



RIDE WORLD WIDE GEORGIA 2024

RIDE INFORMATION

Georgia, once part of the old USSR, lies east of the Black Sea, south of the Caucasus, bordering Turkey and Azerbaijan on its southern border. It is a fascinating country with a rich and colourful history and it has some of the most beautiful riding terrain imaginable. As one of the first settled areas of Christendom, some of the oldest Christian churches in the world are found here. The country is rich in both minerals and agriculture - it boasts 500 different grape varieties and has been growing wine for centuries longer than France. The legend of Jason's Golden Fleece is of Georgian origin - fleeces of wool were placed in mountain streams to collect the gold particles washed down from the mountains thus creating a 'fleece of gold'. The rides we offer in Georgia start in the hills, from a small village about an hours drive from the capital Tbilisi and take you through forests and meadows, passing mountain villages and remote monasteries. They are run by Levan Kobakhidze who used to manage a Thoroughbred stud in Georgia. Levan speaks excellent English and guides the rides himself with his friends helping and arranging the back up. This is an exciting holiday but is also one for adventurous people who enjoy exploring off the beaten track, and can cope without luxuries! Anyone considering a visit to Georgia should remember that its borders opened relatively recently after years of communism. It is still very much a developing country in terms of service and infrastructure and as a result, delays and changes to even the most carefully planned itinerary are always possible. Although your local guides will do their utmost to make sure your trip runs smoothly, if you plan to join a ride you must be aware that flexibility, an open mind and a willingness to accept local standards and local expectations - which will not match those you are used to at home - are prerequisites!



DATES

10 night trips are run from set dates between May and October, with other dates available on request. Please see overleaf for departure dates and contact Ride World Wide to check availability.

HORSES

The horses used for these rides are locally bred and predominantly thoroughbred blood crossed with Arab, Akhal Teke, and also the tough local breeds. They are generally between 14.2 and 16hh, are responsive and forward going but also adaptable and well suited to the terrain.

TACK

Russian military saddles are used and tack, though safe, is quite basic and is locally made (for instance, due to the quality of leather, reins can be quite hard on the hands). Saddle bags are provided and there are seat savers are fitted to each saddle (though you may want to take your own for extra comfort). The horses are mostly ridden in snaffle bits.

RIDING

The 10 night trips include 8 days riding and there is generally around 6 hours in the saddle each day, with breaks to rest and for lunch, although riding time does vary, particularly as the routes are little used so there can be diversions. Also, the undeveloped area and unhurried local culture in Georgia often mean that itineraries are not rigidly adhered to and there may be days where riding, resting or sightseeing hours are longer or split up. Luggage and camping equipment is transported for you by back up vehicle. Groups are limited to a maximum of 8 guests and rides are lead by Levan, usually accompanied by one or two non-English speaking back up riders.

WEIGHT LIMIT

85kg / 13 stone 5 lbs (heavier experienced riders may be taken on request).

PACE

The rides are at a moderate to fast pace overall, with some good opportunities for a long canter when the terrain allows. The route takes you through forests, up some quite steep mountain tracks, across open meadows and agricultural land. There are usually plenty of chances for trots and canter each day, moving on at a good rate where possible. There is also a little roadwork (some on tar roads) in the vicinity of the villages you pass through. Roads however are generally very quiet with little motorised traffic.



RIDING EXPERIENCE

The rides are aimed at experienced, confident riders. To join them you must feel relaxed, comfortable and secure in the saddle on a fairly spirited horse at a walk, trot and fast canter. During the course of the ride there are some long canter, the occasional ditch to jump, and also energetic, sporty canter weaving through the forest, up and down hill. There are also obstacles such as rivers to cross, fallen logs, and steep descents so participants must be fit and well balanced in the saddle. You should also be used to riding for reasonably long hours, outside in an open environment. The horses are sensible, but they have a generally lively and sensitive temperament, so they suit confident, relaxed and sensitive riders. They are used to being ridden with a light contact with the mouth and light use of the leg. As with all our rides, you will enjoy your trip much more if you are physically fit - both riding fit and with a reasonably good level of general fitness - as well as quite energetic riding there will be some walking. If you do not ride regularly at home, we recommend some concentrated training in the months before you go to get used to the hours you will spend on a horse.

TERRAIN

The area you ride through is very unspoilt and is hardly visited by tourists. Much of the riding is through forest and up and down mountains and there are one or two places where riders need to dismount to walk over rough ground - a good chance to stretch your legs! However overall the area is excellent for riding; there is plenty of space, varied scenery and, particularly once you have made the effort of climbing through the forest, many wonderful views. In May, June and July the wild flowers are spectacular and there is always also much to see of cultural interest including remote monasteries, churches hidden in wooded valleys, ancient ruins, mountain villages and summer shepherd camps on the high pastures.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation for the first two and last night is in the capital Tbilisi, usually at a comfortable guesthouse in the heart of Tbilisi old town and rooms here are all with en-suite bathrooms. Camping accommodation is quite basic but camps are often set up in quite stunning settings beside remote monasteries, or close to mountain streams or lakes. Small two man dome tents for sleeping are supplied with a back up vehicle carrying all the equipment and luggage. There is a big “mess” tent for cooking and eating, tables and chairs can be set up inside if the weather requires. You will need to take your own sleeping bag and ideally a thermarest / camping mattress. There are no shower facilities in camps and minimal hot water (some water can be heated for you on the fire) and loos are out in the open air! Some nights are spent in the homes of local Georgian families, all of which tend to be traditional Georgian houses and very basic. Bedrooms may be dormitory style or for two people and bathrooms are shared (usually only one per household) and may be some way from the bedrooms. Water and electricity supplies are both erratic. Loos are often outside (long drops with a hole in the floor which can be quite unsavoury!) If you are travelling alone we will do our best to arrange a single room but in many cases this is just not possible and this cannot be guaranteed.



MEALS

Food in rural Georgia is generally organic and full of flavour, and though the choice is at times limited by what is available, you should have the chance to sample some of the delicious traditional Georgian dishes. Breakfast is eaten by the campfire or at your hotel or guesthouse. It is generally bread or toast, butter and jam or honey with eggs often available and tea or coffee to drink. Lunch is generally a picnic out riding - bread, cheese, cold meat and tomatoes with perhaps tea and biscuits for pudding. 'Chuchrella', a delicious traditional 'energy' bar made of grape juice and walnuts, once the staple diet of Georgian warriors, makes an excellent conclusion to a meal and can be carried in pockets or saddle bags and munched while riding. Dinner often takes the form of a 'supra', a Georgian feast, and the table will be laden with a variety of dishes. There might be a delicious lamb and tarragon soup (a spring dish), local specialities such as unleavened bread stuffed with cheese (kachapuri), chicken or lamb and various vegetable dishes followed by fruit and pudding. Vegetarians can, of course, be catered for, but please let us know in advance by filling in the dietary requirements on the booking form. Dinner is usually washed down with large quantities of Georgian wine. Wine and brandy are generally supplied when camping, and beer too can be requested when close to villages (beer is considered a soft drink by most Georgians!)



WEATHER

The rides are run from set dates between late April and October when the weather in the area is best. During winter months (November to March) there is often 2 to 3 feet of snow on the ground! In spring and early summer the ground is scattered with wild flowers; in July, August and September the fields are harvested and the countryside is busy with people working the fields; then later in September and in October, the forests are full of colour with the changing leaves. Average daytime temperatures between April and October are roughly as follows - April 13°C; May 18°C; June 21°C; July 23°C; August 23°C; September 20°C; October 15°C - though it may be about 5 degrees hotter at midday and about 5 degrees colder at nightfall. In Tbilisi it can get hotter still in the summer. Rain is possible at any time of year so you need to be prepared for this.

WHAT TO BRING

We will send you a list when you book.

ITINERARY

The following is an example of the itinerary planned but please note that it is only an example and may be changed at your guides discretion if they consider changes necessary due to weather or other local conditions.

Day 1 - You will be met on arrival at Tbilisi airport and transferred to your hotel.

Day 2 - After breakfast you will be collected from the hotel at about 10.00am and taken to the old town in Tbilisi for some shopping & sightseeing. Own arrangements for lunch & dinner. Time permitting, your guide may accompany you for dinner to discuss details of the route, horses and rules. Night at the hotel in Tbilisi. (B)

Day 3 - After an early breakfast you will be collected from the hotel and driven about 1 hour to the stables near the village of Asureti to meet the horses and guides and prepare for the journey. After allocation of the horses, mount up and set off riding, heading first towards the village of Asureti, then through lowlands and foothills forested with oak and hornbeam. Continue through valleys of wildflowers and open meadows, crossing the river Algeti then stop for a picnic lunch by the village of Golgeti. In the afternoon ride on towards the small town of Tetri Tskaro (White Spring), then up into the forested hills to the village of Gudarekhi, with its 16th century tower. Camp is set up nearby with a lovely view of the Algeti valley. Approx 6 hours riding. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)



Day 4 - Breakfast in camp and time to enjoy the scenery for an hour while camp is being packed up. Then set off riding for about an hour through beech forest to Gudarekhi Monastery. This is a wonderful 12th century monastery, with a beautiful multi coloured stone bell tower. The main church still stands, surrounded by many ruins, and there is a wonderful mythical feel to this fairy-tale place. There is time to explore before your picnic in the walnut groves surrounding the monastery. In the afternoon ride on, first through forests again and then to open grasslands where the shepherds bring their sheep for the summer. You may be lucky enough to meet the herds of sheep and cattle, with the drovers mounted on local ponies or donkeys and with a few pack animals carrying their supplies for the summer. The cow bells and the singing drovers are often heard across the valleys. Continue through ancient beech forests and meadows of wild flowers until you come to the village of Ivanovka. Approx 4 hours riding. Dinner and night in the house of a local family. (B,L,D)



Day 5 - Set off from Ivanovka riding through forested hills and pasture, then climbing steeply until the landscape opens out. Stop at the highest point of the ride, 1750m, for wonderful views of the Southern Caucasian Mountains. The lunch spot is located near the village of Menkalisi. After lunch, ride down from the ridge, through woods and crossing meadows of wild herbs until, across the valley, the tower of the 12th century Pitareti Monastery complex appears through the trees. Cross the small river and ride on to the monastery where camp is set up. This monastery was uninhabited for many years but a few monks have recently moved back. There are excellent carvings on the eastern façade and on the interior walls many of the frescoes remain intact. For the brave there is a chance to wash in Pitareti mountain stream! Approx 5 hours riding. Dinner and night in camp with an impressive view of the monastery complex. (B,L,D)

Day 6 - Breakfast and, leaving Pitareti, you ride past a 7th century fort, restored in 17th century, with secret tunnel which there may be time to explore! Crossing the Khrami river, ride on along forest tracks and across open pastures, stopping for a picnic lunch near a spring close to the village of Darbasi, inhabited by muslims of Azerbyjanian origin. After lunch ride on through the forest and across vast meadows covered with cowslips and primroses in early spring, daisies in late spring and summer. There is some agriculture too in this area, fields of wheat, beans and maize, peppered with red poppies. In the distance, a fort and church are visible, set on a volcanic plateau at the junction between two rivers, almost an island and an ideal vantage point. This is the site of Dmanisi, once one of the most important of Georgian fortresses and towns. Ride down the ancient stone road to the bottom of the gorge, crossing the river Mashavera and continue to Patara Dmanisi, passing the walls of the old fortress. The night is spent in a local families house in the small town of Patara Dmanisi, once the site of the silk road caravan camps, with looks across the valley to fortress. Approx 6 hours riding. A chance for a shower (water supply permitting) before a traditional Georgian supper! (B,L,D)

Day 7 - After breakfast you will have time to explore Patara Dmanisi, an archaeological site which has been excavated by a world re-knowned Georgian archaeologist. There is a medieval fortified town and 6th century three-nave basilica. Close by, the oldest remains of Homo Erectus so far discovered in Europe were recently uncovered. They are estimated to be 1.7 million years old - in age second only to those found in Africa! The remains of H.sapiens (about 200,000 years old), Paleolithic artefacts, and woolly rhinoceros remains have also been found here. Lunch back at the guesthouse then set off from Patara Dmanisi over hills and through forests carpeted with wild flowers. Camp is set up near the small village of Ukangori. The afternoon's ride is short (approx. 2 hours) and there should be time to explore before dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)



Day 8 - Breakfast and ride on from Ukangori through the woods to the Azeri shepherds summer pastures and on in the direction of small town of Poladauri. Stop for lunch nearby and in the afternoon continue to St Tevdore church ruins, riding through woods then acacia spinneys humming with bees and low woodland. The landscape opens out towards to the 13th century monastery of Tsugrugasheni on the hill, which you have chance to visit, see beautiful carvings and also enjoy a great view of the valley. After the visiting the monastery continue riding to St Tevdore church ruins where nearby camp will be set up. Approx 5 ½ hours riding. Dinner and the night in camp. (B,L,D)

Day 9 - Set off riding from St Tevdore, crossing the river Mashavera to reach the 5th century church of Bolnisi Sioni, which is the oldest cathedral in Georgia. The church here is the only surviving example of the original three aisled basilica (without transepts) and there is a 17th century bell tower next to it. After visiting Bolnisi Sioni continue ride towards the village Rachisubani through forested hills and open areas of vineyards and maize before the lunch break next to a 13th century bridge. After the lunch cross the river Poladauri and ride into the hills, crossing plains of wheat until you see the village of Kosolari on the other side of the river Khrami gorge. From here it is a short ride down to the river Khrami where camp is set up, perfect for an evening swim! Approx 5 hours riding. Dinner and night in the camp. (B,L,D)

Day 10 - Breakfast and set off riding. Cross the river Khrami first following the track up the steep basalt walled valley, then crossing plains of wheat to the village of Durniki. Continue downhill to the village of Assureti, then cross the Algeti river to reach the stables (around 4 hours riding). Say farewell to the horses here and, either a break for lunch, or if all the group prefers to arrive in Tbilisi early, transfer straight back to your guesthouse in the capital. There will be a chance to visit a local spa in Tbilisi where you can enjoy a relaxing soak in sulphur baths with an eastern massage - a highly recommended optional extra! Your guide can help with arrangements for a farewell party - a Georgian 'supra' or feast, sampling local cuisine and wine and then the night at the guesthouse in Tbilisi. (B,L)

ITINERARY cont.

Day 11 - Breakfast and transfer to the airport for your flight home. (B)



DATES & RATES 2024

17th to 27th May
3rd to 13th June

28th June to 8th July
30th August to 9th September

20th to 30th September
11th to 21st October

Prices

10 nights £1890 per person (single supplement £90)

Rates assume a minimum of 4 people; the maximum group size is 8

Small group supplement for 3 riders £250 per person

Small group supplement for 2 riders £450 per person

Rates include - 10 nights shared accommodation, all riding, guiding and equipment, all meals except lunches & dinners when in Tbilisi, and airport transfers at set times with the group. Rates assume twin bedded rooms in hotels and the single supplement is payable if you are travelling alone or would like a single room in Tbilisi.

Please note - Single rooms in guesthouses and single tents cannot be guaranteed and paying a single supplement will only guarantee single rooms at the hotel in Tbilisi. Rooms in guesthouses are often shared between 3 or 4 people.

Rates do not include - International flights / travel to Georgia, any visa fees, personal medical / travel insurance (which you must have), extra drinks during the ride, lunches and dinners in Tbilisi and any tips you may wish to leave.



FLIGHTS & TRAVEL INFORMATION

The meeting point for the ride is Tbilisi airport. Arrival can be at any time on Day 1 and departure at any time on Day 11 as the first and last nights are spent in Tbilisi. In most cases the best option is to fly via the continent - eg via Istanbul with Turkish Airways, via Amsterdam / Paris with KLM / Air France combination or via Athens with Aegean Airlines. Flights range from £550 to £800 plus taxes depending on time of year and availability. We are happy to help or quote for flights, (our ATOL number is 6213).

GENERAL VISA & HEALTH INFORMATION

(NB this is a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking)

Visas Visas are no longer required for British and other European Union Member Passport holders to visit Georgia.

Health No inoculations are legally required to enter Georgia if travelling from Europe but the TravelHealthPro website (NaTHNaC) recommends most travellers are vaccinated against Polio and Tetanus - you should consult a health professional for further and more detailed advice in any case.

(DRAFT 19/11/23)

