

## GEORGIA

### Hiking and Culture In A Land of Beauty and Intrigue

June 17, 2023 – July 2, 2023 (trip# 2305)



Gergeti Trinity Church (Photo by [Jakub Gorajek](#) on [Unsplash](#))

## Overview

Step back in time to join us for a wonderful sixteen-day journey to the undiscovered scenic and culturally interesting paradise of the Caucasus Mountains and the country of Georgia. We will pass medieval towers, churches, and traditional mountain villages as we walk through valleys, across mountain pastures, and traverse mountain ridges with towering peaks all around us. This trip is a mixture of hiking and culture. We will have 8 hiking days, including a 5-day assisted trek, where we only need to carry daypacks, as our luggage will be transported and we stay in small village guesthouses. The other 6 days will be filled with fascinating cultural exploration. We will be accompanied by an English speaking local guide throughout the trip.

Georgia, a former Soviet republic, is a small country (about the size of Ireland) which is located at the strategically important intersection of Europe and Asia. It is bounded to the west by the Black Sea, to the north by Russia, to the south by Turkey and Armenia, and to the east by Azerbaijan. The country's dominant feature is the High Caucasus range which forms its northern border. It is a spectacular and rugged country, with an ancient and often tumultuous history. It is one of the world's oldest Christian nations. The long history and connection to religion is reflected in its many ancient Georgian Orthodox churches and remote mountain villages. Many people have left their mark as seen in the architecture, monasteries, cathedrals, fortresses and cave-cities throughout the country.



Georgia's Place in Europe



### **Trip Difficulty**

This trip is rated [Vigorous/Strenuous](#). Excluding breaks, we will usually hike from five to seven hours per day, between 8 and 15 miles, with an average elevation gain of about 2500 feet. The terrain is rugged and steep in places, and requires agility. Some of the hiking will be at higher elevations where the air will be thinner. One day could be as long as twelve hours. We will hike at a moderate pace, which will permit time for photos and rest breaks. Participants should be in excellent shape and be able to hike for most of the day. We will carry daypacks and lunch each day. Our luggage will be transported for us during our 5-day trek. Note that if the road is impassable on the first day of our trek, we will need to carry what we need for one night and be without our luggage that one night.

### **Itinerary Summary**



*Hiking near Ifrari*

Our traveling arrangements will facilitate a unique exposure to this remarkable area:

- Extensive exploration on foot to fully explore and immerse ourselves in the region's splendor. We will be hiking 8 to 15 miles for eight days at a moderate pace. Daily elevation gains go from about 1,300' to ~3600'.
- Small group travel - this allows us to fully experience the landscape and its treasures, enjoy hassle-free travel arrangements, stay in small, local hotels and guesthouses and dine in intimate village restaurants.

Our adventure begins in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. After a guided tour of this beautiful city, we drive to Mtskheta, an ancient capital and religious center, and into Stepantsminda where we will hike to our first peak, Tetu, at 10,530 feet. The next four days we will explore cave towns, fortresses, monasteries, a spa town famous for its mineral water, waterfalls, and the Prometheus Grotto. We will be immersed in local culture with traditional hospitality and meals in historic authentic villages. We then travel to the Upper Svaneti region where we will begin our 5 day assisted trek, crossing passes, viewing glaciers and high peaks, and walking to remote villages. We will stay in Ushguli (a UNESCO heritage site), the highest permanently settled village in Europe, where time has stopped and centuries old towers look out to Georgia's highest summit, Shkhara (17,063 ft). At the completion of our trek, we will return to Tbilisi before heading home.

## Trip Details



Map of Georgia showing some of our sites, hikes and trekking route

## Itinerary



The itinerary below describes our daily plans. The following abbreviations are used to indicate meals provided by the trip: B = breakfast, L= Lunch, D = dinner. Time is hiking time only, excluding all breaks. Elevation gain is listed as ascent/descent in feet. Lunches included while hiking will be picnic style.

**Day 0 (Friday June 16, 2023):**

Fly from the US.

**Day 1 (Saturday June 17, 2023):**

Arrive in Tbilisi, Georgia. We will meet in the late afternoon at the hotel and then have a welcome dinner (overnight in a hotel in Tbilisi). (D)

**Day 2 (Sunday June 18, 2023):**

Today we will get a guided tour of Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. We will wander in the old districts of the city, which are structured like terraces, and explore the narrow streets to enjoy the colorful houses, patterned balconies, and wonderful samples of modern architecture. We will start our tour from the Metekhi church (13<sup>th</sup> century) facing magnificent views over old Tbilisi. A stroll along winding little streets will take us to the main sights of the city. Afterwards we take a cable car up to the ancient Narikala fortress (4<sup>th</sup> century) to enjoy panoramic views of the entire city and then walk down to the historical domed sulphur bath area. Later we will visit the Georgian State museum before we return to our hotel in Tbilisi. Lunch and dinner are on your own.

(B)



*Tbilisi*

**Day 3 (Monday June 19, 2023):**

We drive to Mtskheta, the ancient capital and religious center of Georgia where we visit its historical places including the Jvari Monastery (6<sup>th</sup> century) and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11<sup>th</sup> century) where the Robe of Christ is buried. Both are UNESCO World Heritage sites. We then drive up the Georgian military highway and on the way may visit the Ananuri architectural

complex (17 century). The carvings on the churches there are some of the best samples of Georgian art. The drive through the high Caucasus Mountains is very scenic. We continue the drive along the Tergi River to bring us to Stepantsminda, which is the main town in the region. From Stepantsminda we will walk up (2.5 miles, 1300'/1300', 2.5 hours) to Gergeti Trinity Church located at 7100 ft above sea level. Weather permitting we may catch a glimpse of one of the highest glaciers in the Caucasus – Mt. Kazbegi at 16,600 ft.

Dinner and overnight at a hotel in Stepantsminda.

(B, L, D)



*Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta*

#### **Day 4 (Tuesday June 20, 2023):**

Today we will hike to our first peak – Mt Tetu, at 10,500 ft. (10 miles, 3600'/3600', 7-8 hours). If we have good weather, we may see Mt. Kazbegi and many other snow capped mountains of the Great Caucasus chain. After the hike, we will walk back to the village and drive to Stepantsminda.

Dinner and overnight at a hotel in Stepantsminda.

(B, L, D)

**Day 5 (Wednesday June 21, 2023):**

We drive to Gori in the heart of the Kartli region where the Great Silk Road once passed. We will visit the Uplistsikhe Cave Town (1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC), an old and interesting complex with dwelling quarters, wine cellars, bakeries, a three-nave basilica church hewn out in the rock, and a theatre. Gori is the birthplace of Stalin and we will visit his house and museum. We continue driving to Akhaltsikhe where we have dinner and overnight at a guesthouse.

(B, D)

**Day 6 (Thursday June 22, 2023):**

Today we will visit one of the cultural highlights of Georgia, the magnificent cave town of Vardzia. The complex once stretched over 1500 ft and consisted of 3000 caves. It is one of the best examples of Georgia's renaissance, with a church hewn out in the rock and amazing 12<sup>th</sup> century frescos. The complex also includes dwelling, churches, refectories, and wine cellars. On the way to Vardzia we will stop for photos of the impressive Khertvisi fortress. We return to Akhaltsikhe to visit the 9<sup>th</sup> century castle and fortress complex of Rabat before dinner and overnight at our guesthouse.

(B, L, D)





*Vardzia*

**Day 7 (Friday June 23, 2023):**

Our travels today take us to Kutaisi via the spa town of Borjomi, a popular resort and center of a nature reserve with a dense forest harboring hundreds of varieties of plant and animal species. The town is also famous for its mineral water. In Kutaisi we will visit the Gelati monastery and the 12<sup>th</sup> century academy which is a UNESCO site. Lunch is on your own.

We will overnight at a family hotel in Kutaisi.

(B, D)

**Day 8 (Saturday June 24, 2023):**

Today we will first drive to Tskaltubo and visit the Prometheus grotto with its beautiful stalactites and stalagmites. After our visit, we will drive to Svaneti, a region known for its high peaks. Lunch is on your own.

Dinner and overnight at a guesthouse in Becho.

(B, D)



**Day 9 (Sunday June 25, 2023):**

In the morning, we walk from the guesthouse through the woods to the foot of Mt. Ushba (15,500 ft) that overlooks the Svaneti region. After crossing a deep forest, we continue to some waterfalls before returning to Becho for a drive to Mestia – the center of the Upper Svaneti region. (12.4 miles, 3450'/3450', 6-7 hours).

Dinner and overnight at a family hotel in Mestia.

(B, L, D)



*Ushba Waterfall*

**Day 10 (Monday June 26, 2023):**

In the morning, we drive to the village of Mulakhi where we start our 5-day trek. We will walk on the slopes of Mt Tetnuld, reaching an altitude of 9200 ft, with beautiful views of the Chaneri glacier, Mt. Ushba, and the Svaneti range with its highest peak of Mt. Laila (13,200 ft). We will cross the Ugvir Pass (8100 ft) and then walk to the remote village of Adishi (6560 ft) where even in summer it is sometimes not possible to reach by 4WD vehicles. Only 5-6 families live in the village, and they will host us in their houses with traditional Svanetian hospitality and food. (9.3 miles, 3050'/1250', 5 hours)

Dinner and overnight in basic shared facilities at a guesthouse in Adishi.

Note that if the road is impassable, we will take what we need in our packs in the morning for one night tonight, and our luggage will rejoin us tomorrow night.

(B, L, D)

**Day 11 (Tuesday June 27, 2023):**

Today is one of the most significant days of the journey. We begin walking in the early hours of the morning, following the Adishura River where we have to make our way across the water for a few minutes on horseback. After several minutes, the Adishi glacier will come into site, with its huge collection of ice at Mt Tetnuli (15,750 ft). We will ascend to Chkhutnieri Pass at 8950 ft before descending to the village of Iprari. (10.6 miles, 2500'/3100', 6-7 hours)

Dinner and overnight in basic shared facilities at a guesthouse in Iprari.

(B, L, D)



*Adishi Glacier*

**Day 12 (Wednesday June 28, 2023):**

In the morning we will set our path to the village of Ushguli. On the way we will pass an ancient village with several towers, and then take a forest path. We will walk across winding fields, where the entire length of the snow-covered Mt Tetnuli is visible. Finally we will arrive at



Ushguli, a UNESCO world heritage site, the highest permanently settled village in Europe. Here time has stopped and centuries-old towers look out to Georgia's highest summit, Mt Shkhara (17,060 ft). (8.1 miles, 2500'/1640', 4-5 hours)

Dinner and overnight in basic shared facilities at a guesthouse in Ushguli.

(B, L, D)

**Day 13 (Thursday June 29, 2023):**

We start the morning with a walk to the foot of Mt. Shkhara and visit the Lamaria church. We walk along the beautiful Enguri River, which will eventually lead to its origin at the Shkhara Glacier. Afterwards we return to Ushguli. (11.8 miles, 1800'/1800', 5 hours)

Dinner and overnight in basic shared facilities at a guesthouse in Ushguli.

(B, L, D)



*Ushguli*

**Day 14 (Friday June 30, 2023):**

Today's hike will be one of the most difficult, but also, the most incredible, of our trek. From Ushguli we take a narrow path along the Grovashi Ridge towards Latipari Pass (9800 ft), where

we will see breathtaking mountain lakes. Upper and Lower Svaneti are visible from here, as well as the following peaks of the Caucasus: Ushba, Tetnaldi, Shkhara, and Jangha. We will hike towards the village of Chvelpi on a dirt path where we will get transportation to Lentekhi. (15.0 miles, 3280'/6000', 11-12 hours)

Dinner and overnight in basic shared facilities at a guesthouse in Lentekhi.

(B, L, D)

### **Day 15 (Saturday July 1, 2023):**

In the morning, we start our six-hour drive to Tbilisi where we have free time in the city for the late afternoon and evening. We will meet at the hotel and then go out for a farewell dinner.

Lunch is on your own.

Overnight at a hotel in Tbilisi

(B, D)

### **Day 16 (Sunday July 2, 2023):**

Our trip ends at the hotel after breakfast. We will make our way on our own to the Tbilisi Airport and home, or possibly other destinations if you wish to extend your trip...

(B)

## **Hiking Summary**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Hike</b>	<b>Miles</b>	<b>Ascent</b>	<b>Descent</b>	<b>Walking Time</b>
3	Gergeti Church	2.5	1300'	1300'	2.5 hours
4	Mt Tetu	10.0	3600'	3600'	7-8 hours
5	none	--	--	--	--
6	none	--	--	--	--
7	none	--	--	--	--
8	none	--	--	--	--
9	Mt. Ushba	12.4	3450'	3450'	6-7 hours
10	Trek Day 1	9.3	3050'	1250'	5 hours
11	Trek Day 2	10.6	2500'	3100'	6-7 hours
12	Trek Day 3	8.1	2500'	1640'	4-5 hours



13	Trek Day 4	11.8	1800'	1800'	5 hours
14	Trek Day 5	15.0	3280'	6000'	11-12 hours

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE AND EXPECTATIONS

You should have a keen interest in cultural explorations and enjoy moderate - strenuous hiking. On an average day we will walk for 5-8 hours and cover 8-15 miles. Daily elevation gain ranges from 1,250' – to 3,600'. You need to be prepared to commit yourself to keeping in shape between the time you sign up for this trip to the time you depart on it.

You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, you will have a great time.

This trip has a moderate-strenuous trek and day-hikes geared towards the experienced hiker and outdoor traveler. We will be hiking for 8 days. Some days will be lengthy with significant elevation gains; others will be shorter and easier. You should have at least intermediate to advanced hiking skills and be able to hike at least 10 miles every day, with moderate elevation gains, while carrying everything you need for 2 days as well as enough equipment to keep you safe in the event of bad weather or injury.



Relaxing together after a great day on the trail

When you participate in this activity, you should be in proper condition for the challenges outlined in this prospectus and equipped with appropriate gear. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety. Prior to your acceptance as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. We may also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities. Please do not be offended by our questions.

While the itinerary in this prospectus is what the leaders have planned at the time of writing, various factors may require changes for reasons of safety, transportation or lodging availability, and unforeseeable circumstances (such as weather considerations, natural disasters in areas to be visited, or recommendations of governmental agencies). The leaders reserve the right to make such changes as necessary, both before and during the trip.

It may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. Leaders in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of safety, whether it be of the group or of the individual. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are examples of some conditions that might result in a participant's being unable to perform one or more activities. Leaders may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

We will spend 5 nights in 2 and 3 star hotels (two persons/room with private baths), 2 nights in small family hotels, and 5 nights in guest houses. The hotels will provide twin-bedded (i.e. two separate mattresses) rooms. In Europe, twin beds are sometimes immediately side-by-side in a single bed-frame, while in the US twin beds are in separate bed-frames and are separated by a few inches.

The guest houses will be simple, very basic, and rustic, but comfortable. Showering and bathroom facilities will most likely be shared among several rooms, and often four people sleep in one room. It would be useful to bring a small camp towel. Unless there is a problem, electricity should be available 24/7, but some guesthouses may not have wifi or cell service. Meals are served in cozy dining areas. Each has its own charm, and unique character and should provide close cultural exchange opportunities with locals and other hikers.



*Guesthouse room and dinner*



## **AIRLINES AND TRAVEL**

Plan to arrive in Tbilisi on the afternoon of June 17 (depart from the US on June 16). Additional details about arrival times and meeting will be supplied later. The trip leader will assist you with information on flights from Boston, NYC, and other points. The trip ends in Tbilisi after breakfast on July 2. Of course, you may arrive early or extend your trip. Do not make any non-refundable travel plans until told to do so by the leader.

## **WEATHER**

Weather is likely to be warm in the cities and towns, with a high of 85 degrees F at that time of year. In the higher elevations it is likely to be 50-60, and perhaps in the forties in the evening or early morning. There is always a possibility of precipitation, particularly in the mountains where thunderstorms are not uncommon.

## **SAFETY AND RISKS**

Participant safety is a high priority for all AMC-sponsored events. Participants should be aware that there are risks associated with outdoor adventure activities, including but not limited to adverse weather and environmental conditions, remote locations of our trips, and transportation in vehicles or on foot. Aside from any personal medical problems, participants should be aware of the possibilities of bug bites, dehydration, sunburn and other heat or cold related problems. You should regularly use sunscreen, take care to be adequately hydrated and bring water on all day trips. Please carefully read and sign the AMC liability waiver document.

## **AMC MISSION**

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run in a manner supportive of and consistent with the conservation, recreational and educational principles and mission of the club. The leaders will encourage participant conduct consistent with Leave No Trace environmental and conservation principles and local regulations.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

For those interested, this excursion can involve more than a splendid hiking trip. Dan is a semi-professional photographer whose photographs have been exhibited and published in many places. Among other honors, he won the AMC photo contest three times. There is absolutely no requirement that you be interested in photography, or even bring a camera, and this is not a class or workshop. First, and foremost, it is a hiking trip in a beautiful region. However, if you are a seasoned photographer or a budding novice, or just curious, Dan will share his perspective on any of your photographic interests. When convenient we will try to be out in the early morning and early evening light to take advantage of the best times for photography. Our hikes will also be paced to allow for photo stops.

## **TRIP COST**

The trip price is \$3200 for AMC members and \$3300 for non-members. To join the AMC and get the lower price, (2020 membership pricing \$50 individual, \$75 family) click [here](#). This will cover the following items:

- Lodging, breakfasts, most lunches and dinners (all but 5 lunches and 1 dinner)
- All transportation after arrival at our hotel in Tbilisi and our return to Tbilisi
- Entrance fees to all sites
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage

Five lunches, one dinner, trail snacks, beverages (e.g. coffee/tea, mineral water, alcohol, etc) and other personal expenses are NOT included. The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. There are several flight options to Tbilisi via other European cities. At this time, we estimate that the price for a round trip between the east coast and Tbilisi, Georgia will be ~ \$1400.

The final trip cost may be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a non-profit basis. Leaders are volunteers who are not compensated except for their travel costs associated with the trip. The advertised trip cost includes an overhead fee which goes toward the administrative expenses of the AMC Adventure Travel program.

The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does *not* include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

Any unspent funds will be refunded to the participants. If the trip's financial position is strong enough at the start, the leaders may make partial refunds during the trip, in the form of payments toward some meals and/or free time activities which would otherwise not be included.

## **REGISTRATION and CANCELLATION**

To apply, you must complete and submit the application, confidential medical form, supplemental medical form (if appropriate) and acknowledgement and assumption of risk and release form. You can download them from this website: [Caucasus 2023 Participant Documents](#). Mail the registration deposit of \$1,200 and all required forms to Dan Stone at the address shown on the application form. You will not actually be accepted, and your check will not be deposited until the leader has determined by telephone conversation with you that the trip is a good match for your interests and abilities. The final balance of \$2000 is due by February 1, 2023. Deposit checks from waitlisted applicants will not be cashed until they confirm continued interest in joining the trip. All payments by check should be payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club.

The AMC Adventure Travel cancellation policy is based on the fact that your cancellation may not raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. Once you are notified the trip is declared to run as scheduled, the minimum cancellation fee is \$200. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration and cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless



they can be applied toward another acceptable participant. Should the leaders be able to replace you, you may be charged a reduced penalty. This will generally not be determined until after the trip. Failure to make trip payment(s) in a timely manner will be considered a cancellation.

On rare occasions AMC Adventure Travel may need to cancel all or a portion of a trip due to force majeure [e.g. terrorism, local health conditions, natural disaster, changes in local regulatory environment, etc.]. In the event of such a cancellation, your trip fee will be refunded less any trip expenses already incurred plus any non-cancellable future trip expenditures. AMC Adventure Travel is not responsible for additional expenses incurred by you in preparing for the trip (including non-refundable air tickets, visa fees, gear or medical expenses, etc.

This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

### **QUESTIONS and REQUESTING APPLICATION MATERIALS**

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dan or Leslie. Dan can be reached at 617 750-0511 before 9PM Eastern Time or at [danstone987@gmail.com](mailto:danstone987@gmail.com). Leslie can be reached at [lesliecarson929@yahoo.com](mailto:lesliecarson929@yahoo.com) or 508-737-6627.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

[Georgia Country profile](#)

[Trek Information](#)

## TRIP LEADERS

**Dan Stone** is a three-season leader with the Hiking/Backpacking Committee of the AMC Boston Chapter. He has led or co-led AMC adventure travel trips to Yosemite, Albania, Colorado and the Alsace in France. He has completed the 48 NH 4,000 footers in winter, the New England's 100 highest peaks and hiked the entire Appalachian Trail mostly as a series of day hikes. He has traveled extensively, having visited 49 states and over 60 countries. With a few exceptions,

he has designed all his travel adventures himself, as well as coordinating many trips with friends to tackle the AT. Dan is an avid photographer, has had hiking photos published in calendars and books, and has won first place in the AMC photo contest three times. Dan designed and led a series of AMC hiking weekends that incorporate photography. He enjoys sharing his photos and knowledge of photography with others.



Leslie Carson is a four-season leader with the Southeastern Massachusetts Chapter and has led hikes for AMC August Camp in the Pacific Northwest for the past seven years. She has led and co-led Adventure Travel trips to Sedona, Nepal, Italy, Morocco, Utah and Switzerland. Her personal travels include hiking the Tour du Mont Blanc, Ireland, Peru, New Zealand, Spain, Italy, Belize, Canada, Caribbean islands, and many of our national parks. When not hiking, planning trips or traveling, she enjoys kayaking, cross-country skiing, reading and gardening.