

Travelling the borders of South Caucasus

A 10-day tour

Day 1 **Travel to Georgia – Tbilisi**

Any EU country – Georgia/Tbilisi. Arrival in Tbilisi – Check-in in the early hours of the morning. Night in Tbilisi.

We take an international scheduled flight to the capital of Georgia and arrive in Tbilisi after midnight. After transferring from the airport to our accommodation, you will be able to rest after the journey.

Day 2 **Through the Old city of Tbilisi**

Tbilisi – city tour. Night in Tbilisi.

After breakfast, we start off by taking a relaxed walk through the old town of Tbilisi to acclimatize ourselves. Alongside the churches, fortifications, mosques, and synagogues, you will be able to take in the flair of the city. Old lanes and houses as well as the lifestyle of the city dwellers invite you to do this. We shall eat an early dinner, go for an evening stroll, and let the day draw to an end.

Day 3 **On the edge of the great powers – Mtskheta**

Tbilisi – Mtskheta/Jvari. Night in Tbilisi.

On this day, we explore Mtskheta the old capital of Georgia. There are two reasons for travelling the roughly 20 kilometres from Tbilisi to Mtskheta: First, no better place narrates the history of Georgia within the entire Caucasian context – Mtskheta lies at the geographic centre of the Caucasus and has played an important role through its position on the edge of the Great Powers. Second, its historical significance is reflected by two superb historic monuments. We want to take a closer look at the Svetitskhoveli cathedral (Living Pillar Cathedral) and the Jvari Monastery perched on a rocky mountaintop. Late in the afternoon, we travel back to Tbilisi.

Day 4 **The East of the country – The Kakheti Region and the Alasani Valley**

Tbilisi – Signaghi. Night in Signaghi.

After breakfast, we leave Tbilisi at about 9 in the morning and travel by minibus toward the east of Georgia and the Kakheti Region that is famous for its wine. The journey on a well-constructed road takes about three hours. We reach the town of Signaghi where we shall be staying for the next two days. After a light lunch, we take a look round this charming little town. If visibility is good, you will gain a first impression of the splendour of the Caucasus and the Alasani Valley lying at its feet. We shall take an early dinner and let the day draw to an end.

Day 5

On the eastern border with Azerbaijan – Lagodekhi National Park

Sighnaghi - Lagodekhi National Park. Night in Sighnaghi.

On this day, we set off a bit earlier than usual. We are taking a trip to the Lagodekhi National Park that is about an hour's drive from Sighnaghi. We leave at about 8 in the morning and get to our goal Lagodekhi at about 9. From the National Park Visitor Centre, we take a horseback tour accompanied by local rangers on the small but sturdy local horses. In the evening, we return to Sighnaghi.

Day 6

Along the southern borders

Sighnaghi – Vardzia. Journey to the border between Georgia and Armenia. Arrival at Vardzia where we spend the night.

After breakfast, we leave Sighnaghi. We are now going on the longest drive of the tour. Our goal is the cave monastery at Vardzia and thereby the south of Georgia on the borders with Armenia and Turkey. When we reach about halfway, we shall take a break at Bolnisi. This is an interesting choice for two reasons: first, it allows us to visit one of the oldest churches in Georgia and the South Caucasus – the Sioni church. Second, it is a town founded by German settlers in 1818 under the name of 'Katharinenfeld'. Here, we want to visit the restored Lutheran protestant parish and meet the descendants of German immigrants.

Afterwards, we continue our journey to Vardzia and get there toward early evening. We can recap on the day during dinner in our picturesquely situated accommodation.

Day 7

Monasticism – asceticism – cave monastery

Vardzia – cave monastery, walking tour. Night in Vardzia.

In the first half of the day, we visit the cave monastery at Vardzia. It is easy to reach from our accommodation. This extensive cave city offers a good opportunity to immerse ourselves in the world of monasticism. Vardzia is a place where you can directly experience the synthesis of nature and culture.

In the second half of the day, we want to take a walking tour up the Kura River and get to know the flora and fauna of the region. As evening falls, we return to our accommodation in Vardzia.

Day 8

From the mountains to the sea

Vardzia – Batumi. Zarzma – Goderdzi pass. Night in Batumi.

After breakfast, we leave our accommodation in Vardzia. Our journey now takes us further along the Turkish border. Our goal for today is Batumi – pearl of the Black Sea. While climbing up toward the Goderdzi Mountain Pass, we stop off and visit the Georgian-Orthodox monastery located at the village of Zarzma. We keep on climbing and finally traverse the Goderdzi Pass (2025 m). Embedded in unspoiled nature, driving over bumpy roads, we pass Muslim villages and settlements and gain a vivid impression of this part of Georgia. In the evening, we reach Batumi – sea, palm trees, and lemons!

Day 9

Batumi – Pearl of the Black Sea

Exploring the city of Batumi. Night in Batumi.

No special program is planned for this day. Instead, we want to give you an opportunity to explore the city by yourself. As the pearl of the Black Sea, Batumi offers numerous opportunities for relaxation, culture, and the enjoyment of nature.

Day 10

Batumi and the surrounding area

Around Batumi. Night in Batumi.

We spend one more day around Batumi and can either go off on a tour of the Mtskheta National Park or spend the day in the Botanical Gardens where we can have a picnic. A cultural event is planned for the evening. We can attend either the State Opera or one of numerous concerts. Before that, we eat dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 11

Farewell

Departure from Batumi /Georgia – Any EU country.

After breakfast, we leave Batumi and travel back toward the capital. It's a long journey, but the roads are good. Late in the afternoon, we reach Tbilisi.

Depending on your flight schedule – most flights from Tbilisi leave early in the morning – we want to give you a last opportunity to sum up your impressions of the whole journey while eating dinner with us. Then it's off to the airport where we shall say goodbye.