Tour Georgia with American Friends of Georgia
September 19 – September 30, 2019

Georgia is home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Situated at the junction of Europe and Asia on the ‘Silk Road,’ Georgian culture is rich with influences from its neighbors, including the Persian, Roman, Greek and Ottoman Empires and Russia. Yet, over the centuries, Georgia has maintained and preserved a unique national identity, its own language, and extensive traditions in the fine and folk arts, music, food, winemaking, and more. Today, Georgians are extremely proud of their heritage and the striking beauty of their country, and very happy to welcome tourists and travelers into their homes and institutions.

AFG’s tours of Georgia, designed and led by our US and Georgian staff, offer a unique opportunity to experience Georgia’s rich culture, and learn more about the work we do to help Georgia’s most vulnerable citizens. AFG tours are unlike any other, with excursions to off-the-beaten-path places, extraordinary sights and discoveries, and the warmth and hospitality of being welcomed by old friends you haven’t met yet. We pride ourselves on offering travelers opportunities to experience Georgia beyond the ordinary, and create lifelong memories and connections in the process.

2019 Tour Itinerary

- **September 19:** Arrival in Tbilisi, Free day
- **September 20:** Starting of the Tour, Tbilisi Excursions
- **September 21:** Tbilisi to Mtskheta, Dzegvi-Ananuri, Tbilisi
- **September 22:** Tbilisi – Zugdidi – Mestia
- **September 23:** Svaneti Area
- **September 24:** Svaneti area
- **September 25:** Svaneti area
- **September 26:** Svaneti to Tbilisi,
- **September 27:** Tbilisi to Bodbe - Sighnaghi - Tsinandali
- **September 28:** Telavi – Ikalto – Alaverdi - Gremi
- **September 29:** Telavi to Tbilisi
- **September 30:** Departure from Tbilisi
Program Description

Day 1: September 19

- **Meet in Tbilisi International Airport.** Your tour guide will be holding an “AMERICAN FRIENDS OF GEORGIA” sign at baggage claim.
- Transportation to and check-in at the Hotel Tiflis Palace (or similar hotel).
- Free day to rest and recover from travel.

Day 2: September 20

- Enjoy a sightseeing tour of the city of Tbilisi, including: the old town of Tbilisi, Sulphur Baths, Narikala Fortress, ancient churches and other sites showcasing the city’s history, architecture and people.
- Lunch at Restaurant Gorgasali, specializing in innovative Georgian fusion cuisine.
- Visit the National Museum. Exhibits include ancient gold treasures and icons.
- Visit AFG’s Mercy Center Hospice, Nursing School and Home Care Program, the first hospice and nursing school in Georgia.
- Meet and enjoy dinner with AFG’s first partner, Mother Mariam, founder of the Hospice and Abbess of the Transfiguration Convent.

Day 3: September 21

- Visit the 2,600-year-old town of Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia.
- Explore Jvari monastery, the sixth-century masterpiece of early Christian Orthodox architecture, located on the hilltop at the confluence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers, and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Visit the beautiful Svetiskhoveli Cathedral, also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Known as the burial site of Christ’s mantle, Svetiskhoveli was built in the eleventh century, although the site itself is even older, dating back to the early fourth century. The cathedral remains one of the most venerated places of worship in the Georgian church to this day.
- Visit the Dzegvi Shelter Community, an AFG-supported community shelter for mentally ill, disabled persons, former street children and abandoned single mothers.
- Lunch with Mother Mariam of Dzegvi and beneficiaries for our Higher Education Scholarship Fund for a special lunch.
Journey to Ananuri, a castle complex on the Aragvi River. Ananuri was seat of the Eristavis (Dukes) of Aragvi, a feudal dynasty which ruled the area from the 13th century until the mid-18th century. The castle was the scene of numerous battles. Within the complex, visit two churches, one of which dates back to the 16th century.
**Day 4: September 22**

- Travel 3 hours to Mestia, located in the high mountainous region of Svaneti in Northwestern Georgia. Svaneti is an extraordinary and surreal land of towers, snow, craggy peaks, wine, and dancing. The entire region is a UNESCO world heritage site. Situated on the southern slopes of the central Caucasus Mountains and surrounded by 3,000–5,000-meter peaks, Svaneti is the highest inhabited area in the Caucasus. Four of the 10 highest peaks of the Caucasus are located in the region, including the mighty Mount Shkhara (5,068 meters or 17,059 feet), the highest mountain in Georgia.
- Check in and enjoy dinner at the Hotel Tetnuldi, with fantastic, panoramic views of the Caucasus Mountains.

![Image of towers and landscape in Svaneti]

**Day 5: September 23**

- Sightseeing tour of Mestia and excursion to the Museum for History and Ethnography of Mestia, the largest museum in Svaneti. Among the greatest sights at the museum are the old New Testament Gospels from the 9th to the 13th century, as well as beautiful icons and crosses.
- Visit the Khergiani Museum, dedicated to the Svan mountain climbing legend Mikheil Khergiani (1932-1969) known as the “mountain tiger” for his ability to climb difficult mountains. He was one of the world's greatest climbers, frequently winning big mountain climbing competitions.
- Travel by cable car to the Restaurant Zuruldi, located at the top of Mt. Zuruldi, for lunch with an incredible view.
- Visit the historical Svan dwelling of the Margiani family. The wealthy Margiani family owned eight towers, of which four remain. Visitors can climb to the top of one of the towers for a panoramic, unforgettable view of the Svaneti region.
- Dinner at the Restaurant Bengurani.

**Day 6: September 24**

- Tour the neighboring village of Latali and see medieval frescoes at Matskhvarishi Church.
- Travel to the small, beautiful mountain town of Becho. Visit historical dwellings and meet local farmers producing artisanal honey and wheat.
- Visit AFG’s first and only rehabilitation center and home care service in Svaneti for people with disabilities.
• Dinner and a cooking lesson at the Grand Hotel Ushba. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 7: September 25

• Journey to Ushguli by special 4 WD car. Ushguli is one of the most beautiful places in Georgia and has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. Ushguli is the joint name of four small villages located 2,200 meters above sea level – the highest inhabited villages in Europe. Ushguli is renowned for its historical stone tower dwellings, also used as guard towers. The most well-known towers in the settlement are the residential towers of Tamar the Great, Queen of Georgia from 1184 to 1213. Visitors can climb to the top of one of the towers.
• Visit Ushguli Ethnographic Museum, a beautiful and informative museum located in one of the oldest standing buildings in Ushguli.
• Lunch in the village of Ushguli at Café Koshki, focused on Svan cuisine.
• Visit Lamaria Monastery, which offers stunning views of Mount Shkhara (pictured below).

Day 8: September 26

• Travel back to Tbilisi. Dinner at the well-known restaurant Azarphesha, with musical accompaniment of Georgian polyphonic singers.
Day 9: September 27

- Travel to Kakheti, Georgia’s largest wine region. Besides being the premier wine-producing area of Georgia, Kakheti is also rich in history, with many beautiful churches, castles and mansions.
- Visit the historic Bodbe Convent. Built as a monastery in the ninth century and remodeled in the 17th century, Bodbe now functions as a nunnery and is one of the major pilgrimage sites in Georgia due to its association with St. Nino, the fourth-century female evangelist whose relics are enshrined there.
- Continue to the eastern region of Kakheti and visit the stunning 18th century hilltop town of Signaghi, known as the “town of love”. It is one of the country’s smallest towns, with a population of 2,146.
- Lunch at Pheasant’s Tears restaurant, winery and art gallery, followed by a short walking tour through the streets of Signaghi.
• Explore Tsinandali Estate, the home of 19th-century aristocrat and poet Alexander Chavchavadze. At the estate we will have a chance to visit the museum, park and taste a variety of Georgian wines.
• Dinner and overnight at Hotel Chateau Mere, located in a stone castle in the Telavi, in the Alazani Valley.

Day 10: September 28
• Travel to Ikalto. Visit the monastic complex of Ikalto, founded by Assyrian monks in the late sixth century. Only three churches have been preserved from the complex. Despite considerable reconstruction, the remains of the academy and the refectory survive, among other ruins of the monastery. It is said that the famous twelfth-century Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli studied here.
• Visit Alaverdi Monastery and its 1,000-year-old wine cellar. This sixth-century facility has a wonderful history, and the few monks still live there keep the monastery’s tradition of winemaking alive. Visitors enjoy a short historical presentation, and, of course, an opportunity to taste the liquid fruit of the monk’s labors.

Day 11: September 29
• Travel to Tbilisi via the splendid Gombori Pass, one of the most beautiful roads in Georgia.
• In Tbilisi, visit the AFG-supported College of Decorative Gardening and Ecology, the first landscaping college in Georgia.
• Lunch in Tbilisi, followed by free time to explore and shop.
• Farewell dinner at the Funicular Restaurant with spectacular and breathtaking views of the city.

Day 12: September 30
Pick up and transportation provided to Tbilisi International Airport.

Price structure

Tour package price is based per person (double/twin room accommodation) and varies based on group size:
• 5-6 people in tour group: USD $2,970 per person
• 7-8 people in tour group: USD $2,755 per person
• 9-10 people in tour group: USD $2,500 per person
• 11-12 people in tour group: USD $2,255 per person

**Single room accommodation:** Add USD $525 per person

**Included in tour package:**
- Transportation to and from Tbilisi International Airport
- Transportation to all tour destinations by comfortable, air-conditioned coach bus
- 4WD vehicles for trips to Ushguli
- English-speaking guide service according to program
- 11 lunches
- 11 dinners with wine as per program
- 2 wine tastings
- 7 breakfasts and overnights at luxury hotel in Tbilisi (Hotel Tiflis Palace or similar)
- 2 breakfasts and overnights at luxury hotel in Telavi area (Chateau Mere or similar)
- 4 breakfasts and overnights at boutique hotel in Mestia (Hotel Tetnuldi or similar)
- Guide & driver’s accommodation outside Tbilisi
- Mineral water bottles
- Entrance fees to all museums and sites as per program
- Local taxes

**Not included:**
- Air travel
- Travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages except wine as described in the program

**How to book**

To reserve your spot on the September 2019 tour, contact Marusya Chavchavadze at marusya@afgeorgia.org. Please note:

- A $500 deposit must be submitted by **May 1, 2019** to reserve your space.
- Full payment for the tour is due by **June 1, 2019**.
- **Trip Cancellation/ Interruption and Medical Evacuation Insurances** are required for this trip.
- Should you need to cancel your reservation, the cost structure is as follows:
  - Cancellation before July 1, 2019……………..Forfeiture of 50% of tour cost
  - Cancellation after July 1, 2019 ………………..Forfeiture of 100% of tour cost (no refund)