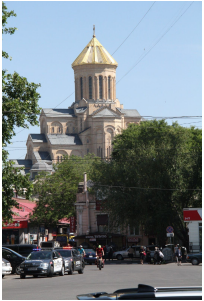


Georgia & Armenia 14 Days

GEORGIA



Arrival in Tbilisi

After arriving at Tbilisi we transfer to the hotel and we will take a short walk around Tbilisi. We have an option to spend an hour at one of the sulfur bath Tbilisi is famous for. Or just relax before we have our first Geologie dinner.

Overnight stay in Tbilisi

Day 1: Tbilisi city tour

Today after breakfast we are going to do a walking tour through Tbilisi old town. We are going to see Metekhi (13C), Anchiskhati (6C), Synagoge, Narikala Fortress (4C), Rustaveli Rd and the National Museum with its treasure chamber.

The museum collection contains fascinating goldsmith's artworks of ancient Colchis. A delicious dinner in a traditional restaurant we concluded the first full day.

Overnight stay in Tbilisi



Day 2: Mysterious semi-desert Gareja

Today, we leave Tbilisi and head south-east into the Desert Gareja. The first visiting point of the day is the Lavra Monastery of David Gareji, followed by a small hike to the caves of the Udabno-Monastery with impressive frescos and spectacular view over the bizarre desert landscape at the border to Azerbaijan.

The trip proceeds to Jimiti, a very old, typically Kakhetian village. Here you can enjoy a lunch and house made wine at a local family's place, which gives you an excellent insight into the daily life and activities, such as bread baking and winemaking in the traditional way.

A late-evening trip to the medieval town Signaghi offers a relaxing finale for the day.



Day 3: Wine Region Kakheti

We start the day with a relaxed walking tour through the wriggling lanes of Signaghi with a breathtaking view over the vast Alazani Valley. Next we continue our journey along the Wine Route visiting Nekresi Monastery en route. The Nekresi complex includes the oldest church in Georgia (4th c.), still echoing the architectural style of Zoroastrian temples, and an ancient Georgian wine cellar, where, in accordance with the traditional "Georgian method", wine is stored in Kvevris (pottery amphorae) embedded in the earth.

We also visit the Gremi Monastery with its Museum of History. After lunch and wine degustation at the Mosmieri wine estate we visit the former princely residence Tsinandali with its famous wine cellar. The residence is a remnant of the onetime splendor of the 19. c. Kakhetian nobility. Finally we make a short detour to a local Kvevri potter in Vardisubani. The Georgian Kvevri-wine producing method counts more than 8.000 years and ranks among the oldest of the world culture heritage.

Overnight stay in Telavi

Day 4:



Today we head to the Great Caucasus. Shortly after leaving Telavi we visit the mighty Alaverdi Cathedral (11. c.) the biggest cathedral of eastern Georgia, whose monks carry on the tradition of Alaverdi wine producing over centuries. We continue our journey along the Gombori Mountains first and then along the old Military Road up to Stepantsminda at the foot of the majestic Mt. Kazbegi. The age-old caravan trail connected the North with the Orient even in the ancient times as described by the Greek geographer Strabo in his reports. A number of fortifications emerged along the route serving the purpose of defense against hostile attacks. After visiting the richly ornamented Ananuri Fortress Complex (17. c.), picturesquely embedded in the Zhinvali Reservoir landscape, the journey continues via the Cross Pass at the altitude of 2.395m to Stepantsminda (former Kasbegi) at the foot of the Kasbegi Glacier. In the late afternoon a short trip to the Russian border over the wild Darial Gorge, the millennia-old battleground for aggressors, baptized with the name “Gate to the North”.

Overnight stay in Stepantsminda

Day 5:

After breakfast we will drive to the pilgrimage church Tsminda Sameba (Gergeti Trinity Church, 14. c., 2.170m), standing in proud solitary splendour in front of a spectacular panorama of the Kasbegi Summit (5.047m), the highest mount in the eastern Greater Caucasus. As the legend says, Zeus chained Prometheus on the top of the mountain as a punishment for bringing fire to mankind. Dinner is a wine degustation and the beauty and peace of the countryside round off the day.

Overnight stay in Ateni

Day 6: The ancient Silk Road

After breakfast we visit the Ateni Sioni Church (7-10. c.), a cross-cupola church with medieval depictions on the life of Mary (12. c.). In the afternoon our journey takes us to the ancient cave-city Uplistsikhe situated on the broad valley of the river Mtkvari (Kura), where bizarre rock ruins are silent witnesses to the sometime grandeur and importance of the ancient trading base. En route we also visit Mtskheta, the old capital of Georgia at the crosspoint of the Military- and the Silk Roads. Visiting the Jvari Monastery (7. c.) looking over the old capital and the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11. c.), the heart and soul of Georgia in the centre of Mtskheta.

Overnight stay in Mtskheta

Day 7: Journey to Armenia

Sanahin & Haghbat monasteries, Dilijan

Today we start our journey to Armenia. We drive to the Georgian-Armenian border near Sadakhlo to meet the Armenian team and change buses. After a half-an-hour's drive on the Armenian territory we visit our first monasteries in Armenia: Sanahin (10. c.) and Haghbat (10.-13. c.), both UNESCO world cultural heritage sites.

We continue our way to Dilijan, one of the popular resorts of the country. The green forest and the water rich northern province Tavush forms a pleasant contrast against the barren South of Armenia. In the evening we enjoy a relaxed walk through Dilijan.

Overnight stay in Dilijan

Day 8:

Our first destination for today is the Haghartsin Monastery (10-13 c.). Afterwards we drive to the Sevan Lake at 1.900m, one of the highest-altitude lakes in the world. At the north-west edge of the lake we climb steps and a narrow pathway leading to the Sevan Monastery (9. c.), lying majestically high up on a mountain ridge. We continue the journey through one of the impressive passes of Armenia, the Orbeliani Pass (2.410m). We also visit a caravanserai from the 13. c. Here, just like the merchants of the ancient Silk Road, you can enjoy a breathtaking view over the Selim Valley and the mountain range of Vayots Dzor. Transfer to Hermon.

Overnight stay in Hermon



Day 9:

Today's route takes us to the village Shatin, where, with a little luck, we can see some ibexes. The route goes on to the Novarank monastery (13. c.), lying in the Amaghu Gorge. The journey continues through the wine region Areni and we visit maybe the oldest wine cave (6. m.lm. B.C.) in the world. Afterwards we enjoy a leisurely midday meal and wine tasting in the village Areni. We continue our way to the Khor Virap monastery in the Ararat province. From here you can enjoy a far-reaching view of the holy Mt. Ararat and the border to Turkey. We continue to Yerevan the capital of Armenia.

Overnight stay in Yerevan



Day 10:

Today we will do a city tour through Yerevan. The capital of Armenia is a buzzing metropolis with modern architecture. Yet you see the traces of its turbulent past in every corner.

We will visit Erebuni Fortress, built in 782 on the Arin-Berd hill and Cafesjian Museum of Modern Art. After that we drive to the neighbouring town Ejmiatsin, the centre of the Armenian apostolic Church. At a short coffee break we meet with the members of the church organization "Cross of Armenian Unity". In the afternoon we visit the Ejmiatsin Cathedral (4. c.), as well as the churches

Hripsime, Gajaneh and the ruins of the round church Svartnots (all three UNESCO world cultural heritage sites, 7. c.). Drive back to Yerevan.

Overnight stay in Yerevan (B/L/D)



Day 11:

Picturesquely embedded in the lightly wooded slopes at the edge of the Azat Gorge Valley, the UNESCO rocky monastery Geghard (12.-13. c.) it belongs to the prettiest monasteries of the Caucasus. We visit a church hewn partially into the volcanic rocks of the Azat Gorge. Here we can enjoy an exclusive vocal concert of medieval Armenian church music.

Next we visit the sun temple Garni dating back to the 1.c. A.D., where you can listen to the beautiful sound of the wind instrument Duduk, the national instrument of Armenia. Dinner at a local family's place will give you an insight into the country life of an Armenian

family. Together with the family members we can bake Lavash, the traditional Armenian pita bread. In the evening we drive back to Yerevan and visit the Matenadaran Museum of Manuscripts with a collection counting more than 17 tsd. manuscripts.



In the evening we taste brandy at the local brandy factory.

Overnight stay in Yerevan (B/L/-)

Day 12:

After breakfast we drive to Amberd Castle (10.-13. c.). Though in ruins, this is one of the only few feudal fortresses in Armenia which till today proudly crowns over the valley of the Aragat Montains.

Having visited Amberd we continue our journey over Gyumri to Bavra, back at the Armenian-Georgian border, where the Georgian team is waiting for us.

Today's final destination is Vardzia.

Overnight stay in Vardzia

Day 13:

After breakfast we visit the cave-city Vardzia (12. c.) near the border to Turkey. The almost 500 m high rock wall towers the riverbank. Network of numerous hand-carved caves extends throughout multiple floors interconnected via stairways, terraces and galleries. At its time the cave complex contained streets, tunnels, residential premises and cupolas, libraries and baths. The absolute highlight of the site is the medieval fresco art of the cave-churches, i. a. you can view one of the rarest pictorial representations of Queen Tamar depicted by her contemporaries. In the afternoon we continue our journey to Akhaltsikhe where we visit the recently rebuilt Rabat Fortress and the Rabat Museum. Among its very well preserved exhibits this local branch of the National Museum houses some of the most important findings from the region Samtskhe-Javakheti, one of the oldest settlement areas of Georgia. Finally, our journey leads us back to Tbilisi, where we enjoy our farewell dinner in a traditional restaurant.

Overnight stay in Tbilisi

Day 14: Departure

Transfer to the airport as expected in the early morning of the following day.