



Georgia

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Why Go?

From its sublimely perched old churches and watchtowers dotting fantastic mountain scenery to its green valleys spread with vineyards, Georgia (Saqartvelo, საქართველო) is one of the most beautiful countries on earth and a marvellous canvas for walkers, horse riders, skiers, rafters and paragliders. Equally special are its proud, high-spirited, cultured people: Georgia claims to be the birthplace of wine, and this is a place where guests are considered blessings and hospitality is the very stuff of life.

A deeply complicated history has given Georgia a wonderful heritage of architecture and art, from cave cities to the inimitable canvases of Pirosmeni. Tbilisi, the capital, is still redolent of an age-old Eurasian crossroads. But this is also a country striving for a place in the 21st-century Western world, with eye-catching new buildings, a minimal crime rate and a heap of new facilities for the tourists who are a big part of its future.

When to Go

The ideal seasons are from mid-May to early July and from early September to mid-October, when it's generally warm and sunny. Most of July and August can be uncomfortably humid, and lowland temperatures can reach 40°C. However, this is an excellent time to be in the mountains, and it's the peak season on the Black Sea.

Early autumn brings the festive wine harvest in Kakheti, from about 20 September to 20 October. The eastern half of Georgia often suffers below-freezing temperatures between December and February.

Connections

Tbilisi has direct flights to/from numerous European cities, several in the Middle East and Kazakhstan, and even Ürümqi in China. Batumi has direct flights to/from Istanbul, Tel Aviv, Moscow and several Ukrainian cities. Both Tbilisi and Batumi have Baku flights, and Tbilisi has flights to/from Yerevan.

The busy Sarpi border crossing to/from Turkey is used by buses between Tbilisi and Istanbul as well as shorter-distance services. Some Georgia-Turkey transport also crosses the Vale-Posof border near Akhaltsikhe.

Marshrutky (public minivans), taxis and a train connect Tbilisi with Yerevan via the Sadakhlo border. There is also *marshrutka* service between Akhaltsikhe, Gyumri and Yerevan via the Zhdanovi-Bavra border.

An overnight train runs between Tbilisi and Baku, as do buses and *marshrutky* via the Tsiteli Khidi (Krasny Most, Red Bridge) border. The more attractive route to/from Azerbaijan, via Lagodekhi, Balakən and Zaqatala, is a matter of several *marshrutky* or taxi hops.

ITINERARIES

Three Days

Focus on Tbilisi, the fascinating capital, with an outing to Mtskheta and a day trip to the spectacular Davit Gareja cave monastery.

One Week

Starting with Tbilisi, you have time to visit the mountains and another region too. Opt for two or three nights in either Kazbegi or Svaneti (to fit Svaneti into this schedule you'll have to fly at least one-way). Have a couple of nights in the eastern wine-growing region of Kakheti (including a visit to Davit Gareja), or head to the cave city Vardzia via Borjomi and maybe have a day walking in Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park.

Two Weeks

You can fit in all the destinations of the one-week itinerary, plus Gori, Kutaisi and the Black Sea resort of Batumi.

Visas

Many nationalities need no visa for stays up to 360 days. Those who do need visas can obtain them on arrival at Tbilisi airport or road entry points into Georgia (50 GEL for 90-day single-entry visas), or beforehand from Georgian embassies or consulates. Visas on arrival are not available for those coming by train or sea. See p119 for further details.

RESOURCES

Georgia

(www.georgia.travel)

Agency of

Protected Areas

(www.apa.gov.ge)

National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation

(www.heritagesites.ge)

Georgia & South Caucasus

(georgien.blogspot.com)

Civil.ge (www.civil.ge)

Fast Facts

- » **Country code** ☎995
- » **Population** 4.47 million
- » **Currency** Lari (GEL)
- » **Language** Georgian
- » **Emergency** ☎113

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	1.77 GEL
Canada	C\$1	1.69 GEL
Euro zone	€1	2.36 GEL
Japan	¥100	2.16 GEL
NZ	NZ\$1	1.41 GEL
UK	UK£1	2.70 GEL
USA	US\$1	1.66 GEL

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget accommodation**
25 GEL per person
- » **Two-course meal** 12 GEL
- » **Museum** 3 GEL
- » **Beer** 1.50 GEL per bottle
- » **100km marshrutka ride**
10 GEL

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