

Georgia ~ a Cultural Walking Tour

<http://www.kudutravel.com/tours/georgia-walking-tour>

9 – 22 June 2020

Georgia's geographical position at the heart of the Greater Caucasus defines its history and culture, placing it at the crossroads of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Invaded over the centuries by the Greeks, Romans, Vikings, Mongols, Persians, Ottoman Turks, Russians, Armenians and even the British (in 1919), Georgians have survived with a very strong sense of identity, expressed through their heritage of defensive towers and splendid, very early churches – and above all, in their love of wine and feasting and their legendary hospitality to visitors.

On a two-week cultural walking tour in June, coinciding with breathtaking displays of wildflowers in the mountain meadows, we explore the old caravanserai district of Tbilisi (an important stage on the Silk Route), visit many beautiful stone-carved churches and monasteries in remote settings, taste wines in vineyards close to the Azerbaijani border and walk in high mountain valleys peppered with ancient stone towers.

HIGHLIGHTS of our Georgia walking tour include:

- Moderate walks on 7 days (1.5 – 3.5 hours) – with superb Caucasus mountain scenery
- Visits to the most important early stone-carved churches and cathedrals in the country, and the National Museum with extraordinary prehistoric gold collections
- Exploring historic Tbilisi (a major Silk Road halt) with its caravanserais, picturesque wooden balconies, carpet shops and early Persian fortress
- Brilliant displays of wildflowers (with many Caucasus endemic species) in the mountain meadows
- Distinctive cuisine full of surprising flavours and excellent Georgian wine
- Walking in the remote Svaneti district, famous for its photogenic stone towers peppering the high valleys

Guests' comments on this trip:

'Another great Kudu triumph, one I have been waiting for and it certainly did not disappoint - the wild lands of the Caucasus, especially the eastern side and the Military Highway, were everything I expected from bits I have read and photographs I have seen, thank you for a thoroughly good time.'

'The unsurpassed mountain scenery and flowers made for great walking. I found the whole country interesting - such a different way of life.'

'Thank you for what was an outstandingly interesting tour - perhaps the very best tour I've been on with Kudu, or anyone else for that matter.'

Itinerary

DAY 1

B, L, D included

After arriving at Tbilisi airport in the early morning, we have a short transfer to our boutique hotel, ideally set in the old city centre. Having rested in our hotel rooms, we explore the city, partly on foot and partly with private transport. We start in the Botanical gardens and the fortress of Narikala, then walk down through the restored caravanserai area, with its carpet shops, traditional baths, mosque, synagogue and the 13th century Metekhi church.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

A leisurely start to a day as we continue exploring historic Tbilisi, including the fabulous prehistoric gold displays in the National Museum. Later, we visit the outdoor ethnographic museum and have lunch under a vine trellis. Dinner is an introduction to Georgian cuisine with its emphasis on fresh herbs, walnut and plum sauces, cheese pies and lamb, baked with garlic and vegetables in clay pots.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

We set off by road, heading southeast into the steppe, a starkly beautiful area of dry hills, covered with flowering grasses in June and patrolled by short-toed eagles and Egyptian vultures. In the remotest part, we walk up to the Davit-Gareja monastery complex, founded in the mid-6th century, with churches built into the sandstone caves. Continuing east, our destination is the walled hilltop town of Signaghi, where we walk through cobbled lanes, lined with wooden balconied houses, to our small 3-star hotel. A wine tasting before dinner introduces us to the unique wine-making traditions of Georgia, entirely different to the rest of the world!

DAY 4

B, L, D included

In nearby Tsinandali, we visit the manor house museum dedicated to the Georgian Romantic poet Alexander Chavchavadze, then stroll round the fascinating market in Telavi. In a local house, we try our hand at making traditional Georgian bread and enjoy a particularly good lunch before visiting the frescoed 11th century Cathedral of St. George at Alaverdi and the Persian-influenced citadel of Gremi.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

Returning by road towards Tbilisi, we drive on to Mtskheta, the town at the heart of Georgia's spiritual identity, where the Royal family converted to Christianity in AD 337, and visit both the enormous 11th century cathedral and the splendidly sited 6th century church of Jvari. Continuing west to Kutaisi in central Georgia, we have the option of visiting the Stalin Museum in Gori and then settle into our small Kutaisi hotel.

DAY 6

B, L, D included

After an early morning walk around Kutaisi to see the market, we set off into the high Caucasus. The scenery gets ever more spectacular as we climb into Svaneti, the wildest and most remote region of Georgia, in whose stone towers the country's greatest treasures and icons were always hidden in times of invasion. We stay for 3 nights in a new small 4-star hotel and there may be time for an early evening walk along paths lined with yellow rhododendrons.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

This morning, weather permitting, we drive to high flower meadows, with panoramic views. We have a picnic overlooked by the 4,710 m twin peaks of Mt. Ushba, nicknamed the Matterhorn of the Caucasus. On returning to Mestia, we visit the excellent museum with icons and treasures from the local churches.

DAY 8

B, L, D included

4WDs take us even higher into the mountains to Ushguli, reputedly the highest permanently inhabited settlement in Europe at an altitude of 2,200 m, filled with 11th century towers and a UNESCO World Heritage site. We walk along a wide valley with (cloud permitting) fine views of Georgia's highest mountain, 5,068 m Shkhara and visit the frescoed mediaeval church of St George before a farm lunch.

DAY 9

B, L, D included

We have an early start to drive (4.5 hours) back down through splendid mountain scenery to Kutaisi, staying tonight in the same comfortable small hotel in the centre. We visit the newly restored (partly Romanesque) Bagrat cathedral that dominates the town and have time to explore the architecturally interesting centre on foot.

DAY 10

B, L, D included

A long drive today, with stops to buy wooden spoons and baskets. We follow the celebrated Georgian Military Highway, pausing to visit the fortified 17th century church at Ananauri with its interesting Persian and pagan influenced carvings. The drive becomes increasingly beautiful as we access the high mountains and cross a pass to Kazbegi where we stay for 3 nights at a memorable hotel with a pool, an outstanding restaurant and breath-taking mountain views.

DAY 11

B, L, D included

After a leisurely swim and a delicious breakfast, 4WDs take us up through the forest to picnic and visit the wonderfully sited 14th century Sameba (Trinity) church, with magnificent views of the 5,033 m Mt. Kazbegi. There is an optional walk down with delightful mountain flowers and views (2 hours) followed by some free time to shop for woolly socks and wild sheepskin hats from the stalls on the square.

DAY 12

B, L, D included

We drive high up a side valley to commence our day's walk from the village of Jutta. A path leads up into a wild and remote valley, filled with wildflowers (irises and fritillaries) and bounded at its head by the snow-covered peaks of Chaukhi mountain. Small herds of horses graze along the stream and lammergeiers and eagles often patrol overhead.

DAY 13

B, L, D included

As we drive back over the mountains, we pause to walk on the grassy tracks of the famous Cross Pass. Heading back towards Tbilisi, we stop for a lunch of grilled trout and reach the city by mid-afternoon to settle back into our boutique hotel in the historic centre.

DAY 14

B, L included

The morning is free to pursue individual interests. The options include the collection of naïve paintings by Pirosmiani in the National Gallery, the eccentric clock tower designed by a puppet master or the striking Peace Bridge built recently in steel and glass over the river Mtkvari. An afternoon transfer to the airport for flights home concludes our holiday.

Activity Level Standard

7 walking days, 1.5 to 3.5 hours daily. Lightweight hiking boots which offer good ankle support are essential as the terrain is generally rough underfoot.

Temperatures

June temperatures range between 16° and 28°C during the day in Tbilisi, and average 15° in the mountains. It is normally fairly dry and clear at this time of year.

Accommodation

- 3 nights (first 2 and the last) in Tbilisi, in a boutique hotel ideally set in the old city centre
- 2 nights in Signaghi, in a small 3-star hotel
- 2 nights in Kutaisi, in a comfortable small hotel
- 3 nights in Mestia, in a new small 4-star hotel
- 3 nights in Kazbegi, in a memorable hotel with a pool, an outstanding restaurant and breath-taking mountain views

Trip Price, per person sharing:

£3,505.50 until 8th December 2019

£3,597.75 until 8th March 2020

£3,690 after 8th March 2020

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

£520 single supplement

£500 deposit per person

Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. We shall endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy whenever possible.

Price Includes

- Accommodation for 14 nights (including the nights we arrive), on a twin shared basis
- All meals (with wine/beer at dinners and restaurant lunches) as listed in the daily notation
- All land transportation in a private vehicle with drivers (minibus and 4WDs) as described except during free periods
- All entrance and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- Gratuities for hotel and restaurant staff (appreciation for tour leaders is discretionary)
- Services of English-speaking local guide plus Kudu Travel tour leader throughout

Price does not Include

- Flights to and from Tbilisi
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements

- Passport, visa and health documentation
- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides wine/beer with group lunches and dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- Meals noted as excepted in the daily notation
- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Georgian departure tax (if any)

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Visitors from the EU and USA currently require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to Georgia. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest Embassy of Georgia.

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to Georgia, but you may wish to **consult your doctor (at least 6 weeks before you travel)** about updating your immunisation against Hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid, or anything else they consider advisable. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad/>) and the FCO (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 14 guests.