



Christian Caucasus: tour to Georgia and Armenia

Two countries and two peoples - so similar and so different! Georgians and Armenians are descended from the same root - the great-grandson of Noah, the biblical prophet Togarmah. From ancient times they lived on the border between Europe and Asia, surrounded by the Islamic world from all sides, but they have managed to keep their faith and unique identities. Centuries-old friendship and friendly rivalry, mutual jokes and anecdotes, richness of culture, numerous monuments and original cuisine... Take a closer look at these two ancient peoples and visit Georgia and Armenia - it is your history. Let's start it right now! In the end, enriched with new knowledge, you have to answer the most important question and to do this without any help: who is better - Georgians or Armenians? Be careful... and remember that this is just a joke!

Day 1. Arrival in Georgia

Day 2. Tour in Georgia: Tbilisi - Mtskheta - Tbilisi

Day 3. Tour in Georgia: Tbilisi - Gori - Kutaisi

Day 4. Tour in Georgia and Armenia: Kutaisi - Borjomi - Vardzia - Alaverdi

Day 5. Tour in Armenia: Alaverdi - Garni fortress - Yerevan

Day 6. Tour in Armenia: Yerevan - Echmiadzin - Sevan

Day 7. Tour in Georgia and Armenia: Sevan - Dmanisi - Bolnisi - David Gareja - Telavi

Day 8. Tour in Georgia: Telavi - Gremi - Signagi - Tbilisi

Day 9. Farewell to Georgia

Duration: 9 days / 8 nights

Length: 2500 kilometers

Overnight stay:

Tbilisi – 3 nights

Kutaisi – 1 night

Alaverdi – 1 night

Yerevan – 1 night

Sevan – 1 night

Telavi – 1 night

From the ship straight to the ball! This is definitely about the first day of your trip! Upon arrival at Tbilisi airport - shuttle service and accommodation, then - a gala dinner at the restaurant with Tamada. You will have an opportunity to appreciate spirit of Georgian hospitality right from the start: let yourself enjoy tasting of national dishes - barbeque on skewers "mtsvadi", cheese pies i.e. khachapuri, Georgian wine, accompanied by live music.

Day 2. Tour in Georgia: Tbilisi - Mtskheta - Tbilisi

"I have never seen anything more luxurious than Tiflis baths neither in Russia nor in Turkey" - this was wrote by great Pushkin about Abanotubani. Correctness of the Russian poet's words can be tested during a walk through Old Tbilisi. The most beautiful among those baths is Orbeliani Bath with turrets and blue tiles. And what about the view from the Narikala fortress? Capital of Georgia - all before your eyes!



Metekhi Church of Our Lady stands on the cliff along with a monument of the city's founder, King Vakhtang Gorgasali at its side. Narrow streets lead into the old quarter of the city - Avlabari. There, on the hill of St. Elijah, stands huge Sameba Cathedral in which the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia conducts Sunday services. In the yard of the cathedral there is a pond with swans and a cafe with the legendary Georgian soft drinks brand "Lagidze Waters". Sioni Cathedral, previously Tbilisi's main church, strucks a traveler with its magnificent decoration. While Anchiskhati Church which houses a miraculous icon is the oldest basilica in the city.

Georgia National Museum, a brief drive, and here it is - Mtskheta! From the height of the Jvari monastery opens up a great view of the ancient capital of Georgia and the surrounding mountains. Ancient streets lead to the spiritual center of Georgians - Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. At the monastery of Samtavro you may see tombs of the first Christian monarchs of Georgia and pray at the tomb of St. Gabriel - as they say, wishes come true then!

Day 3. Tour in Georgia: Tbilisi - Gori - Kutaisi

So, it is time to head to the West! A trip around Georgia cannot happen without visiting Uplistsikhe. The oldest city in Georgia is mesmerizing - it is completely carved in the rock, as if created by nature itself ... this pagan cult cente of Georgia witnessed the earliest centuries of Georgian statehood, became a battleground between the old beliefs and budding Christianity, watched armies of foreign invaders and was a hotbed of internal fighting between Georgian feudals. Remnants of sacrificial altars, wells for burning rituals, ancient pharmacy building and reception hall of Queen Tamar... you will feel the breath of history itself!

Nearby there is the town of Gori - Stalin's birthplace. At the house - museum of the famous Soviet dictator are kept his personal belongings, his birth certificate and the death mask of Joseph Jugashvili. In the yard you can see a train carriage which drove Stalin for his meetings with Churchill and Roosevelt during the Second World War. The center of the city is overlooked by the Gori Fortress - one of the largest fortifications in Georgia.



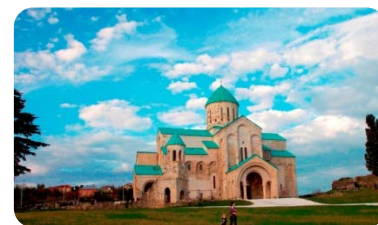
Having crossed the Rikoti pass we find ourselves in western Georgia! Sunny Colchis from the myth of the Argonauts welcomes with mild climate, where one can feel the breath of the sea. The main city of the region, the country's second city - Kutaisi it's flaunts its chaos with its picturesque old quarters, beautiful white bridge and a bronze statues of "Picasso's boy". One dominating feature of the city is big white Bagrati church under green domes which have arisen in all its glory following the reconstruction. This cathedral is a monument to the unification of Georgia into a single state in the X century. Before retiring to your beds you will see amazing frescoes and mosaics in Gelati Monastery and Gelati Academy - a medieval center of theological and secular sciences, the fame of which reached even distant lands!

Day 4. Tour in Georgia and Armenia: Kutaisi - Borjomi - Vardzia - Alaverdi

Any ailment can be cured by Borjomi mineral springs! Only here one can breathe freely: lungs can barely contain clean, fresh air, which is continuously enriched by deciduous- coniferous forests of the national park-reserve. You will never forget the peculiar taste of the healing mineral water "Borjomi", which can be drunk straight from the warm source of the depth of 10 kilometers.

This gift of mountain depths may be taken with you on the road to an impressive monument of the Golden Age of Georgia. The cave city of Vardzia - a symbol of greatness of Georgia in the XII century, a witness of tragedies of later ages - towers above the river in the Mtkvari valley. This panorama can be photographed endlessly... 13-storey fortress-city is fully carved in the rock, and its name is associated with the childhood of the great Queen Tamar. When church doors open you'll be delighted with ancient frescoes, and find yourself impressed with their history.

Not far from here there is the Armenian border. After leaving Georgia, we will go into the city of Alaverdi to spend the night. This is the center of copper production, which will become a transit point for us on the way to the Armenian capital.



Day 5. Tour in Armenia: Alaverdi - Garni fortress – Yerevan

Upon arrival in Yerevan you should definitely stop in one of the largest archives of ancient manuscripts. Scientists from all over the world come to the Matenadaran to study the history, culture and life in the Middle East. Old books in silver and leather bindings, dust of ages and mysterious silence of one of the world's largest depositories...

And here is the fortress Garni - a temple of pagan god of the sun - Mithra. The building that dates back to the I century BC resembles Athenian temples. And then you will see a place where once there were kept one of the greatest Christian relics - a spear that pierced Jesus Christ. This monastery in a rock called Geghard that means "spear". We will also visit the Gharghavank monastery to learn more about the Armenian medieval architecture. In the evening a walk and some shopping in Yerevan are planned.

The spear that a Roman soldier pierced Christ with, is now stored in the residence of Armenian Patriarchs - in Echmiadzin Monastery Complex. The Church capital of Armenia - the city of Vagarsharap was founded by King Vagash. There are three parts of the Holy Cross on which Jesus was crucified. St. Gayane Church is also situated within Echmiadzin. It is believed that every Armenian once in a life must come here since the Lord himself pointed to the place of the construction for refusing pagan King of Trdat. Rarity - the dome of the church is in the form of a cross.

Eventful day. Today you will also see " Angels' Abode". This is a church of the VII century, echo of the Byzantine culture. According to a legend, it was found by a shepherd looking for a shelter from the heavy rain. And here, there is Ararat before us - the same mountain to which Noah brought his ark after the Flood. If you have heard about the beauty of these places, then it certainly was about monastery of Khor Virap, situated near the Turkish border - where Mount Ararat is buried in the clouds. The next comes another legend. Part of the Holy Cross with the blood of Jesus Christ, found by a mysterious stranger, is now kept in the XIII century monastery complex of Noravank. And, finally, "Armenian sea" - beautiful lake of Sevan! Here we stop for the night!

Day 7. Tour in Georgia and Armenia: Sevan - Dmanisi - Bolnisi - David Gareja - Telavi

Goodbye, Armenia - hello, Georgia, again! Across the border, we are going to a place of sensational excavations and amazing discoveries. Dmanisi - the town near which the remains first Europeans - Zezva and Mzia and their relatives were found. Bones of ancient people from Georgia recently forced scientists to reconsider the established theory of the origin of mankind! Details can be discovered at the museum in the Dmanisi archaeological zone.

Then it is the turn of Bolnisi. Sioni Church, walls of which are decorated with crosses that are very similar to those of Malta. It is here that the most ancient monuments of the Georgian alphabet "Asomtavruli" are preserved. Bolnisi Sioni was built in 478-493 years, immediately after gaining autocephaly by the Georgian Church. You will find that in those days architects did not seek to adorn facades with artistic features. The emphasis was on the interior. Therefore, outside the church is decorated with only lining of green tuff. Inside the temple produces monumental impression of strength and greatness, with simple forms and harmonious proportions.

Going to the east, to the semi desert Udabno near the border with Azerbaijan. David Gareja cave monastery - a huge complex, spread out along the mountain ridge. You will see the Lavra that was founded in the VI century by hermit David and cells that were carved into the rock by his followers. Dead silence and pristine beauty of these places can easily bewitch with the force of surging impressions... These landscapes are indeed a real winner for your camera!

And here we are again among the wooded mountains that are gradually replaced by broad fields of vineyards. The Alazani Valley - the most fertile region and the heart of Georgia's wine kingdom - Kakheti, welcome you. The region's capital - the city of Telavi - will be delighted to provide us a comfortable bed.



Day 8. Tour in Georgia: Telavi - Gremi - Signagi - Tbilisi

Shviamta Monastery - lost in a dense forest was an abode of Kakhetian Queen Tina. She saw the construction of these churches in a dream, and after becoming a widower - became a nun here. It is indeed an extremely beautiful place! And would you want to see a place where Shota Rustaveli studied? The poet who wrote "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" was educated by Ikalto monastery. Here, in the XII century functioned another major academy and the monastery still preserves a winepress, where even the author of the masterpiece of the world literature once worked.

Speaking of grapes... A well-known wine from the cellar of the Alaverdi monastery has special taste. From century to century monks tried to make wine as brilliant and noble as Alaverdi Cathedral. The magnificent temple of the XI century is clearly visible on the background of the Caucasus Mountains, surrounded by lush vineyards. One can stay forever admiring it, but ... a new experience waits for us ahead!

A beautiful park, well maintained home – it is immediately evident that aristocrats lived here! Nino Chavchavadze - a wife of Russian classic Alexandr Griboyedov - ran through green shrubs in Tsinandali as a child. And today, listening carefully, you may hear the laughter of children in gardens of Kakhetian prince-poet Alexandr Chavchavadze. House-museum preserves the memory of the outstanding officer and public figure of the XIX century. Meanwhile the cool air of an old wine cellar brings thoughts of a glass of golden wine...

Indeed, the famous "Tsinandali" serves as a perfect addition to a picnic with barbeque, after which, full and satisfied, we go to Tbilisi. But we are not taking the shortest route but passing through "little Italy" - a charming "City of Love" - Signagi that has made a nest on the hill above the Alazani Valley and which offers you an amazing view from the old city walls.



Day 9. Farewell to Georgia

The last tour day in the capital of Georgia. Adjacent to the central Rustaveli Avenue streets will provide good shopping opportunities. Do not forget to stock up on souvenirs and visit healing sulfur baths. Back in the X century, geographer and traveler Ibn Haukal wrote about them: "water is hot here and all without fire". Now you will be the one telling about it!