



## Gems of Georgia

Classic Tour | 12 Days | Physical Level 1

Tbilisi – Kutaisi – Mestia - Akhaltsikhe - Vardzia - Tbilisi

Situated between Europe and Asia in the Caucasus region, discover the beautiful mountain scenery and fascinating historic fortresses of Georgia, plus dig into delicious local cuisine and explore the popular city of Tbilisi.

- A cable car to Narikala Fortress
- Explore Svetitskhoveli Cathedral
- Visit the mountain village Ushguli
- Stop at historic Gelati Monastery
- Discover Vardzia, the city of caves
- Learn the history of Rabati Castle



#### Gems of Georgia tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) and Local Guides
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

*The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.*

#### Classic Tours:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Central Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

#### Physical Level 1:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

Of course, our National Escort and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

### Country Profile: Georgia

Situated at the strategically important crossroads where Europe meets Asia, Georgia has a unique and ancient cultural heritage, and is known for its traditions of hospitality and cuisine. Over the centuries, Georgia was the object of rivalry between Persia, Turkey and Russia, before being eventually annexed by Russia in the 19th century. The country broke away from the Soviet Union and became an independent state in 1991.

### Joining Your Tour

The tour is 12 days in duration including international flights. Please note that depending on flight schedules passengers may arrive/depart on Day 2.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day two in Tbilisi and end the tour on Day 11 in Tbilisi. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

### Itinerary Changes

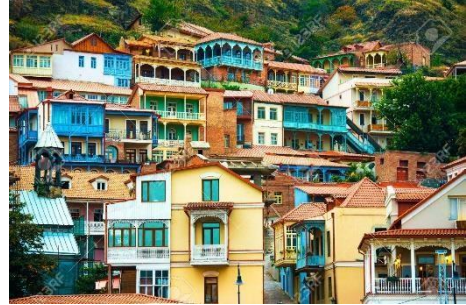
It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.



## Itinerary – Gems of Georgia

### Days 1-2: Fly to Georgia

Fly overnight via Dubai to Tbilisi. On arrival, transfer to your hotel where you have the rest of the day at leisure.



#### Destination Information

**Tbilisi** – Tbilisi's eternal charms of a dramatic setting in the deep valley of the swift Mtkvari River, picturesque architecture, an ever-lively arts and cultural scene, and the welcoming Georgian lifestyle have been added a whole new 21st-century dimension of inviting cafes and restaurants.

### Day 3: Tbilisi

After breakfast at the hotel you will drive to Kakheti, the region known as the birthplace of winemaking. Here you will visit Bodbe – a monastic complex. Continue to Signagi, also called “City of Love”, to visit the museum with archaeological, ethnographic, and photographic collections. Return to Tbilisi for your city tour that will include a cable car ride up to Narikala Fortress. Take a walk in the park near the Sulfur bathhouses, well-known for their healing powers. Cross the Bridge of Peace—a modern glass bridge in high-tech style before stopping at the Flea Market where you will find an assortment of antique and hand-made crafts.



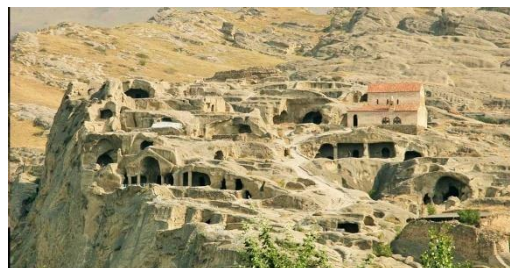
#### Destination Information

**Bodbe** – Bodbe monastery was built in 9<sup>th</sup> c. and was significantly renovated in 17<sup>th</sup> c. The monastery now functions as one of the major pilgrimage sites in Georgia. The female evangelist St. Nino's relics rest in Bodbe.

**Narikala fortress** dates back to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, it has a superb location with magnificent panoramic views over the Tbilisi city.

### Day 4: Tbilisi - Kutaisi

This morning you will drive to Mtskheta, the 3000-year-old ancient capital and religious centre of Georgia. Spend time visiting the historical sights of Jvari church and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, both of which are UNESCO World Heritage sites. You will visit the House Museum of Joseph Stalin in Gori, the town of his birth. Continue to Uplistsikhe cave town before arriving in Kutaisi.



### Destination Information

**Mtskheta & Svetitskhoveli Cathedral** – Mtskheta has been Georgia’s spiritual heart since Christianity was established here in about 327 and holds a near-mystical significance in Georgian culture. With an alluring setting where the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers meet, the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is still the setting for important ceremonies of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

**Uplistsikhe Cave Town** – This fascinating and once enormous cave city sits above the Mtkvari River, with expansive views along the Mtkvari valley. Between the 6th century BC and 1st century AD, Uplistsikhe developed into one of the chief political and religious centres with temples dedicated to the sun goddess.

**Kutaisi** – Capital of several historical kingdoms within Georgia, Kutaisi is today being revitalised after years of post-Soviet decline. Georgia’s parliament was transferred from Tbilisi to brand-new quarters here in 2012. One of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities, served as a main cultural and educational centre of the region.

### Day 5: Kutaisi – Mestia

Explore Sataplia caves, best known for dinosaur footprints alongside the cave. The tour enters the through-cave on one hillside, crosses underground before surfacing near the footprints. In the center of the cave you’ll see a heart-shaped stalagmite. Continue to Mestia, the administrative center of Svaneti. It is a long journey with regular stops along the way. In Zugdidi you will visit the Dadiani Palace History and Architectural Museum. After Samegrelo, the drive continues up to the Caucasus Mountains, arriving in Mestia in the evening.



### Destination Information

**Svaneti** – Svaneti is the highest inhabited area in the Caucasus and is divided in two parts: Upper Svaneti and Lower Svaneti. Mestia, in Upper Svaneti is surrounded by mountains, medieval-type villages and distinctive tower-houses. The area is home to the Svans, a proud people with a long history of survival in this isolated part of Europe, who speak their own language.

### Day 6: Mestia – Ushguli - Mestia

Today starts with a visit to Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography, which houses old Georgian manuscripts, ethnographic and archaeological items. Explore Upper Svaneti, driving by 4 x 4 WD vehicles to Ushguli village – the highest continually inhabited village in Europe. The route is off-road but picturesque. You will further visit the ancient villages of Mulakhi, Ipari and Kala to see the churches rich of murals and frescos. Return to Mestia.



### Destination Information

**Ushguli** – The village is located at 2200m and is the highest continuously inhabited village in Europe. The village is most famous for its abundance of watchtowers and this is where you get the view of the highest mountain in Georgia - the 5,068 metre high Mt. Shkhara.

### Day 7: Mestia - Kutaisi

Breakfast at the hotel is followed by driving to Kutaisi where you will visit two major historic-cultural sites - Gelati Academy/Monastery and Bagrati Cathedral. In the evening you will visit Gora Park, located on the top of the hill.



### Destination Information

**Gelati Monastery** – A medieval monastic complex was also a centre of science and education and the academy it housed was one of the most important culture centres in Georgia. It consists of 3 churches, a free-standing belltower and the academy building.

### Day 8: Kutaisi – Akhaltsikhe

Drive to Borjomi Spa resort, famous for its mineral water 'Borjomi'. Visit the small park and taste the fresh mineral water. Continue to Akhaltsikhe where you will overnight.



### Destination Information

**Borjomi Spa resort** – Borjomi is a resort town in the picturesque Borjomi Gorge. The town is most famous for its mineral water industry, which is one of the main exports of Georgia. Borjomi is also home to the most extensive ecologically themed amusement park in the Caucasus.

**Akhaltsikhe** – Akhaltsikhe means 'New Castle' in Georgian and is dominated by the Rabati castle that overlooks the Potskhovi River. The castle and the old town were lavishly restored a few years ago, helping to turn the town into a very attractive stop en route to Armenia.

### Day 9: Akhaltsikhe – Vardzia

Today you will visit Rabati Castle, with the complex consisting of churches, mosques, museum and synagogue. Rabat Fortress (Old Town) with its rare examples of darbazebi (traditional Georgian houses), castle, mosque and synagogue. Travel over treacherous terrain to reach Chachkari village before continuing to Vardzia.



#### Destination Information

**Vardzia** – Vardzia stretches over half a kilometre along the river Mtkvari and has 19 tiers and used to house around 3000 caves. The complex also includes dwellings quarters, small hall-type churches, refectories, wine cellars and a pharmacy. Finally, there is a church hewn out of rock with amazing 12th century frescoes.

### Day 10: Vardzia – Tbilisi

This morning you will visit Vardzia, a magnificent cave town from the 12th century and one of the highlights of the trip. Vardzia is a medieval rock-hewn cave monastery complex, carved into the volcanic rocks on 13 levels, with numerous internal corridors, secret tunnels and chapels. Continue on your way to Tsalka, stopping near lake Paravani to visit the female monastery Foka.



Here you can buy different kinds of cheese and chocolate made by nuns. Return to Tbilisi with a stop at Dashbashi canyon, known as one of the most impressive natural monuments of Georgia.

### Days 11 – 12: Depart Tbilisi

You will be transferred from the hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight. Any time before your flight is at leisure. Fly to New Zealand, arriving home the following day.

**Please note: Late check-out** is not included in our Gems of Georgia tour. If you wish to book a late check-out for your final day in Tbilisi, please contact our reservations department who can confirm the additional price and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.

**Transfers:** In the event that your flight departs outside of the majority group departure time, you will be transferred to the airport by a shared coach (not with other Wendy Wu Tours passengers).

Please inform our reservations team of any allergies and/or special dietary requirements at time of booking.



## Gems of Georgia Travel Information

### Visas

Entry visas are currently not required for New Zealand Passport Holders. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into New Zealand.

### Insurance

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

### Eating in Georgia

The South Caucasus is a land of breath-taking views, ancient culture, temperamental people and colourful national cuisines. The countries of this region have much in common: their histories and fates intertwined throughout the centuries. Still, each country and cuisine is unique in its own right.

Caucasians are noted for a creative and masterful cuisine that cooks evolved over the years by using fragrant herbs and spices and tart flavours such as lemons and sour plums. With healthy yet delectable ingredients like pomegranates, saffron, rose water, honey, olive oil, yogurt, onions, garlic, fresh and dried fruits, and a variety of nuts.

Your itinerary has been carefully crafted to introduce you to a range of local dishes and we hope that you enjoy the culinary adventure ahead. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive group tours from dinner on the day of your groups' arrival until breakfast on your day of departure.

Those with dietary requirements will be well catered for - just make sure to inform your booking agent of any specific requirements well in advance of your trip.

All the restaurants we visit will be researched and inspected regularly to ensure that they follow the strictest health, cleanliness, and safety guidelines. All waiting staff will wear face masks and gloves and self-service buffets will be avoided in favour of à la carte dining, waiter-served meals, or waiter-assisted buffets. Hand sanitiser will be provided to the group before and after every food and beverage service.

### Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the New Zealand and Georgia. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room.



If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs. Please note that double bed requests can be made at time of booking but can't be guaranteed.

### Porterage

Please be aware that porterage is not included on our tours in Georgia. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

### Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Roads in Georgia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road – not just 1-2 miles as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only. There may be sections of road where the surface is comparatively bumpy, but our drivers will do their utmost to lessen the impact.

### Development in Georgia

The South Caucasus region sits right in the heart of the emerging Eurasian supercontinent — a massive market that makes up 70% of the population, 80% of energy resources and 45% of the GDP in the world. China is to the east, Turkey and Europe are to the west, Russia is to the north, and Iran, the Middle East, and India are to the south. The new BTK Railway through this region was the missing trade link of the much-heralded middle corridor of the New Silk Road, which is a multimodal trade route that goes from China to Europe via Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

Though parts of Georgia match the west in modernity and technological advances, it is important to remember that these countries are still developing and as such, many aspects of tourism in these countries do not have the solid infrastructure and safety standards as seen here in the west.

### Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so in each city, we will visit a workshop or factory which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

### Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by both a National Escort and local guides. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

## Tipping Policy

Local tipping is not customary in Georgia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is in US Dollars and will be collected by your National Escort on arrival and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy, but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

## Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable.

## Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling to cities outside of the main cities in Georgia. US Dollars and Euros are easily exchanged throughout Georgia but other currencies such as New Zealand Dollars normally cannot be exchanged in hotels, exchange bureaus and airports. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

## Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of NZ\$250 per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional Tours – Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

## Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside. People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

## Appropriate Dress

When visiting churches or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout Central Asia require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory, so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

## Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your Doctor or Health Centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Holiday Health has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful at [www.holidayhealth.co.nz](http://www.holidayhealth.co.nz)

## Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz) as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

## After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

**Last updated November 2020**