

Go Slow in Georgia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

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| Day 1 – 2 | Overnight flight to Tbilisi. Transfer to Borjomi |
| Day 3 | Birding at Nadarbazevi Lake and Georgian Wine Country |
| Day 4 | Tabatskuri Lake and the Alpine Meadows of Tskhratskaro Pass |
| Day 5 | Tsaghveri, Tashiskari and Nedzvi |
| Day 6 | Exploring Kvabiskhevi Gorge and the forests of the Lesser Caucasus |
| Day 7 | Inbound flight |

Departs

June

Focus

Wildlife, Wine, Cuisine & History

Grading

A. Suitable for participants of all levels of fitness.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GEO06)

Highlights

- Outstanding hospitality with excellent food and superb wine
- Outstanding wetland birding with Armenian Gulls and Dalmatian Pelicans
- Green Warbler and Mountain Chiffchaff
- Superb raptors including Lammergeier and Eastern Imperial Eagle
- An exciting range of reptiles and amphibians
- Abundant wildflowers and butterflies



Eastern Imperial Eagle, Caucasian Spotted Fritillary, Dalmatian Pelican



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Introduction

The Caucasus ranks among the world's foremost biodiversity hotspots, home to an extraordinary number of endemic species. Stretching from the soaring peaks of the Greater and Lesser Caucasus to the arid steppe and semi-desert plains of eastern Georgia, the region supports an exceptional diversity of habitats. Lying along key migratory flyways, Georgia offers outstanding birdwatching opportunities throughout the year.

From the alpine grasslands of Kazbegi National Park to the ancient broadleaved woodlands near Gori, over 200 species of butterfly inhabit the country's richly varied landscapes. Encircled by mountains and flanked by both the Black and Caspian Seas, Georgia harbours around 6,400 species of vascular plants, nearly a quarter of which are endemic. Its diverse animal-life includes some 850 vertebrate species, with over 120 unique to the region – making the Caucasus a temperate-zone stronghold for endemism and one of global conservation importance.

Framed by the dramatic ridgelines of the Caucasus, Georgia's story is steeped in myth, history, and culture. Once part of the fabled Kingdom of Colchis – home to the legend of the Golden Fleece – and later flourishing under the Bagrationi monarchy, Georgia's noble traditions reflect a long legacy of cultural refinement. Shaped by Persian, Ottoman, and Russian influence, the country's identity has been defined by resilience and artistry, with figures such as the poet Shota Rustaveli embodying a spirit of literary and religious devotion. Today, Georgia's national parks, historic cities, and thriving vineyards tell a tale of cultural renewal, offering visitors a captivating blend of natural splendour and rich heritage.

Georgia's wine culture is among the oldest in the world, with archaeological evidence of winemaking dating back over 8,000 years. Unique in its use of indigenous grape varieties and ancient clay qvevri vessels, Georgian wine is both a cultural tradition and a living art. This long-standing expertise yields wines of distinctive character and elegance. Georgia's cuisine is similarly celebrated – a seasonal, locally rooted gastronomy defined by bold herbs, tangy cheeses, and fresh vegetables. From the rich, comforting flavours of khachapuri to the delicately spiced khinkali, Georgian food offers a deeply satisfying complement to the country's warm hospitality and vivid landscapes.



Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1 - 2

Overnight Flight to Tbilisi. Transfer to Borjomi

Our adventure begins in Georgia with a scenic transfer from Tbilisi to the charming spa town of Borjomi, nestled amid the forested foothills of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains. En route, we'll pause at the iconic Jvari Monastery, perched high above the Mtkvari River, where we'll receive an introduction to Georgia's rich history and culture. After checking in to our very comfortable hotel base for the entire tour (where we use the upgraded balcony rooms as standard, and the sauna, pool and gym are included), there's time to relax before an optional afternoon walk through Borjomi Central Park, a mosaic of mature deciduous woodland, riverine glades and mineral springs. This gentle stroll provides an excellent introduction to the region's natural beauty. The remainder of the day is at leisure before we gather for a welcome dinner.

Day 3

Nadarbazevi Lake & Georgian Wine Country

Today we explore the steppe and wetland habitats surrounding Nadarbazevi Lake, a bird-rich oasis in the arid landscapes of the Shida Kartli region. Here, expansive reedbeds and shallow waters teem with wildfowl and waders. Species likely to be seen include Ruddy Shelduck, Black-winged Stilt, Whiskered Tern, and Armenian Gull, while the surrounding fields and scrub support shrikes, bee-eaters, and a fine variety of larks and pipits.

In the afternoon, we travel into the rolling hills of central Georgia's viticultural heartland for a visit to a small, artisanal winery. Amid sun-drenched vineyards and flower-filled meadows, we enjoy a traditional Georgian lunch and wine-tasting before returning to Borjomi.

Day 4

Tabatskuri Lake & the Alpine Meadows of Tskhratskaro Pass

Today's focus is the remote and scenic Tabatskuri Lake, high on the volcanic Javakheti Plateau. En



Lammergeier

route, we ascend the Tskhratskaro Pass, where subalpine meadows and scree slopes burst with wildflowers and support species such as Red-backed Shrike and Water Pipit. The lake itself is fringed by marshes and grassy steppe, offering superb birdwatching. Among the highlights here are Dalmatian Pelican, Velvet Scoter, Black Stork, and Great White Egret, while the skies may hold raptors

such as Lammergeier, Golden Eagle and Eastern Imperial Eagle. After a relaxed picnic overlooking the lake's open expanse, we return to Borjomi through rolling alpine grasslands dotted with volcanic rock formations and sparse woodlands.

Day 5

Tsaghveri, Tashiskari & Nedzvi

We venture into the mixed woodlands, riverbanks and montane meadows of the Borjomi area to search for the region's rich wildlife. Our first stops are the sunny hillsides and rock walls of Tsaghveri and Tashiskari, where we search for various Darevskia lizards and possibly Tessellated or Grass Snakes. We then continue to the Nedzvi Managed Reserve, where moist woodland clearings and shaded streams may reveal Eastern Treefrog, Caucasian Toad, and possibly the elusive Caucasian Salamander, a beautiful local endemic. These habitats also offer opportunities to observe flowering plants, including Urville's Marsh Orchid, forest birds and butterflies, with surprises around every corner. After a picnic in the forest, we return to Borjomi for a relaxed evening.

Day 6

Kvabiskhevi Gorge & the Forests of the Lesser Caucasus

Our final full day is spent in the wooded gorges, mixed forests and limestone crags of the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park. We begin with a short visit to the historic Atskuri Fortress, then continue to the remote valley of Kvabiskhevi, where broadleaved forests and steep-sided canyons offer outstanding opportunities for wildlife. Though elusive, species such as Red Deer, Roe Deer, and even Brown Bear inhabit the area, while birdlife is varied and includes Green Warbler, Mountain Chiffchaff, Black Redstart and Golden Eagle. The botanical diversity here is equally rewarding, with numerous endemic and Caucasian flora to admire. After a picnic lunch in the shade of beech and hornbeam trees, we visit the Mtsvane Monastery, set in a peaceful forest clearing, before returning to Borjomi for our farewell dinner.



Mountain Chiffchaff

Day 7

Inbound Flights

In the morning, we depart Borjomi and return to Tbilisi International Airport, where the tour concludes. We leave with fond memories of Georgia's diverse wildlife, dramatic landscapes and warm hospitality.

Tour Grading & Focus

The main focus of the tour will be the excellent general natural history of the country, with the local wines, cuisine and history as additional interests. This is a 'Go Slow' tour and daily activities will be at a relaxed pace with short, slow walks and plenty of downtime.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Whilst we should hope for warm, sunny conditions, it can be overcast at times with occasional rains. The time in the mountains could be cool, particularly at night. It would be sensible to come prepared for such possibilities.

What's Included

All meals, starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 7, are included. The wine-tasting sessions are also included in the tour price but all other alcoholic or soft drinks are not.

Use of the hotel sauna, pool and gym are also included in the price. The hotel also has an excellent spa where treatments can be purchased.

The cost also includes upgraded balcony rooms at the hotel.

Extending Your Holiday

We would be very happy to assist in arranging extensions, should this be of interest. The city of Tbilisi itself is well worth an extended visit and this can easily be arranged. Please contact Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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