

14-DAY ADVENTURE

TRANSCAUCASIAN TRAIL

Georgia

Georgia and Armenia are the lesser known alpine paradise. Kept secret by those who have the privilege of exploring them. From rugged, snow capped peaks to rolling meadows, vibrant traditions to gentle natured locals it's a miracle this region is still so undiscovered. In recent years, a small group of enthusiastic locals have been creating a trek that takes in breathtaking panoramas, visits hidden delights and celebrates the Caucasian culture. They have named it the Transcaucasian Trail.

We venture into some of the beautiful landscapes this trail has to offer. Beginning in Armenia we discover the sweeping passes and abundant nature of Dilijan National Park, taking in grand monasteries and scenic viewpoints as we trek from point to point. We then cross into Georgia, visiting the ancient sulphur baths in Tbilisi old town before journeying up into the Caucasus mountains. Here we explore the untamed landscape of the Kazbegi region, marvelling at the deep valleys etched into the sides of this mountainous wilderness.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Follow the picturesque route of the little-known Transcaucasian Trail
- Visit ancient monasteries standing proud along the trail
- Cross from Armenia to Georgia, taking in the incredible culture of both countries
- Relax your tired muscles in the soothing waters of the Tbilisi Sulphur Baths



ITINERARY

DAY 1

WELCOME TO YEREVAN

Welcome to Armenia! Upon arrival at Zvartnots international airport, we will be met by our guide and driver and transferred to our hotel. We will then have the rest of the day at our own leisure.

Accommodation: **Hotel**

DAY 2

YEREVAN

After having breakfast at the hotel, we will start this morning with a city tour of Yerevan. During tour, we will visit The Republic Square, where we will see the stone carpet, hiding 3000 years worth of history and the architectural prowess of the Opera and Ballet Theatre, before admiring the enchanting panorama of Yerevan and Mount Ararat from the top of Cascade Monument. Afterwards we'll visit the treasury of the Armenian manuscripts - Matenadaran. Founded in 1959, Matenadaran has one of the biggest collections of ancient manuscripts in Armenia. We make a stop at Tsitsernakaberd Memorial, dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide before ending the day with a visit to a local Duduk master. Duduk is a traditional Armenian woodwind instrument known for its impressive sound. We will learn about the history of duduk and enjoy the performance whilst indulging in a coffee in the master's garden. Our pre-trek briefing will then be held this evening at the hotel.

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included: **Breakfast**

DAY 3

KHACHARDZHAN - LAKE GOSH

After having breakfast at the hotel, we will set off to the enchanting town of Dilijan, a picturesque settlement in the Tavush Province of Armenia, nestled in the northeastern part of the country. It is often referred to as the "Little Switzerland" of Armenia due to its stunning landscapes, lush forests, and fresh mountain air. After having a short exploration of the town, we will be transferred to Khachardzan village from where our trail begins. Khachardzan is known for its traditional Armenian architecture, charming rural atmosphere, and warm hospitality. From Khachardzan, we embark on a journey through the National Park towards Lake Gosh, a beautiful alpine lake nestled amidst the mountains. The crystal-clear waters and serene atmosphere of the lake provide the perfect backdrop for tonight's camping spot, in the heart of Armenia's wilderness.

Hiking time: **5 hours**

Ascent: **600 m**

Accommodation: **Camping**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 4

LAKE GOSH - GOSHAVANK - LAKE PARZ

After having breakfast, we will set out on the woodland trail from Lake Gosh to Lake Parz. On our way we will visit the majestic Goshavank Monastery, nestled in a picturesque setting, surrounded by lush forests and rolling hills. Goshavank is a medieval monastery dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries. It's intricate stone carvings, cross-stones (khachkars) and architectural elements are all characteristic of religious Armenian architecture. The trail concludes at Lake Parz, another beautiful alpine lake located within Dilijan National Park. From here we can either walk a further 3 kms to get to our camp or we will be collected and transferred in SUV vehicles. Tonight we camp below the tree canopy, in a clearing in the forest.

Hiking time: **5 hours**
Descent: **300 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 5

LAKE PARZ - DILIJAN

Today we embark on a scenic journey through the forested trails of Dilijan National Park towards the town of Dilijan. Along the trail, we will be treated to breathtaking views of the surrounding forests, mountain ranges, and meandering streams. Dilijan National Park is home to diverse flora and fauna, including oak, beech, and pine trees, as well as various species of birds and wildlife. Known locally as the Gyolort, we have the opportunity to see an incredible view of a huge alpine meadow blanketed with a rainbow of flowers, bursting into bloom. Here we take time to immerse ourselves in the tranquil beauty of Armenia's wilderness. Upon reaching Dilijan, we visit a local family and are given a masterclass in Tolma - creating a traditional Armenian meal.

Hiking time: **4 hours**
Descent: **500 m**
Accommodation: **Hotel**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 6

JUKHTAKVANK MONASTERY - HAGHARTSIN MONASTERY

After a hearty breakfast, we will be transferred to Jukhtakvank Monastery. Jukhtakvank, meaning "Twin Sisters Monastery," consists of two churches dating back to the 12th century. From here, we make our way through scenic, forested trails to Haghartsin Monastery. Haghartsin is a medieval Armenian monastery located in a secluded valley. Dating back to the 10th century, Haghartsin monastery is renowned for its architectural beauty, intricate stone carvings, and spiritual significance. After the hike we will be treated to some Gata (Armenian sweet pie) and watch as the locals craft it into a delicacy.

Hiking time: **7 hours**
Ascent: **700 m**
Accommodation: **Camping**
Meals included:
Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 7

HAGHARTSIN – HOVK – APAKEQAR

After a delicious breakfast, we will be transferred to Hovk village to start today's trekking. As we ascend from the village, we are treated to breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. The trail winds through verdant forests, meadows adorned with wildflowers, and rocky terrain, offering a diverse range of landscapes to explore. The highlight of the trail is reaching the summit of Apakeqar Mount. This majestic peak offers panoramic views of the Tavush Province and the surrounding mountains. We will marvel at the stunning vistas and take in the fresh mountain air from this vantage point. We then descend the mount to Hovk Village, where we'll visit a local family to enjoy a cup of tea brewed with locally harvested herbs selected by our host. This evening we are free to sample some of the local restaurants in Dilijan for our evening meal.

Hiking time: **6 hours**

Descent: **500 m**

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included: **Breakfast / Lunch**

DAY 8

DILIJAN – TBILISI

Today we cross the Armenia-Georgia border in Sadakhlo. At the border we will be greeted by our local Georgian guide and driver. We will then transfer to the capital – Tbilisi. Here we will have the opportunity to soothe our aching muscles in the ancient Sulphur Baths. These therapeutic waters have been soothing visitors for centuries. We will immerse ourselves in the rejuvenating waters of these iconic bathhouses, nestled amidst the historic charm of Georgia's capital city. We then have the rest of the day at our own leisure.

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included: **Breakfast**

DAY 9

FREE DAY IN TBILISI

Today we have the whole day to spend at our leisure in Tbilisi. Explore the enchanting Old Town, a maze of cobblestone streets filled with charming houses and hidden courtyards, visit the Georgian National Museum with its impressive exhibits or sample some Khakali from one of the many delectable restaurants.

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included: **Breakfast**

DAY 10

ANANURI – GUDAURI – STEPANTSMINDA

This morning, we will embark on a journey northward along the renowned Georgian Military Highway. Our first stop will be at the magnificent Ananuri Fortress, standing proud on the banks of the Aragvi River. At the centre of the fortress is a fortified 17th century church, adorned with captivating carvings influenced by Persian and pagan art. Our next stop will be at the famous Gudauri view-point. Surrounded by the towering Caucasus Mountains, we will be captivated by the awe-inspiring panoramas and embrace the thrill of the sheer drop below. We will then continue our journey to Stepantsminda, where we will take a short hike through the forest to the Gergeti Trinity Church, perched dramatically on a hilltop against the majestic Mount Kazbek backdrop. Returning to the town, we have time to explore before settling into our hotel for the evening.

Hiking time: **3 hours**

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 11

JUTA

Today, we drive to the village Juta, taking in the amazing valleys, torrenting rivers and alpine meadows as we drive through. On arrival at Juta, we set off on our hiking trail which leads to the majestic Chaukhi Mountains that are located on the main ridge of Caucasus, standing 3,688 meters above sea level. We continue our trekking route up to the turquoise waters of Chaukhi Lake, a smattering of rocks thrown haphazardly across the water. We immerse ourselves in this stunning panorama before returning to Stepantsminda.

Hiking time: **3 hours**

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 12

TRUSO VALLEY

The Truso Valley is a spectacular sight. Here, at the source of the Tergi River, the minerals in the water create vibrant explosions of white and yellow that melt into the crystal clear waters, painting an enchanting picture across the valley floor. We trek along the river bank and up to Kasari Canyon and the abandoned village of Ketrisi. Here, we discover the remains of the medieval Zakagori Fortress. We then stop for a break by the breathtaking Truso Lake. Revived from our rest, we head deeper into the jagged peaked mountains before looping back to our vehicle and making the return journey to Stepantsminda.

Hiking time: **5 hours**

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 13

GVELETI WATERFALLS

Before leaving the Kazbegi region, we take a refreshing morning hike to the glistening curtain of Gveleti Waterfall. This hiking route is far from difficult and doesn't take much more than an hour, but the scintillating view of the cascading water makes it definitely worth a visit. In the afternoon, we hop back into our transfer vehicle and drive back to Tbilisi, where we have the rest of the day at our leisure.

Hiking time: **1 hour**

Accommodation: **Hotel**

Meals included:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

DAY 14

DEPARTURE

Depending on your flight time, you may have a chance to explore Tbilisi some more before we transfer you to the airport for your return flight.

Meals included: **Breakfast**

TRIP INFORMATION

DIFFICULTY

This adventure is of **moderate difficulty**. The terrain can be steep and rocky and you will be hiking for 4 days consecutively. In some months the weather can be very hot and the sun intense, which adds to the difficulty of the hiking. The maximum ascent in a single day will be 1400m. You should be in good physical condition with recent experience of hiking for several days in row with over 1000m of ascent and descent in a day. To ask about your suitability for this trip and what you can do to prepare please feel free to give us a call.

FOOD & DRINK

This adventure in the Caucasus is **full board whilst trekking**. The region's gastronomy consists of rich pastries, meats and cheeses, eaten alongside fresh, vegetable salads. A continental style breakfast is served at your hotel each morning and whilst camping you will be provided with cereals, cheeses, cold meats and fruit along with plenty of tea and coffee. Each day whilst trekking you will receive a picnic lunch for you to carry in your daypack. Our lunches are all made with fresh local produce and will include fruit, vegetables, cold meats, cheese and lovely fresh bread. Evening meals will be taken at the hotel or in a mess tent whilst camping. There will be a range of starters, main courses and desserts for you to choose from at the hotels and you will get to try local delicacies such as Gata, Khakali and Chirbuli. Whilst camping, we will provide a three course meal each evening using locally sourced, fresh ingredients. In Tbilisi, Yerevan and Dilijan, your evening meal isn't included. This is an opportunity to head into one of the local restaurants and sample the locals favourites.

During the trip you will be given 2 bottles of water per day. Any other drinks, including additional water, are your own responsibility. You may wish to carry a water purification system such as a filter or tablets to treat water from natural springs or villages whilst trekking. There are plenty of places to refill your water bottles both in towns and in remote mountain areas, your guide will advise you when and where to refill. Please be aware that tap water in Armenia and Georgia may not be safe to drink, so you may wish to bring a filter/purification tablets to treat this also.

If you have special dietary requirements please inform us as soon as possible after booking your trip. We will work with you to ensure your needs are met.

ACCOMMODATION

On this trip we will stay in **hotels** for 10 of the nights. The hotels will be of 4 star standard with double or twin rooms and private bathrooms. Single rooms can be arranged on request and subject to availability.

On the other 3 nights we will be camping in the Dilijan National Park. We provide a high quality 3 man tent per 2 people to allow for maximum space and comfort. We will also provide a sleeping mat per person and a dining tent for use at meal times and as a communal area. We will be camping in wild spots with no facilities, so on these nights don't expect to be able to get a shower. The toilet situation whilst wild camping will be a case of finding somewhere hidden, away from camp or the path and digging a hole. Please remember to bring toilet roll and a lighter to burn it after use.

LUGGAGE

During the trek, your luggage will be transported by an all-terrain vehicle. You should bring two bags with you, a large 80-100 litre duffel bag and a smaller 30-50 litre daypack. Your duffel bag will be transported by the vehicle each day and made available for you at your accommodation each afternoon once the vehicles have arrived. Your daypack will stay with you at all times and should be used to carry spare clothing, water, suncream, lunch etc. A flexible duffel bag or backpack is best for your main luggage.

HOW DO I GET THERE?

You will need to arrive at Zvartnots International Airport (EVN) in Yerevan on Day 1 of your itinerary and fly out from Tbilisi on Day 14. If you would prefer to arrive a few days earlier, we would be happy to book additional hotel accommodation for you on request.

In order to reach Yerevan from the UK, it is necessary to have a stopover in Europe. For those travelling from the UK, Wizz Air and Pegasus offer flights from London and Manchester via Vienna or Istanbul. Air France offer flights from Birmingham via Paris. From Scotland, you will need to fly via London.

From the US, Delta and Air France offer flights from New York, Miami, Los Angeles and Atlanta via Paris. From Dallas the flights with the least stop overs are with Qatar going via Doha.

When you arrive in Yerevan, please look out for our guide and driver in the arrivals area, they will be holding a large "KANDOO ADVENTURES" sign.

PRE-TREK BRIEFING

A pre-trek briefing will be held for this trip at 6pm on Day 2 of the trip. Your guide will meet you in the hotel reception area for this briefing.

BUDGET & CHANGE

The currency in Armenia is Armenian Dram (AMD) and it's symbol is ₼. In Georgia, the currency is the Georgian Lari (GEL) and it's sign is ₾. For the latest exchange rates please see www.xe.com.

The Armenian Dram is an open currency so you will be able to exchange some money before you leave your home country and take it with you. Georgia has a closed currency which means Lari cannot be imported or exported from the country. You can exchange currency at the airport, banks, exchange offices, or with currency exchangers. However, the latter isn't recommended as some exchangers will provide you with counterfeit money. US Dollars and Euros are the easiest currencies to exchange. The National Bank of Georgia and TBC bank are considered to be credible banks to exchange your money with. Credit and debit cards are widely accepted at restaurants and larger shops in the big cities. If you are planning to carry a credit card for emergencies, please inform your card provider in advance. ATMs are also available in the bigger cities to withdraw cash, if you have a pre-paid card such as Monzo or Revolut this can often be done without exchange charges.

The only way to pay for things in the smaller towns and villages is in cash. Cards are not accepted in these areas so you will need to carry enough cash for snacks, drinks and any personal expenses.

The average cost of a three course meal is around ₼8000-12000 / ₾60-80 (\$20-30). A taxi ride will generally start at ₼300 / ₾2 (\$0.75) whereas a one way bus ticket for a 10 minute journey will be around ₼60 / ₾0.4 (\$0.15). It is fairly cheap to eat out and travel compared to Western standards and if you are wanting to buy some sulguni cheese or churchellato take home then these generally cost anywhere between ₼2,000-40,000 / ₾15-270 (\$5-\$100) for gifts that will pack into your main bag. Don't forget you will also need to budget for drinks too. A bottle of water might cost you \$1 to \$2, while a local beer can be around \$2 to \$4. We would recommend a budget of \$300 for your time in Armenia and Georgia.

TIPS

Tipping when you are satisfied with the service you have received is customary in Georgia/Armenia. However, it is not mandatory and should be left to the discretion of each individual. We recommend the following tips per person per day:

- ₼13/₾1950 (\$5) - guides
- ₼8/₾1170 (\$3) - drivers

These should be paid in the local currency where possible.

FORMALITIES & HEALTH

PASSPORT

Please double check that your passport is valid for 6 months beyond the date of arrival in Georgia. We recommend that you take a photocopy of your passport and keep it separate from the original, and this will be useful if the original is lost while you are travelling.

VISA

Travelling to Georgia is visa free for up to one year, for UK and US citizens. For other nationalities a visa may be required. Please check this with your embassy.

VACCINATIONS

There are no specific health risks in Georgia. However, you should ensure that your routine vaccinations and boosters are up to date, such as tetanus and MMR.

INSURANCE

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully and adequately insured for the duration of your trip. Please ensure that all activities, excursions and destinations in your itinerary are included in your travel insurance policy, in addition to your regular cover for cancellation and medical expenses. If you are climbing Mount Kazbek, you will need to be covered for trekking up to 5100m and using fixed ropes. We ask that you keep a copy of your policy summary (containing policy number and the emergency contact number for your insurer) in your day sack at all times, so that we can access this information should we need to contact the insurer on your behalf.

MEDICATION

Please note that Georgia has a very strict anti-drugs policy. This can also cover prescription and non-prescription medicines commonly available in the UK and US. For example, non-prescription medicines containing codeine are illegal.

If you need to bring prescription medication with you to Georgia, please also bring your signed Doctor's prescription and the original packaging for the medicine.

EQUIPMENT & CLOTHING

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED BY KANDOO ADVENTURES

- 3 man tent per 2 people
- Sleeping mat
- Dining tent and cooking utensils

CLOTHING TO BRING

HEADGEAR

- Sun hat – preferably wide-brimmed for protection
- Sunglasses – high UV protection
- Neck gaiter or scarf
- Warm beanie style hat – fleece or wool

UPPER BODY

- Gloves – warm fleece or wool gloves
- Short sleeve shirt/t-shirt – lightweight, moisture wicking (x2)
- Long-sleeve shirt/t-shirt – light/medium weight, moisture wicking (x2)
- Fleece or soft shell jacket
- Lightweight insulated jacket – down or primaloft
- Water/windproof hard shell outer jacket
- Swimming costume

LEGS

- Trekking shorts
- Trekking trousers – lightweight – convertible trousers work well
- Wind and waterproof over trousers (Gore-Tex or similar)
- Gaiters
- Swimming shorts

FEET

- Trekking boots – with good ankle support
- Training shoes or sandals – to wear in the accommodation in the evening
- Light-weight trekking socks (x3 pairs)
- Breathable, high-wicking liner socks (x2 pairs)

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- Sleeping bag
- 80-100L duffel bag
- 30-40L rucksack with chest strap and waterproof cover – to carry water, packed lunch and personal items each day
- Trekking poles
- Water bottle or hydration bag – must be able to carry 2.0L of water
- Drybags – provide additional waterproofing for the kit in your rucksack
- Individual plastic tub and cutlery – for your picnic lunch
- Headlamp (plus extra batteries)
- Water filtration system or purification tablets
- Towel

OTHER ACCESSORIES

- Sunscreen and lip balm (high SPF)
- Toiletries, including wet wipes, after sun and hand sanitiser
- Camera and spare batteries
- Personal medication and first aid kit
- Personal snacks and energy bars – dried fruit and nuts are also good
- Microfibre towel
- Ear plugs, if you are a light sleeper

HOW TO BOOK THIS TRIP

1 CHOOSE YOUR DATE AND CHECK AVAILABILITY

A full list of available dates can be found on our website.

2 CONTACT US

Contact us by phone, email or through our website. We will answer any questions you may have and send you a personalized itinerary and quote.

3 COMPLETE BOOKING AND PAYMENT

When you are ready to book, we will send you a link to our online booking forms and participation agreements. We accept all major credit and debit cards and require a low 20% deposit to secure your place.

