EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

On Foot in the Caucasus (TGG 2015)

WALK & TREK

TOURDURAT
16
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Comfort: Simple
Tour Type: Small Groups
Trek Grade: Moderate
tour Code: TGG

Tour Highlights - On Foot in the Caucasus

- ✓ Kazbegi region - Trek to the Gergeti Church, Mt Chaukhebi and through Truso Gorge
- ✓ Svaneti region - Trek to the foot of Mount Ushba, to the Chalaadi Glacier and to the foot of Mount Shkhara
- ✓ Local contact - Spend time amongst the people of remote Svaneti and learn about their unique culture
- ✓ Caves and grottoes - Visit the cave town at Uplistsikhe and the dramatic grottoes at Tskaltubo
- ✓ Tbilisi - Explore the capital

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	7 nights Standard Hotel 8 nights Simple Guesthouse
Included Meals:	15 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 13 dinners
Start Point:	Join tour: Tbilisi
End Point:	Tour ends: Tbilisi
Transport:	4WD, Bus
Countries:	Georgia

On foot in the Caucasus

Explore two of Georgia's remote trekking regions as we trek through deep valleys, past villages to dramatic glaciers. After exploring the capital Tbilisi we travel north to Kazbegi and take day walks through Truso Gorge, to Trinity Church and to the foot of Mount Chaukhebi. Travelling east we explore the remote Svaneti region with walks to the base of Mount Ushgali, Mount Shkhara and Mt Chalaadi.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Simple

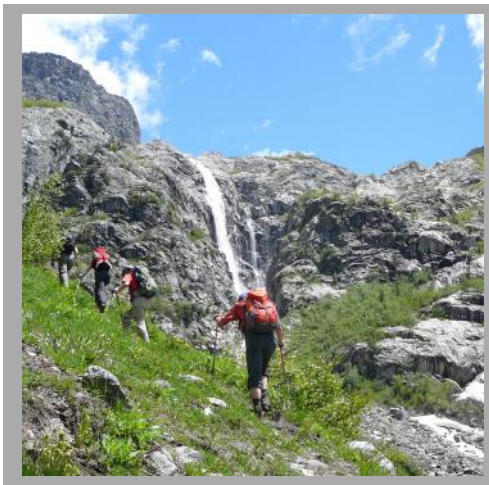
These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, typically with en suite facilities.

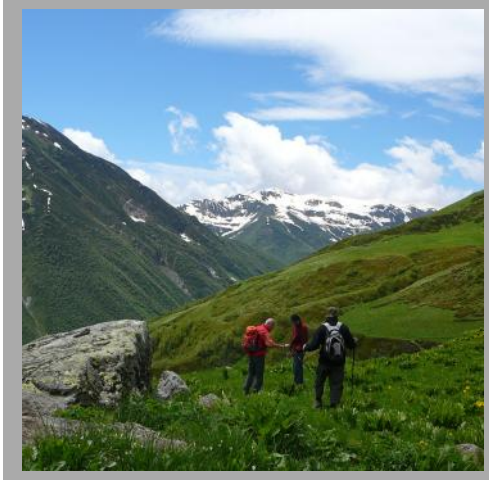
Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Trek 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.





Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

DAY 1 Join tour Tbilisi

The tour starts this evening in Tbilisi. The capital of Georgia is an ancient and cosmopolitan city; there is a synagogue, a mosque, a Georgian basilica, an Armenian church and a Zoroastrian Fire-Worshipper's temple all within a 15 minutes walk of each other.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Walking tour of Tbilisi

One of Europe's most fascinating capitals, we enjoy a half day orientation tour on foot which takes in the important Church of Metecki, Sioni Cathedral and the State museum and allows plenty of time free to wander the boulevards and back streets of the city, absorbing its unique ambience.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Drive via Mtskheta to Kazbegi

Leaving the capital this morning, we drive to Mtskheta, the spiritual heart of Georgia. Here we visit what is considered to be the most sacred place in Georgia, the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. The 9th century basilica contains the grave of Sidonia, who was said to have been buried holding Christ's robe. We also visit the 6th century Jvari church before continuing along the Georgian Military Highway to Kazbegi.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4 Gergeti Trinity Church; Gveleti waterfalls

The Kazbegi region is very picturesque, with alpine meadows and towering snow-capped mountains behind. We plan to walk from Kazbegi town through Gergeti village and up to the Church of the Holy Trinity, stunningly located on a hilltop overlooking the snowy peaks of the Caucasus Mountains and the Mount Kazbegi Glacier. Tracing our steps back we take a short transfer through Dariali Gorge to Gveleti village where we begin our walk to a beautful waterfall. Total walking approximately 5/6 hours.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5 Trek to the foot of Mt Chaukhebi

A drive through the beautiful Sno Valley brings us to the village of Juta and the start point for todays walk. The village is located at the junction of two valleys and we follow the route up towards the great bulk of Mount Chaukhebi. As we leave the village the valley widens and the landscape becomes more barren. We follow a flat trail, keeping the river on our right hand side until we reach a steeper section leading to the base of the mountain. We return to Juta and drive back to Kazbegi. Total walking approximately 6 hours.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 Truso Gorge walk

This morning we transfer to the small village of Kobi, where we leave our transport and walk to Okrokana village at the head of the Truso Gorge. After taking the chance to meet the villagers we head in to the gorge, following the Terek River as we walk. Soon after we have left the village steep cliffs appear on the left hand side although our path remains relatively flat. We return back to Kobi and then transfer to our hotel in Gudauri. In winter the town is a ski resort and we are treated to some impressive mountain panoramas. Approximately 6 hours walking.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7 Drive to Kutaisi via Gori

We begin to make our way across the country today as we drive to Kutaisi. En route we stop to visit the Stalin Museum at Gori and the 'cave town' at Uplistikhe. Here an entire town of streets, churches, palaces and residential buildings has been carved into the

mountainside. Dating from the first millennium BC, it gradually grew to be an important city on the trade route linking Byzantium with India and China. Today is a long drive but we take plenty of breaks to stretch our legs.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 8 Visit Gelati Monastery; drive to Becho

This morning we drive to the magnificent monastery complex at Gelati, which consists of a variety of churches and the Academy building. It was founded in 1106 by King David the Builder in gratitude to God for his victories over the Turks. The King wanted it to serve as a centre of Christendom, so as well as scholars many religious artists studied here. Many of the treasures which were made here have been lost over the centuries, however the buildings and frescos in them are extremely well preserved, and the setting of the monastery on a hillside with views over to the distant Caucasus peaks is very attractive. We then drive to Becho, a small village and the base for our first walk in the Svaneti region.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 9 Walk to the base of Mount Ushba

After a short transfer to Shikhra village we walk through thick forest on the trail to the base of Mount Ushba where we reach the glacier and a beautiful waterfall. We take a picnic lunch so we can enjoy the views before making our way back through the forest and driving to Mestia. Approximately 6 hours walking.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 10 Trek from Lakhiri to Mestia

Our walk today starts at a tiny church perched on a hilltop overlooking Mount Shkhara. After taking in the views we walk down a small ridge and then in to the forest, there are some steeper sections on this part of the walk. As we emerge from the forest we are treated to views of Mount Tetnuldi, Mount Shkhara and of the Chalaadi Glacier. The walk takes us right to our base for the night, the town of Mestia. Approximately 5 hours walking.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 11 Mount Chalaadi Glacier

Today we walk up through the beautiful Mestia Valley on our way to the base of Mount Chalaadi. The glacier river is our constant companion as we follow it right up to the glacier tongue. We are treated to views of the glacier and ice cliffs as well as the tip of Mount Ushba at certain points on the route. The landscape is particularly beautiful with lush green forest against a backdrop of snowy mountains. Approximately 5 hours walking.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 12 Drive to Ushguli; Mount Guro Walk

This morning we drive to Ushguli, the base for our final two walks. We start with a steep climb out of the village as we walk to the top of Mount Guro. We pass through a small birch forest before we pass the tree line and the view opens up to show Mount Shkhara, Mount Tetnuldi adn Mount Laila. The last 50 metres of the climb are very steep but we take our time. The views from the top are stunning and we spend time to enjoy them before making our way back down to the village where we settle in to our family run guesthouse for the evening. Approximately 5 hours walking.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 13 Mount Shkhara trek

Mount Shkhara is Georgia's highest mountain, standing at 5068m tall. Our walk to the base of the mountain follows a surprisingly flat trail and for the most part we are rewarded with spectacular views of the peak. As we reach the final approach to the mountain we follow the glacier water and the terrain becomes rockier and we reach the tongue of the glacier, with incredible views up to the craggy, snow covered sides of Mount Shkhara. We transfer back to Mestia for the night. Approximately 5 hours walking.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 14 Drive to Kutaisi

Leaving the mountains today we make our way back to Kutaisi. On the way we stop at a local agricultural market, as much a place for people to gather and catch up as well we buying food and essentials.

Overnight: **Simple Guesthouse**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 15 Tskaltubo Grotto; drive to Tbilisi

We make our way back to the capital today, stopping on route at the natural grotto in Tskaltubo. The grotto has 16 caves to explore all with incredible limestone stalactites and stalagmites. On arrival back in Tbilisi we have some free time before our farewell meal.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 16 Tour ends in Tbilisi

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 15 breakfasts, 9 lunches,13 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

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.

Georgia

Lunch £: 5.00

Dinner £: 7.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Georgia

Bottle of Beer £: 0.90

Water £: 0.30

Tipping - Tour Leader

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

Tipping - 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$ 30.

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

Foreign Exchange

Georgia

ATM Availability: Only in major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very limited.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are difficult to change

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.

Joining your Tour

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 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 on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

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.

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 please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

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

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.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment,

personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable. You will also need to ensure your travel policy covers you for all activities you intend to do whilst on tour.

We are delighted to include FREE travel insurance **for all qualifying customers** who book an Explore trip from 01 January 2015.

For more information about Travel insurance and to check whether you are eligible to receive free cover, please visit www.explore.co.uk/insurance. Explore Worldwide Ltd are an Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Limited. who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. The registration number can be checked by visiting the the FCA's website www.fca.gov.uk or by contacting them on 0800 111 6768.

Visa Information

Georgia: Visas are not required for EU nationals, UK, Canadian or US citizens.

Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

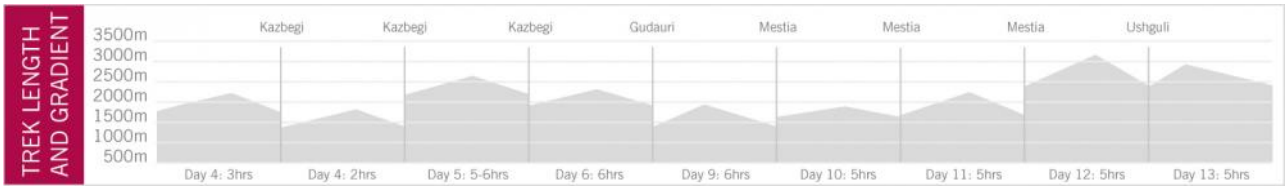
All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Georgia

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. Special Note: Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before 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 http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour



Trekking Details

This is a 8-day trek with an average of 4 to 5 hours of walking each day along forest paths and village trails. We have graded this trek as moderate.

Walking Boots

Lightweight walking/trail boots.

Climate

Georgia

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.

Clothing

Pack essentially for 'Hot Conditions'. Weather is changeable in the north and mountains; it can be cool especially at night, bring a warmer jacket. Raingear is essential at all times. You should avoid shorts and vest tops; long trousers or skirts are ideal. A headscarf is essential for visiting churches and mosques.

Equipment

A waterbottle, torch, swimsuit, sunhat, suncream and sunglasses. You may wish to take walking poles.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes and sandals for visiting sites and hilly towns.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Georgia

Population: 4,636,400

Size of Country: 69,700 sq km

Major Language: Georgian

Religion: Christian

Time Difference to GMT: +4

Electric Supply & Plugs

Georgia

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety andÂ security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. ForÂ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link atÂ http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is ‘Available’ or ‘Guaranteed’ we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2015 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2015. 2016/17 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2016.

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