In-depth reviews, detailed listings and insider tips

VITAL PRACTICAL INFORMATION TO HELP YOU HAVE A SMOOTH TRIP

Health

HEALTH GUIDELINES

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while travelling. A little planning before departure will save trouble later: visit a doctor in good time to discuss vaccinations and prepare any medications that you need to take with you; carry spare contact lenses or glasses.

While you’re on the road, take care to avoid dodgy food and water, as well as insect and animal bites, to minimise the risk of problems.

BEFORE YOU GO

Insurance

It’s a very good idea to have comprehensive travel insurance with medical evacuation cover. A policy that will make payments directly to providers, rather than reimburse you later, is usually preferable.

Standards of public health care in the region are very patchy. If you need medical attention you may well want to go to one of the expensive Western-standard clinics in the major cities, in which case good insurance cover is essential.

EU citizens are entitled to free public medical and some dental care in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan under reciprocal arrangements, though they still have to buy prescribed medicines.

Websites

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the internet. The following include country-specific information:

www.mdtravelhealth.com
Full travel-health recommendations for every country, updated daily.

wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel
The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

www.nathnac.org
The UK’s National Travel Health Network and Centre.

IN GEORGIA, ARMENIA & AZERBAIJAN

Availability of Health Care

The capital cities have some expensive, Western-standard clinics. Public medical care is available in all towns, though clinics and hospitals may be ill supplied, and nursing care limited (families and friends are often expected to provide this). In Georgia some

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

You should be up-to-date with the vaccinations that you would normally have back home, such as diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella, polio and typhoid. Further vaccines may be advisable for children or the elderly.

• Hepatitis A

Classed as an intermediate risk in the region: vaccination may be recommended for those who are staying for long periods, or with family or friends, or in areas with poor sanitation.

• Hepatitis B

Has high endemicity: vaccination may be recommended for some groups, including people who are likely to have unprotected sex.

• Tuberculosis (TB)

Vaccination is a good idea for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population or planning a long stay.

• Rabies

Exists in all three countries. Consider vaccination if you plan a lot of activities that might bring you into contact with domestic or wild animals, such as cycling, hiking or camping, especially in remote areas where postbite vaccine may not be available within 24 hours.
“All you’ve got to do is decide to go and the hardest part is over. So go!”
TONY WHEELER, COFOUNDER – LONELY PLANET

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Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan

Svaneti
Spectacular mountain walks, 175 ancient towers (p79)

Kazbegi Area
Great outdoor activities, majestic Caucasus scenery (p87)

Yerevan
Cafe culture, fancy fashions, fast cars (p124)

Geghard Monastery
Half cathedral, half cave (p145)
Two Weeks
A Taste of Everything

You can get a taste of all three countries in two weeks, but do organise your Azerbaijani visa in advance. Starting in Yerevan and finishing in Baku, or vice versa, if you can arrange it, will save backtracking. Otherwise, three days in and around the Georgian capital Tbilisi, the region’s most attractive city, is the obvious starter. Take day trips to Davit Gareja cave monastery and/or the old Georgian capital Mtskheta. Next head up to Kazbegi for two or three days in the spectacular Great Caucasus. Return to Tbilisi and head off to Baku by road or the night train, explore the bustling Azerbaijani capital for a day or two, and return to Tbilisi by the ‘country route’ through quaint Lahic and lovely Şaki and Zaqatala. Now head south into Armenia, visiting the World Heritage monasteries of Haghpat and Sanahin en route to the capital Yerevan. In three days here you can venture out to Garni Temple and Geghard and Khor Virap monasteries as well as enjoy the city’s cafes, shops and museums.
Three to Four Weeks  
**Georgia & Azerbaijan**

Begin with three days in attractive Tbilisi, taking a day trip to Davit Gareja or Mtskheta. Head up to Kazbegi for a couple of days in the wonderful Caucasus, then take the overnight Tbilisi–Baku train. Spend two or three days soaking up the buzz of Azerbaijan’s capital, with side trips to the Abşeron Peninsula and/or the petroglyphs and mud volcanoes of Qobustan. Head up to the carpetmaking town of Quba and to mountain villages beyond such as Xinaliq for Azerbaijan’s best hiking. Return to Baku and head northwest to quaint Lahic, another base for good walks. Continue to lovely Şəki and, if time's on your side, linger at Caucasus foothill villages such as Kiş, İlisu or Car. Re-enter Georgia at Lagodekhi and spend two or three days tasting the wines and sights of Kakheti from Telavi. After another night or two in Tbilisi, travel west to the spectacular valleys, villages and mountains of Svaneti, visiting Gori and Kutaisi on the way or way back.

If time allows, detour to spectacular, remote Tusheti (from Kakheti), or Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park and Vardzia in southwest Georgia, or the fun Black Sea resort of Batumi.

Three to Four Weeks  
**Georgia & Armenia**

For a three-week itinerary, start easy with three days in attractive Tbilisi, taking a day trip to Davit Gareja or Mtskheta. Head up to Kazbegi for a couple of days for a taste of the wonderful Caucasus, then return to Tbilisi and south into Armenia. Check out Haghpat and Sanahin monasteries in the Debed Canyon, then enjoy Yerevan’s food, cafes, museums and shops for about three days, with outings to Garni Temple and Geghard and Khor Virap monasteries. Explore southern Armenia for about four days, focusing on the Yeghegnadzor area (monasteries, lovely walks and wineries), slow-paced Goris and spectacular Tatev. Return to Yerevan and Tbilisi and head out to the stunningly beautiful Caucasus enclave of Svaneti, visiting Gori and Kutaisi on the way or way back. Spend your last couple of days enjoying the wines and sights of Kakheti from Telavi.

With an extra week, take your pick of side trips to Stepanakert in Nagorno-Karabakh (from Goris); northeast Armenia’s intriguing Dilijan and Ijevan areas; Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park and Vardzia cave city in southwest Georgia; the enjoyable Black Sea resort of Batumi; or spectacular, remote Tusheti (from Kakheti).
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

John Noble
Coordinating Author; Georgia
John, from the UK, first arrived in Georgia in 1990 when it was still officially part of the Soviet Union and he was writing Lonely Planet’s first (and last) guide to that now-defunct empire. Entering Georgia from Russia through the Dariali Gorge to Kazbegi was like taking a big breath of fresh air. John was thrilled by the Georgians’ love of freedom and the outstanding warmth of their hospitality, and every visit since then has deepened his own love for this utterly unique and stunningly beautiful country, which is now finally gaining the place in travellers’ consciousnesses that it deserves. John has written on many ex-Soviet states for Lonely Planet, but none quite like Georgia.

Michael Kohn
Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh
Michael first visited the Caucasus in 2006, having travelled there the hard way on a turbulent crossing of the Caspian Sea to Baku. After zigzagging through the region he returned a year later to cover Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh for the 3rd edition of this guide. Struck by the kindness of the Armenian people on his previous visit, Michael was thrilled to take a second tour of duty of Armenia and NK in 2011. He specialises in writing Lonely Planet guides to Silk Road regions from China to the Levant.

Danielle Systermans
Azerbaijan
Born in Belgium, Dani has spent the last 25 years travelling the globe, both modestly for pleasure and more luxuriously in the world of international finance. She first arrived in Baku back in 1995 with an improbable mission: to explain the ‘new idea’ of credit cards to an audience of sceptical ex-Soviets. Judging from all the ATMs in town these days she was quite successful. Friendships and an unquenchable traveller-curiousity keep bringing her back to the region in a series of visits that have been as stormy as any love-affair, and just as compulsive.

Contributing Author
William Dunbar: Tbilisi Drinking & Entertainment
William is a freelance journalist who has worked in Georgia since 2006. When not travelling the country covering political unrest or obscure mountain tribes, he likes to unwind in the less salubrious Tbilisi nightspots and then complain about the service.