcoming them to Tbilisi: "The city that loves you."

Stroll down the city's main thoroughfare Rustaveli Avenue on any given evening and you'll come across groups of young musicians busking. Rock music is the order of the day, but you will occasionally hear groups of teenagers playing the phanduri (a traditional string instrument), and singing folk songs from Georgia's Caucasus mountains.

Tucked away behind the communist-era cinema on Rustaveli Avenue, the house of 19th-century lawyer and economist Vasil Gabashvili (built in 1897) in many ways typifies Tbilisi's unique architectural style. An impressive double-storey



wooden balcony, carved in traditional style, hangs elegantly from a classical façade replete with decorative baroque elements.

The house was once the residence of notable Georgian physician Nikoloz Kipshidze, who acted as personal doctor to Josef Stalin during his protracted deathbed illnesses. Although Communist authorities planned to destroy this grandiose bourgeois structure, Kipshidze managed to use his connection to Stalin to save the building, and it's now home to his descendent, museum curator Nino Kipshidze and her artist husband Dato Sulakauri.

Best local artist

A graduate of Tbilisi's State Academy of Arts, Eteri Chkadua is known for her vivid and often outlandish portraits, in which minute attention is lavished on faces and facial expressions. Chkadua left Tbilisi and moved to the US after marrying the artist Kevin Tuite. At the time, however, the then-Soviet government regarded her paintings produced at the State Art Academy as government property, and refused to allow them to leave the country. After much bureaucratic shuffling, Chkadua was allowed to buy some

of the paintings back, costing her father the equivalent of a month's salary.

Most under-rated location

Hidden away behind an unassuming brick facade at 7 Kaspi Street, a fascinating relic of Georgia's communist past survives intact, almost completely unknown to locals and visitors alike. Behind a pair of iron doors emblazoned with a large hammer and sickle, visitors can take a step back in time in a museum preserving the illegal printing press used by the young Josef Stalin at the turn of the 20th century. The yard contains the house used by Stalin and other revolutionaries, and a shed containing the well shaft which gave access to the underground chamber that still holds the original German printing machine.

Best cultural Instagram account

Mariam Sitchinava's pictures provide a surreal but enchanting glimpse into the inner life of the Georgian capital, explored through fashion, faces and landscapes. Sitchinava's Instagram was recently featured by Vogue magazine, heralding the arrival of the "best new it girls ... from Georgia (the country, not the state)".



Moment in history

A large stone monument in front of the old parliament building on Rustaveli Avenue marks the spot where, on 9 April 1989, the Soviet Army violently dispersed a peaceful pro-independence rally using spades and batons, killing 20 civilians and injuring hundreds more. The public shock and anger at the horrific nature of the attack – the victims of which included many women and children – marked a turning point in Georgia's struggle for independence from the Soviet Union. Two years later, approximately 90% of Georgians took part in a referendum on independence, paving the way for secession from the Soviet Union in May 1991.

Homegrown talent

Originally from the small southern Georgian town of Bolnisi, Shota Adamashvili burst on to the Tbilisi music scene after appearing on a TV talent show, wowing audiences with his soulful performances of country music, despite having never visited the United States. Visitors can catch Shota performing weekly in venues across the city.

Insider's tip

Although Georgia is renowned as a country of wine, Tbilisians love their beer too. On warm summer evenings crowds of men can be seen carrying five-litre bottles of the stuff straight from the tap of the Kazbegi brewery by the Mtkvari River. The chilled beer is prized for its freshness and is traditionally enjoyed with smoked and salted fish (sold at a number of well-stocked stalls nearby) and hunks of brown bread.

While some locals will brave several lanes of busy traffic on the Sanapiro highway in order to enjoy their beer right on the riverside, others, including traders from the local Eliava Bazaar, flock to a make-shift outdoor canteen of rickety wooden benches and tables, located up a discreet flight of steps just north of the brewery. A flat fee of 1 lari (33p) per person buys you the privilege of a clean sheet of newspaper on the table and access to a fetid lavatory.

- Joseph Alexander Smith, June 20, 2016



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