The country is roughly the size of Switzerland, but we’ve packed a lot in here.

If you talk about mountains, we’ve got plenty.

And ours are higher than the Alps.

In fact, our peaks are the loftiest in Europe.

We have some breathtaking paths that are rarely trodden.

If you want to taste more than just scenery, try our wines.

We have more grape varieties than anywhere on the planet.

It comes with an equally varied and sophisticated wine culture.

Then there’s Georgian architecture from our richly-frescoed churches to our stone watch-towers, carved wooden balconies and Art Nouveau buildings.

Combine all this with a Mediterranean climate.

And bring it alive with our legendary sense of hospitality.

You have something special here in the heart of the Caucasus region.

You have Georgia.

Come and explore it for yourself!
Mtškheti, ancient capital of Eastern Georgia (UNESCO Heritage Site)
If you have visited Georgia at least once, or met Georgians in a foreign country, you will certainly know the importance they attach to the past of their country and to the history of the Georgian state.

The pre-Christian Kingdom of Colchis that existed on the territory of Western Georgia was the first Georgian state mentioned in Greek historiography and myths as a fabulous and mysterious country to which the Argonauts sailed to carry away the Golden Fleece and where Prometheus, punished by gods, was chained on an inaccessible mountain in the Caucasus.

It was in Colchis that the first Georgian money was minted – the Colchian tetri. Millennia later, when in the 1990s, Georgia won her cherished independence and issued her own money, the Georgian coin was called tetri in honour of that first coinage.

In Mtskheta, ancient capital of Eastern Georgia, when the Mtkvari is shallow, ruins of a bridge are seen in the river which, according to legend, was built in the first century BC by the Roman commander Pompey during his campaign in Georgia. Both ancient Greek and Roman traces are clearly seen in the archaeological material.
brought to light in Georgia. The most valuable part of this material is in the depository of the State Museum of Georgia, the most superb item in the holdings of the museum being a statue of a lion discovered in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia, and dated to the third millennium BC. It is the first massive gold statue found by Georgian archaeologists.

But there is yet another ancient archaeological find that has caused a real sensation, placing Georgia at the centre of attention of world scholars. The bones of Hominids unearthed at Dmanisi turned out to be the oldest in the entire Europe. The remains of the prehistoric humans, with assigned age of one million eight hundred thousand years, have entirely changed the hitherto existing theories of migration of man from Africa to Eurasia. Our slogan “Europe started here” has been inspired by this discovery.

Dmanisi—the site where the oldest Hominids in Europe were unearthed.

Mutso, Khevsureti - the most beautiful landscapes, towers and ritual structures.
The spread of Christianity and the Middle Ages

Georgian is the state language of Georgia. It is one of the oldest living languages, with its own distinctive script and one of the only 14 alphabets currently used across the globe. The first surviving written source dates from the fifth century, being a religious text, which is by no means fortuitous.

The Georgians officially adopted Christianity in 337, when the missionary St. Nino, arriving from Cappadocia, converted first the Georgian Queen and the King to Christianity. Since then, the country’s history and Christianity have been closely interlinked. In Georgia you cannot find a village in which at least one Christian monument is not to be found. Especially popular is the cult of St. George. The name under which the world today knows Georgia derives precisely from the favourite saint of the Georgians. However, the self-designation of the Georgians is Kartvelebi, while the country is called Sakartvelo.

You can find early Christian monuments in Tbilisi too, for example the sixth-century Anchiskhati church in old Tbilisi, or the Jvari monastery on a hill above Mtskheta, commanding the view where earlier the principal pagan idols stood.

In the sixth century twelve Syrian missionaries arrived in Georgia. Dispersing to different parts of the country, they built their own monasteries. Of these the most important is the David Gareja monastic complex built by David in the south-east of the country. Monastic and enlightenment life in this complex continued throughout the Middle Ages. The just cited Gareja monastic complex represents churches and rock-cut caves, harmoniously placed in the gloomy landscape of a semi-desert and adorned with unique frescoes. The Svetitskhoveli cathedral church in Mtskheta is an important monument, being at the same time a resting-place of Georgian kings.
The Gelati church, built by King David the Builder near Kutaisi, Western Georgia at the heyday or renaissance of Georgia was the principal enlightenment centre of Georgia at the time.

Almost of the same period is Vardzia in South Georgia, a cave-city cut in vertical volcanic rock. One of its cave-churches features the fresco of the twelve-century Queen Tamar during whose reign the country reached its zenith of power, extending from the Black Sea to the Caspian. Enjoying great love, she is called king in place of queen in Georgian. One can scarcely come across a village in Georgia that is not linked to Tamar through legend. The grave of this great monarch is lost. Old men in many villages will tell you a legend of Tamar’s grave being in their church or village.

In the thirteenth century, first the Mongol sway and later the devastating inroads of Timur-Lenk, the most relentless conqueror, weakened Georgia so much that the country disintegrated into several small states. In the late Middle Ages Georgia turned into an arena of incessant struggle between the great empires of the time: Ottoman Turkey and Persia. Christian monuments of this period are much simpler in form; however, the Late Middle Ages too have bequeathed few significant monuments, some necessarily listed in routes of cultural tourism, e.g. the sixteenth-century church and fortress of Ananuri and the Gergeti Monastery of the Trinity at the foot of Mount Qazbegi.

From the eighteenth century a third strong player appeared in the Caucasus: Russia, in the north. Gradually gaining the upper hand over Turkey and Iran, from the early nineteenth century Russia methodologically conquered the weakened small Georgian states, and became the dominant power in the Caucasus in the mid-nineteenth century.

1. Gareja Caved Monastery (VI c.) – monastic complex including churches and rock-cut caves adorned with unique frescoes.

St. George – favorite saint of the Georgians.
Towers and village strongholds form an inalienable part of the landscape of high-mountain Georgia. Their majority were built in the Late Middle Ages, some being older. The villages of the mountaineers built on the Caucasian ridges were always inaccessible and hard to conquer by the enemy. Even Georgian monarchs occasionally found shelter with the free mountaineers exempt from feudal obligations.

For centuries Georgia’s treasure was kept in Svaneti - the mountain region of Western Georgia, encircled with the most beautiful peaks. Much of that treasure is there today too _ in Svan churches, adorned with amazing frescoes, and in village museums. Protection of this treasure is today too the sacred duty of each Svan as it was in that remote past when kings and feudal lords kept these church treasures out of the way of enemy inroads by sending them to inaccessible Svaneti.

The character of the Svans and Georgia’s mountaineers took shape in severe natural conditions and incessant conflicts with North-Caucasian tribes. Each Svan family possessed its own ancestral tower abutting on their dwelling house. Villages built in this way were almost inaccessible to the enemy. In the nineteenth century, one such village - Khalde - held out to the onslaught of Russian troops armed with guns, inflicting much damage to the invaders.

There are numerous villages along the Caucasus Range that lie at 2000 m above sea level. While v. Ushguli at the foot of Georgia’s highest peak Shkhara (5068 m) is the most elevated settlement in Europe.

For centuries history in the lowland followed its own course, while the traditional life of the mountaineers changed little. That is why the Georgian mountain region attracts many ethnographers to the present day. If you are interested in ancient religious rituals and folk festivals that originated in the pre-Christian period, you must by all means visit Khevsureti. In this mountain region everyday life, history and myth are intertwined forever. Myth has an absolutely concrete geography at that. The huge boulders at the top of v. Roshki were broken as a result of the fight of giants and gods; nearby is a lake in which the local god slew the last giant, while in the neighboring valley lived the magician Mindia who tasted the flesh of a serpent while he was in captivity with the evil spirits; after
this he learned the language of all animals and plants, becoming an unvanquished leader of his people. The land of Khevsureti is steeped in these myths. Add to this the most beautiful landscapes, towers and ritual structures, two inaccessible village-strongholds: Shatili and Mutso, hospitable people of self-sufficient culture and you may form a definite idea of Khevsureti. However, a journey to the place is better than relying on hearsay.

Throughout history the Georgian mountains helped the plain. This was the case in the seventeenth century too, when an army of the mountaineers of the eastern Caucasus descended into the plain and rid Kakheti of the Persians. The coalition troops of those mountaineers were commanded by the chief of one of the tribes—the Tushes. As a token of gratitude, the king of Kakheti presented the Tushes and their chief with the fertile Alazani plain. According to legend, the Tushes were promised to be given land reached by the galloping horse of their chief. The horse galloped across the entire Alazani plain and fell dead, at the place where today its statue stands. Every Tushi feels it his duty to dismount at this place and pay his respects to the memory of the legendary horse. From that day on, the Tushes turned semi-nomadic, spending the winter in Alvani plain in Kakheti, and in summer leaving for the picturesque Tusheti— their historical home on the northern slope of the Caucasus Range, taking with them their families, cattle and sheep. Here their summer festivals are held, moving from village to village and singing beautiful Tushi songs accompanied with the sound of accordion. Everywhere home-brewed beer is drunk and traditional horse races are held.

Today the pine forests of Tusheti, the deep canyons, peaks and towered villages are declared a national park; tourist infrastructure is developed fairly well. The Tush summer is one of the best seasons in Georgia and the entire Caucasus.
If you visit Tbilisi, someone - be it a tourist guide, salesperson or taxi driver - will by all means tell you the story of the foundation of the city. Tbilisians are especially fond of this legend. It is a story of an event that happened some fifteen hundred years ago, during hunting: the fifth-century King Vakhtang Gorgasali’s favourite falcon and the pheasant caught by it fell into water out of which the King’s attendants took both the prey and the predator cooked. The king liked the natural hot waters and ordered the building of a town here. This is how the capital moved from Mtskheta to Tbilisi, some 25 km eastward, while the hot sulphur baths, built in the oriental style, have become one of the colourful sites of the city. In the Middle Ages these baths were ascribed many medicinal properties. That is why many conquerors came here allured by these baths. Thus, apart from comfort, the natural hot sulphur waters created many problems as well.

But the baths were not the only trouble. The multicultural city lying at the crossroads of caravan routes was a sort of key to Georgia, and often to the entire Transcaucasia. This city withstood numerous invasions and occupation by the Byzantines and the Khazars, Turks and Persians. The Arabs came to Tbilisi in the seventh century and stayed here for five centuries, until expelled in the twelfth century by King David the Builder - the uniter of Georgia. Tbilisi was located on the crossroads of Europe and Asia Tbilisi has been the capital of Georgia for fifteen hundred years.
last burnt down by the Persians in 1795. Following the conquest of Transcaucasia in the nineteenth century, the Russians turned it into the centre of the region, installing their viceroy in this city-in the building that today houses the Palace of Culture of the Youth.

The impressions received from this city have been reflected in the diaries of many a traveller, while many writers have dedicated lines of admiration to it. The Russian Alexander Pushkin, the Frenchman Alexandre Dumas and the Norwegian Knut Hamsun travelled in Georgia at various times, each depicting this colourful city in his own way. Each must have found what he looked for but none stinted words of enthusiasm.

Tbilisi with its million and a half residents is continuing to grow. Numerous modern apartment houses and hypermarkets are under construction. The city is changing but its main charm-cultural diversity-remains the same. The real soul of this city is hidden in the small balconyed courtyards of old Tbilisi, where Georgians, Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Azerbaijanis, Greeks and representatives of many other nationalities have for centuries lived as a single family, sharing one another’s problems or joys. In such old quarters one can find Georgian and Armenian orthodox churches, a synagogue, mosque and even a trace of an ancient Zoroastrian shrine.

The best thing that can happen to you in Tbilisi’s old town is to get lost. It allows you to wander through the winding streets and discover small tea houses, modern cafes, traditional bakeries turning out their freshly baked loaves, then there are carpet shops and bath houses. This is today’s Tbilisi—a city built at the crossroads of cultures, in the constant expectation of guests to share its little joys and secrets with them.

1. Tbilisi hot sulphur baths built in 17th-19th century in the oriental style is one of the colourful sites of the city.
2. Sharden Street, Old Town Street in Tbilisi.
3. Baratashvili Bridge the 11th Crossing Bridge on Mtkvari River, Tbilisi.
While travelling in Georgia one is amazed at the quick alteration of various types of landscapes and climatic zones. Indeed, it is hard to find another small country on the world map with so many different type landscapes represented, each important and unique with its flora and fauna. In the country which you cross by car from edge to edge in a single day the Black Sea area with its subtropical thick jungle alternates with the marshes and wet-lands of Western Georgia, mountain steppes and lakes on Javakheti upland in South Georgia, semi-deserts and light forests in the south-western part of the country, mountain forests, sub-alpine and alpine meadows, and finally, the beauty of Georgia’s snowy peaks of the Caucasus Range.

The not too high Likhi Ridge that divides Western and Eastern Georgia prevents the clouds coming from the Black Sea from moving eastward. Hence Western Georgia is much more humid and wet. There is Mt. Mtirala in the Adjara highland region that is the wettest place in the region, its annual rainfall reaching 4000 mm. By way of comparison we may cite the semi-desert in the extreme east where the annual precipitation seldom reaches 100 mm.

And all these differing landscapes have their own inimitable flora and fauna. In a semi-desert, lifeless at first sight, such rare birds and animals occur as black francolin, chukar, imperial eagle, black vulture, Indian porcupine, jackal and fox. Wolves are numerous here, while the Vashlovani reserve is inhabited by the Near Eastern Leopard, so far the only species in Georgia. The popularity of the semi-desert in the extreme east where the annual precipitation seldom reaches 100 mm.

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of this beast, discovered in 2004, is so great that it has been named Noe. It is the visiting card of the Vashlovani National Park and the subject of special protection.

Forty per cent of Georgian territory is still covered with forests, mainly deciduous. Coniferous and mixed forests also occur. The deserts abound in roe-deer, bear, red-deer, wolf and lynx. There are many small and large beasts and rare birds.

The Kolkheti marshes lie on the principal route of bird migration. There are two such ways in the Caucasus, one following the coast of the Black Sea, and the other that of the Caspian. In spring and autumn you may watch the migration of millions of birds in the vicinity of Poti or Batumi. A fairly large part of these birds winter in Kolkheti.

The Kolkheti lowland, which has already for several years been declared a national park, is a winter home for migratory birds and a real paradise for bird watchers.

Javakheti, a region of South Georgia, is a severe volcanic upland of inimitable beauty, lying at about 2000 m above sea level. All aquatic birds characteristic of the region are to be found on lakes scattered over the area. This is the only place were large colonies of pelicans nest. Lake Paravani belongs to Javakheti lakes. It is the largest freshwater pond of Georgia.

Such a unique animal as the Caucasian goat inhabits the inaccessible rocks of the Caucasus Range, being endemic to the Caucasus. This wild goat spends most part of the year at places higher than 3000 m above sea level. It is an
Keli Lake – the most beautiful lake located on a volcanic plateau.
inseparable character of folk myths and legends. In the past, hunting the goat was considered a deed of courage and manly dignity for Georgian mountaineers.

The Caucasian snowcock, an endemic bird, lives in the neighbourhood of the Caucasian goat, and a bit lower, at the boundary of sub-alpine and alpine belts, is also the endemic Caucasian black grouse.

Along the entire Caucasus Range and in the Lesser Caucasus mountains we find the chamois, and in the east of the Caucasus Range there is a small population of the bezoar ibex. Seeing the golden eagle, lammergeyer and griffon-vulture _ the large predator birds of the Caucasus Range _ adds beauty to these unforgettable landscapes.

Georgian flora is characterized by a high level of endemism. Quite distinct in this respect is the Lagodekhi protected territory in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia. The area is spread out on the slopes of the Caucasus Range, the difference of altitude reaching 2600 m, ranging from riverside forests in the plain to huge virgin forests in the mountains in the middle and the seemingly lifeless rocks of the Greater Caucasus. In this botanical paradise 121 species are Caucasian, and 9 Georgian endemics.

Such diversity calls for appropriate protection. In Georgia there are already 40 protected territories, while ecology is increasingly acquiring higher priority.
Georgians believe that Georgia is the home of wine. Furthermore, according to a theory, the word wine derives from the Georgian word ghvino. Archaeological excavations prove that wine was made, and of course drunk, in Georgia seven thousand years ago.

Wine is revered here and is made in almost all households—not only in the countryside, but many a resident of Tbilisi, even a busy man, finds time to buy grapes and make his own wine to treat his guests. In Georgia a guest, especially an unexpected one, is considered God’s gift. If a Georgian has good wine at home, he feels secure. As they say in Georgia, “he is not afraid of a guest”, for preparing a dinner takes only hours, while making wine needs time and knowledge. Every host takes pride in the good wine of his own making.

The best grapes for making wine come from Eastern Georgia. Well-tended vast vineyards are an inalienable part of the local landscape. The Kakhetian—made wines Saperavi, Tsinandali and Mukuzani have in recent years become well known abroad too, and they are on offer at supermarkets of Europe and the USA.

Although Kakheti is the land of wine, unique varieties occur in Western Georgia as well, for example, the black grape Khvanchkara from the Racha region. It is grown in a very limited area, is distinguished for superb qualities and wine made from it is very expensive.

Peasants keep their home-made wine in wine jars (qvvevis). These are huge clay vessels (occasionally a wine jar’s capacity is up to one ton), buried in the ground. It has a narrow, almost hermetically sealed neck above the ground. In Eastern Georgia wine jars are buried in the marani (wine cellar), while in Western Georgia they are buried right in the yard. The opening of a wine jar and tasting the new wine is quite an event, attended by the supra or Georgian feast, which is a social phenomenon of no small significance in the life of the Georgians.
There is much that differentiates Western from Eastern Georgia, even nature, the people’s temperament and the dishes brought to the table. One thing is the same, however, the Georgian table has a tamada or toastmaster, who is a good organizer and occasionally a specialist in settling conflicts. Any supra is inconceivable without a tamada. Being a tamada is a responsible job and Georgians do not entrust it to a person at random.

Along with wine, Georgian cuisine is a beauty of the supra. The dishes of Western Georgia are more refined, prepared with more spices, and occasionally more piquant. The locals use much walnut in food. Famed and very tasty are satsivi and bazhe, meat of turkey or chicken in walnut sauce. Superb is khachapuri, Georgian closed pizza with cheese made in Western Georgia. Also very popular here is chadi or corn bread, which is very delicious with sulguni, cheese made of local cow’s milk, and with freshly caught fish. Dishes made of egg-plant are popular, as well as pkhali, a dish made of edible plants with walnuts.

Dishes of Eastern Georgia are simpler but no less tasty: boiled and then cooled chicken in garlic sauce, long loaves of bread baked on the spot, called lovingly “mother’s bread”; mutton or veal seasoned with tarragon, called chakapuli; salty sheep cheese, freshly gathered greens and mtsvadi, meat (mainly pork) roasted in every corner of Georgia but as the saying goes, it is nowhere as tasty as in Kakheti, washed down with Kakhetian wine.

In the Caucasus mountains, where grapes do not grow, the traditional drink is fruit vodka, as well as beer. The latter is of ritual significance; hence during religious festivals brewing beer is a must for the mountaineers. Khinkali is their favourite food. It is a variety of dumpling whose dough is filled with meat and juice. It takes some skill to eat Khinkali without spilling the juice. But the pleasure given by this dish is worth some discomfort. Khinkali is one of the most beloved dishes of Georgians.

Wine is revered here and is made in almost all households.
Georgia is renowned for her polyphonic music—be it folk songs or church hymns. In 1977, when the US launched the spacecraft Voyager, it carried the traditional Georgian song Chakrulo on board as part of the world's cultural heritage. When you listen to Georgian polyphony a sensation arises in you that you are touching some old and archaic knowledge. In 2001 UNESCO acknowledged this music as “a masterpiece of the world's intangible cultural heritage”. Really, with a few exceptions (e.g. one of the church hymns was written by a twelve-century Georgian monarch), the age of these songs is almost unknown, but the impression they make is always very great.

The Georgians loved and still love singing. Song is an adornment of the Georgian supra. Georgians sang at table and in war, in joy and sorrow—in Svaneti, Western Georgia, they sang at a man’s death, at his burial, and it is indeed a stunning and tragic requiem.

There also is another renowned Svan song, Lile—pagan hymn to the moon. Thus, the liveliest Georgian roots are the Georgian song.

All regions have their own song and style. As a rule, Georgian polyphony is three-personal. However, in Guria region, Western Georgia, a seven-person polyphony is in evidence—astonishing and differing from all other corners of the country.

Every summer this polyphonic diversity comes together in Georgia’s capital Tbilisi, for the “ArtGen” festival. The organisers of the festival bring professional and non-professional singers, old men, inimitable performers of

Embroidered Rug from Gelati Monastery built by King David the Builder near Kutaisi, (UNESCO site).

Georgian handicrafts – enamel.
old folk song and connoisseurs of their secrets. Each village often has its own song repertory in Georgia. The festival is held at the Georgian Ethnographic Museum, a vast open-air park in which old houses and local ethnography, characteristic of all corners of the country, are represented. Best Georgian pop and rock groups always take part in the festival, turning into a genuine triumph of a cometogether of the old and new, eagerly waited for throughout the year.

Georgian dance, like its polyphonic songs, remains a major cultural export. The Georgian State Dance Company tours the world for most of the year. The vigorous, leaping dances; clashing swords, flying sparks and daggers thrown into the floor are combined elegantly with graceful female dances. Add to this, multi-coloured costumes from mountain villages, wild drumming, pipes, as well as an accordion, and the over-all effect is unforgettable.

The cultural life of Tbilisi is not limited to folk festivals alone. The visitor of the principal avenue of the city will not miss the Opera House built in the Moorish style. Georgia boasts a fairly old tradition of opera and ballet.

Several academic and many small theatres also perform successfully in Tbilisi. The Georgian theatre and cinematograph and the original style of the local producers are well known in the cultural circles of the West.

Yet in the first place we advise the guests of Tbilisi to visit museums here. The History Museum is renowned for its pre-Christian treasure and gold items, while the Museum of Art houses the treasure of Christian culture and specimens of Georgian painting. Of these special mention should be made of the out of the ordinary exhibition of the canvases of Niko Pirosmani, a primitivist painter of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

1. Georgian dance, like its polyphonic songs, remains a major cultural export.
2. Margarita Niko Pirosmani a primitivist painter of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
Pack your bag and discover Georgia
Beaches, hot springs and spa towns

In summer the Black Sea shore of Georgia is flooded with holiday-makers. The Adjarian resorts: Batumi, Kobuleti, Sarpi, Kvariati and Gonio are favourite places of rest for Georgians and guests of the country. In Adjara green hills covered with impenetrable forests and citrus orchards abut close on the coastal zone.

Georgia’s mineral spas acquired significance back in the nineteenth century. The Russian emperor built a small palace in Borjomi; a small town and railway were constructed in the Mtkvari valley. It is said that here there was a small draw-bridge built by Eiffel, which was later washed away by a swollen Mtkvari. The Borjomi spa, distinguished for its medicinal properties, today too attracts many holiday-makers. The town is surrounded by vast forests—a favourite hunting place of the Russian emperors and other princes. It is today declared a national park.

the 14th century Gergeti Monastery of the Trinity at the foot of Mount Kazbegi.

1. Gonio, Adjara – the black sea cost
2. The Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park is the largest one in Europe.
Gudauri is an ideal place for skiing and snowboarding, the difference of altitudes between the start and end of the route is 1300 m.
Skiing

There are two major winter resorts in Georgia: the famed Bakuriani with its pine forests lies on one of the spurs of the Lesser Caucasus, while Gudauri is on the Main Caucasus Range, at one and a half hour’s distance of travel by car from Tbilisi. Tourist infrastructure is well developed at both places. In Gudauri, which is an ideal place for skiing and snowboarding, the difference of altitudes between the start and end of the route is 1300 m.

Trekking and walking

If you are fond of traveling on foot with a rucksack on your back, crossing mountain streams, sleeping in tent in the forest and on alpine meadows you must by all means visit Georgia. Here you shall find qualified mountain guides and organizations well-experienced in tourism of this kind. And if you prefer roaming alone, you can make use of approved tourist routes given on GPSs and maps. Landscapes and diversity of nature alternates, keeping in store many pleasant surprises for the traveller.

The most popular routes of trekking in the Caucasus Range pass through the provinces of Svaneti, Khevi (Qazbegi region), Khevsureti and Tusheti. Incidentally, the administration of the Georgian National Parks has developed and marked tourist long and short one-day routes.

← Gudauri ski Resort is Set at over 2000 metres in the Greater Caucasus.
↓ Mount Kazbegi - one of the 5000 m peaks of the Greater Caucasus.
Vardzia 12th-13th century cave-city cut in vertical volcanic rock in South Georgia.
Cultural Tourism

One can visit historical sights in every corner of Georgia. Very impressive are the remains of Nokalakevi (Archaeopolis), the ancient capital of the region in Samegrelo, Western Georgia. The walls of this city, towering above the beautiful Tekhuri river valley, withstood in the past the catapult assaults of the troops of Sassanid Iran and Byzantium. The city-fortress is linked to the river by a secret exit.

In Kutaisi, the principal city of Western Georgia, the impressive ruins of the highest Georgian church in the past and the Gelati monastery, functioning to the present day, are of interest.

Notable among monuments of Christian culture is Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia. This town, with its large and small churches, lying at the confluence of the Mtkvari and the Aragvi, reminds one of a museum and because of its significance it is placed under the protection of UNESCO.

Christian monasteries and old fortresses are entered in almost all tours of Georgian tourist companies, as well as the cave cities of Vardzia and Uplistsikhe. The latter is the oldest monument of this type in Georgia, built in the pre-Christian period.

Interest attaches also to the small town of Sighnagi, built on the eighteenth-century caravan route and surrounded entirely with a wall, from where a view of the fertile Alazani plain and the Kakheti Caucasus Range opens up. In recent years much has been done towards the restoration of the town and it has turned into one of the major tourist centres of Georgia.
Wine tours

One can taste local wine in Sighnaghi and throughout Kakheti. Wine tasting maranis or wine cellars and halls have been opened at many places — at homes of local peasants and in major wineries. However, there is one place that is known for its chateau wines and wine-making past.

In the nineteenth century, in the middle of Kakheti, the local Prince Chavchavadze arranged a small European oasis. On his estate, where he planted a beautiful garden, there simultaneously appeared the first grand piano in Georgia and first European wine technologies. It was Prince Chavchavadze who first began to make wine and cognac. Tsinandali, one of the best known Chavchavadze wines, was first made here. Today the Chavchavadze residence is open to visitors. The soul of the past epoch still lingers on in the small palace immersed in the greenery of the park, while best wines can be tasted in the ever cool marani of the Chavchavadzes.

Alaverdi Wine cellar - Archaeological excavations prove that wine was made, and of course drunk, in Georgia seven thousand years ago.

Wine is revered here and is made in almost all households by.
Mountaineering in Georgia is an appreciated and prestigious variety of sport. Quite a few well-known mountaineers were trained in this mountainous country. There are two most popular places for mountain climbing in Georgia: Qazbegi district and Svaneti.

Mount Qazbegi is one of the 5000 m peaks of the Greater Caucasus. This beautiful, permanently ice-capped peak is the symbol of Georgian mountaineering. The first mountain climbing expeditions were organized on this mountain. It is of medium complexity and with experienced guides any physically well-trained mountain climber can ascend it.

The Chaukhi massif of rocky peaks is in the same region. These not too tall peaks (3800 m) are called Caucasian dolomites. The charm of Chaukhi lies in the fact that here one can find a route of any complexity and it is equally interesting both for beginners and professional climbers.

Svaneti is Georgia’s corner with the greatest number of peaks, while the Svans are the strongest professionals among Georgian mountaineers. The highest summit Shkhara (5068 m) is in Svaneti, as well as the Tetnuldi (4900 m) nicknamed the Bride of Svaneti. Yet the twin-peaked Ushba (4710 m) is the beauty of Svaneti and the entire Greater Caucasus. It is the most difficult and fatal peak in the Caucasus Range—a dream of all climbers.
Spring is the best time for bird watching: the time of the awakening of nature, mating and time of migration of birds from south to north. Javakheti lakes, uninhabited semi-desert and the Greater Caucasus are the places that always fall into the routes of bird watchers. Seeing birds of passage, as well as nesting birds and endemic species is always guaranteed in such tours, however, seeing foreigners armed with binoculars and telescopes often causes locals to wonder, for it is so far an absolute novelty in this country.
A photographer will find many things of interest for him in Georgia: alpine meadows blooming like a colour carpet and snowy peaks towering above them, untouched virgin forests, semi-desert and sea shore. But local ethnographic diversity must be no less interesting. The population of many corners of Georgia lives in full harmony with the surrounding nature, timing its everyday activity to its annual seasonal cycle. This harmony of nature and man – only a small hint at civilization – must be most interesting for photographers.

\textit{Paliastomi Lake.}
Eco-tourism

The Georgian landscape is especially suited to the eco-tourist, due to its relatively unspoiled status and absence of mass tourism. Tourists have a possibility to spend time in seclusion in the nature, wander in protected areas and valleys known for their endemism. The eco-tourist will find much of interest to himself in Georgia.

Vashlovani reserve is inhabited by the Near Eastern Leopard, so far the only species in Georgia.

→ The most popular times to visit are spring and autumn – both for colours (spring flowers, autumn leaves) and the balmy temperatures.
**Mountain biking**

This sport is quite new in Georgia, and is becoming ever more popular. Whereas the appearance of the bicycle on the roads and footpaths of the Caucasus mountains was a great event, today it surprises no one. There are very few level places in Georgia; hence it is an excellent place for mountain biking in search of fresh adventures.

The Gergeti Trinity church is set poignantly on a hill directly below the towering white massif of Mount Kazbek (5033 metres).

**4 x 4 Adventure**

Off-road vehicles allow you to get off the beaten track in Georgia, which is not that difficult. The relatively small mileage between deserts, coastline, subtropics, tea plantations and high mountains allows you to experience a vast number of contrasting landscapes in a small amount of time.

Off-road vehicles allow you to get off the beaten track in Georgia.
Caves

Karstic caves largely occur in Western Georgia – mainly in the regions of Imereti and Racha. They are very deep and highly interesting to explore. Some of them have underground rivers, allowing you to boat in a cave.

→ Tskhaltubo Cave – Karstic caves are very deep and highly interesting to explore.

Rafting

Spring is the most popular season for rafting in Georgia, when mountain rivers abound in water. The most popular place is the Aragvi, which can be reached from Tbilisi in one and a half hour. Georgia and her rivers have greater potential for rafting. For example, the Enguri river in Svaneti has sections of several kilometers long that belong to the most difficult category.

→ The River Tskkhura, village Nakalakevi, Samegrelo.
← Rafting – Georgia and her rivers have greater potential for rafting.
Horse-riding

The horse has always been the principal transport on the footpaths running along the steep slopes of the Greater Caucasus. The local short but very strong horses can surmount amazing difficulties; hence their importance today too is great. There still are villages in the Greater Caucasus mountains that can be reached only on horseback. Such journey in the Caucasus mountains will bring you unforgettable pleasure.
**TRAVEL INFORMATION**

**Visa requirements**

A passport valid for at least six months is required for visitors of all nationalities.

There is no visa requirement for those who hold a passport for staying up to 90 days from: EU; USA; Canada; Japan; Switzerland; Lichtenstein; Norway; Israel; The Holy See; Principality of Andorra; San-Marino; Republic of Iceland; United Arab Emirates; State of Kuwait; South Korea; State of Qatar; Kingdom of Bahrain; Oman.

For more information about visa regulations, please visit [www.mfa.gov.ge](http://www.mfa.gov.ge)

**Getting there and away**

**By Air:** Non-stop flights can be taken from: Munich, Vienna, London, Kiev, Baku, Minsk, Riga, Prague, Istanbul, Aktau, Tel-Aviv, Yerevan, Minsk, Amsterdam, Paris, Dubai, Kharkov.

**By Road:** You can get to Georgia by auto from Europe as well as from Asia. The historically famous “Silk Road” crosses the country. Georgia has highways connecting it directly to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey. Buses to Tbilisi depart from Baku, Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon, Yerevan and Athens. Busses run from the central bus stations of every city.

**By Train:** Railway connects Georgia to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Trans from Baku are available every day. For more information about train timetable, please visit [www.railway.ge](http://www.railway.ge)

**By Sea:** Coming to Georgia by ferry is available every week from Ukrainian ports: Ilyichevsk and Odessa.

**Hotels**

Tbilisi offers hotels in all categories from international four-star, to home-stays. In rural regions accommodation is primarily three-star family hotels, bed and breakfast and home-stays. [www.georgia.travel](http://www.georgia.travel)

**Restaurants**

Georgian cuisine is renowned the world over. There are many excellent restaurants serving both traditional and international cuisine.

**Climate**

Georgia is located in a hot region but is kept cool by the high Caucasus mountains – save in late July and early August when temperatures can hit 40 degrees Celsius. Indian summers often extend the warm season to the beginning of November.

**Money**

Georgia’s currency is the Lari, which is sub-divided into 100 Tetri. One Lari is 0.45 Euros or 0.59 U.S. dollars (date 07/2009).

Most Tbilisi hotels accept credit cards, but only a few accept cards outside the capital. Cash point machines are available in Tbilisi.

**Telephone**

The country code is 995. The area code for Tbilisi is 32. Mobile telephone: GSM 900 and 1800 networks.
USEFUL WEBSITES

Government
President of Georgia: www.president.gov.ge
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia: www.mfa.ge
National Investment Agency: www.investingorgia.org
Tbilisi City Hall  www.tbilisi.gov.ge
Georgian National Museum  www.museum.ge

Tour-Operators
Georgian Incoming Tour-Operators’ Association: www.gitoa.ge
Georgian Tourism Association: www.tourism-association.ge

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