

EXPLORE!

Hiking in the Caucasus
8 days

Georgia - Trip code WGEO



Hiking in the Caucasus

Trek in a fascinating, off-beat region, virtually untouched by tourism. Lying among the craggy snow-capped peaks and deep gorges of Georgia's Greater Caucasus Mountains, Svaneti is a region with its own unique history and culture. Stay with the proud Svantian people in remote villages with their distinctive *ikoshki* - medieval defensive stone towers. Hike through thick forests to the base of Mount Ushgali, the Shkhara Glacier and beautiful waterfalls.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Caucasus hikes** - Trek to the foot of Mount Ushba, summit Mount Guro and reach the Shkhara Glacier
- ★ **Local culture** - Spend time among the people of remote Svaneti and learn about their distinct culture
- ★ **Monastery and grottoes** - Visit Gelati Monastery and the dramatic Prometheus Caves
- ★ **Kutaisi** - Explore Georgia's 'second city' on the banks of the Rioni River
- ★ **Food and drink** - Enjoy hearty home-cooked local dishes and Georgian wines

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Simple

These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, sometimes with en suite facilities.

WALKING GRADE:

Moderate

For those who are fit and active, these moderate walks are normally on good paths and tracks at low altitude. Days may include some fairly demanding ascents and descents, so previous experience is preferable but not essential.

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Trip starts in Kutaisi, Georgia's second city

The trip starts today in Kutaisi. The capital of Western Georgia, Kutaisi is considered as Georgia's second city (although recently overtaken in population by Batumi) and has a friendly rivalry with the actual capital Tbilisi. Kutaisi sits on the banks of the Rioni River and the Caucasus Mountains can be seen in the far distance to the north. The city has today been revitalised after post-war Russian decline and the Georgian government moved its parliament here in 2012.

Note that customers arriving on Wizz Air flights from London Luton will be arriving in the early hours of the following day (Day 2) with rooms ready at the guesthouse on arrival.



Accommodation: Natela's Guesthouse 'Beqa' (or similar)



Simple Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Visit Gelati Monastery; drive to Svaneti region

After breakfast this morning we drive out of Kutaisi to visit the 12th century Gelati Monastery. Gelati is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and was one of the main cultural and intellectual centres in Georgia in medieval times. We also call in at the city's thriving local farmers' market, a great chance to get a first flavour of local life and see some of the fresh produce we'll be enjoying in our meals during the trip.

It's around a six hour drive from Kutaisi to our destination for the night, the village of Becho in the region of Svaneti, with the scenery during the second half of the journey becoming ever more dramatic and mountainous as we head north. Becho lies close to the Russian border in the shadow of the magnificent Mount Ushba. At 4,710 metres, Ushba is commonly known as the 'Matterhorn of the Caucasus' because of its distinct spire-shaped summit. Situated on the southern slopes of the central Caucasus Mountains and surrounded by 3,000 to 5,000 metre peaks, Svaneti is the highest inhabited area in the Caucasus. Its valleys are dotted with beautiful medieval villages where you will see many stone towers, or Koshki, as they are locally known, which were originally built in medieval times to protect the villagers from invaders and provide sanctuary from avalanches. It is an area of stunning natural beauty with glaciers, rivers and coniferous forests. The local people, known as Svans, are a distinct ethnic sub-group with their own language and traditions.



Accommodation: Jena's Guesthouse (or similar)



Simple Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 3 - Hike to waterfalls at the base of Mount Ushba

Today we drive a short distance up the valley to the start point of our trek near the settlement of Mazeri. Our hiking route starts out following the left bank of the Dolra river, ascending gradually through thick forests on a rocky trail. There are some great views of the beautiful Ushba waterfall along the way. Eventually we cross the river on a wooden bridge to reach a small military encampment in the woods. The Russian border is not far away, just over the mountains. From here the route becomes steeper and the path soon leaves the forest to reach the impressive waterfall at the base of Mount Ushba. You can choose to rest at the bottom of the falls or continue on a steep hike all the way to the top. We plan to have a picnic lunch during our hike and enjoy the views before making our way back on the same trail through the forest to our bus.

In the afternoon we drive deeper into Svaneti to Mestia, the main centre in Upper Svaneti and our base for the next two nights. Mestia is a large village small town sited at an elevation of 1500 metres with a population of over 2,600. It's becoming increasingly popular with Georgians and Russians as small a ski resort in winter (there are a handful of runs outside of the town) and a centre for trekkers in the summer months. Quite a few of the old stone dwellings on the northern side of the town still retain their imposing stone watchtowers and these are illuminated at night, an enchanting sight. At the Margiani House museum you can visit a traditional Svantian home and climb inside one of the watchtowers. The History and Ethnography Museum is well curated with information provided in English and well worth a visit if you are keen to find out more about the Svan culture.

Today's 11 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately 6 hours with a total ascent and descent of 980 metres if ascending to the top of the falls, 450 metres to the first waterfall.



Accommodation: Family Hotel Kala (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 4 - Drive to Mulakhi; walk back to Mestia

This morning we take four-wheel drive vehicles to the start of our walk today, the small village of Mulakhi. The trail skirts around the side of a valley and passes through several small settlements and takes in superb views of all the way back to the Mestia valley. We'll enjoy a picnic lunch with views along the trail.

Today's 14 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately 5 hours with a total ascent of 520 metres and descent of 650 metres.



Accommodation: Family Hotel Kala (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 5 - Four wheel drive to Ushguli and Mount Guro ascent

This morning we drive to Ushguli and as the road condition deteriorates past Mestia we'll travel by four-wheel drive vehicles. There's almost a sense of driving back in time on the journey which culminates with a striking view of the four hamlets which make up Ushguli, nestled at the bottom of a steep valley with many brooding medieval watchtowers in sight. Oxen are still used to plough the fields of potatoes and the streets are a often muddy, higgledy-piggledy warren of mainly stone dwellings.

We strike out on the first of our two hikes from Ushguli in the afternoon - the ascent of Mount Guro whose 3070 metre summit overlooks the village. The hike starts with a steep climb out of the village and continues steeply upwards through pastures rich with many wildflowers including orchids and wild tulips. We'll take our time to enjoy the views which open up to show us Mount Shkhara (Georgia's highest peak at 5201m), Mount Tetnuldi and Mount Laila. The panorama from the top is simply stunning and we spend time here before making our way back down to the village.

Today's 10 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately 5 to 6 hours with a total ascent and descent of 800 metres.



Accommodation: Nanuli's Guesthouse (or similar)



Simple Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 6 - Trek from Ushguli to the glacier at the foot of Mount Shkhara

Mount Shkhara is Georgia's highest mountain, standing at 5201m, it's the eastern anchor of an imposing 12 kilometre long ridge known as the Bezingi Wall. Our walk to the foot of the glacier at the base of the mountain follows the course of the Enereti River back to its source along a surprisingly flat trail and for the most part we are rewarded with spectacular views of the mountain. Wildflowers carpet the grassy valley and purple orchids can be seen in bloom along the banks of the river. As we reach the final approach to the glacier the path becomes steeper and terrain rockier. Finally we reach the tongue of the glacier, with incredible views up to the craggy, snow-covered sides of Mount Shkhara. We return on the same route to Ushguli then drive back to Mestia.

Today's 18 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately 6 hours with a total ascent and descent of 320 metres.



Accommodation: Family Hotel Kala (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 7 - Drive Kutaisi via Dadiani Palace and Prometheus Grotto

Leaving the mountains behind us today we make our way back to Kutaisi via the town of Zugdidi where we break our journey with a visit to Dadiani Palace - now a museum it was once a magnificent palace and the seat of one of the oldest great Georgian families. We then continue to the Prometheus grottoes - one of Georgia's natural wonders where you will see magnificent stalactites and stalagmites, petrified waterfalls, cave pearls, underground rivers.



Accommodation: Natela's Guesthouse 'Beqa' (or similar)



Simple Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

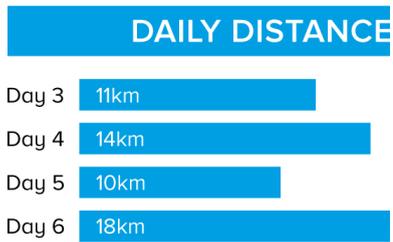
DAY 8 - Visit Bagrati Cathedral before trip ends in Kutaisi

There's time this morning to pay an early visit to the 11th century Bagrati Cathedral before the trip ends in Kutaisi.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Walking and Trekking information



Walking grade

Moderate

Trek details

Walks on 4 days for between 4 to 6 hours. Trail conditions vary from wide dirt paths to rough and rocky underfoot. The Mount Guro ascent is a steep climb with rewarding views.

Max walking altitude (m)

3070



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7
Lunch: 4
Dinner: 6



Transport

Bus
4WD



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

4 nights simple guesthouse
3 nights simple hotel

Trip information

Country information

Georgia

Climate

Georgia has a temperate climate with warm dry periods from June to September. Early and late in the season, temperatures can drop to sub-zero at higher altitude.

Time difference to GMT

+4

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Christian

Language

Georgian

Clothing

Take light and comfortable clothing that can be layered according to the temperature. Pack a good quality waterproof jacket and trousers, fleece jacket, comfortable walking trousers, shorts, t-shirts and a sunhat. Please be aware that temperatures can change dramatically at altitude and at night.

Footwear

We recommend you bring lightweight walking boots with ankle support, make sure that your boots are worn-in and comfortable before the start of the trip. Also trainers or sandals for relaxing and general wear. We suggest that on international flights you either carry your walking boots in your hand luggage or wear them - should your luggage be lost or delayed, your own boots are the one thing that will be irreplaceable.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack.

Equipment

You will need a water bottle (preferably 2 litres), torch, insect repellent, sunglasses and high factor sun cream. Trekking poles are recommended.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow US\$ 20.

In order to make things easier for you, the Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

Georgia

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£5

Dinner price

£7

Beer price

£1.00 - 3.00

Water price

£0.3

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Lari.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

We recommend you take your money in undamaged mixed denomination US\$ notes issued post 1993.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Only in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance

Very limited.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are difficult to change

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, 4WD

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

This trips stays in simple, family-run guesthouses and hotels. In Kutaisi and Mestia all rooms have attached bathrooms while in Becho and Ushguli you will be accommodated in twin or single rooms with shared bathroom facilities.

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Georgia: Visas are not required for EU nationals, UK, Canadian or US citizens. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the

UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom. Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Maximum altitude (m)

3070

Georgia

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health

advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
