

GEORGIA – GATE TO THE ORIENT

Thursday, September 19th to Friday, September 27th, 2002



For centuries, Georgia has existed in the Western mind as a mysterious and remote mountain region in the Caucasus, a doorway opening on to the East. Tall, cloud-capped peaks rise along the Black Sea coast, where verdant green meadows and mountain-top plateaus give way to vineyards, crystalline lakes surrounded by ancient Grecian ruins, and Russian dachas. But despite its reputation for exoticism, much of Georgia's history was actually defined by its cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the Georgian royal dynasty of Bagrationi, which ruled since the ninth century, encouraged the region's cultural diversity in order to bolster trade along the Black and Caspian Seas, and to facilitate the exchange of goods between Europe and the Orient.

Exiled in the Caucasus, Russian poets and writers such as Tolstoy, Pushkin and Lermontov, produced unforgettable works of poetry and fiction extolling a land where nature seems to have been divinely perfected and endowed with inhabitants as gracious as their beautiful surroundings. The Tsars and Grand Dukes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries built palaces, vast estates, and summer retreats there. Prince Alexander Chavchavadze (1786-1846) and other Georgian nobles entertained Russian aristocrats on their estates and provided the constant source of excitement for Russian visitors.

As Prince Michael Vorontsov, a Caucasian Viceroy in the mid-nineteenth century, once commented, "Georgia is a garden, but one which is not like other gardens. A gardener of special talents is needed to tend the flowers, which grow here... This little Georgia will become in time the most

beautiful, the most durable piece of gold brocade woven into the many colored patchwork of mighty Russia.”

Arts to Life escorts you through this garden, following in the footsteps of Russian Dukes and Duchesses, to the palaces of Georgian aristocrats and nobles. We will meet theater directors, artists, and statesmen, and other leading figures in Georgian society, and will be entertained in homes furnished with the decorative arts dating back to the region’s glorious early centuries. We will be entertained with traditional food, vintage Georgian wines, song and dance, and will come to appreciate Georgia’s blending of Eastern and Western traditions as we come to understand why one notable traveler once called the country ‘the best cure for melancholy and misanthropy that could well be imagined.’

Thursday, 19th September

Arrival in London, where guests stay in the Portobello Hotel. We will attend a lecture, ‘Introduction to Georgian Culture and History’ by Laurence Kelly, a noted author and historian. In the evening, we will dine with special guests and His Excellency Teimuraz Mamatsashvili, the Ambassador of Georgia to the United Kingdom.

Friday, 20th September

Arrival in Tbilisi, where guests will be welcomed and driven to the prestigious Villa Berika, with rooms richly furnished with Russian antiques. Accompanied by an expert historian who will recount Tbilisi’s rich past, we promenade in the old parts of the capital, which date back 1500 years. We are invited to dine with a famous Georgian theatre director, noted for his adaptations of Shakespeare in his villas situated in one of Tbilisi most picturesque locations, overlooking a beautiful old church.

Saturday, 21st September

We spend the day with art historian Ketj Japaridze, with whom we study the history of Georgian architecture. Participants will proceed to several Georgian churches, some as old as the city itself. We will proceed to the magnificent Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia. The church stands at the point where two of the regions great rivers, the Mtkvari and Aragvi, meet. This special spot is also the burial place of Georgian kings.

Participants will then enjoy a performance of the Georgian National Ballet at the Georgian National Theatre. The Georgians are famous for their dance – the famous choreographer George Balanchine was himself a native – and their national ballet has toured the world to great acclaim.

A special reception and dinner at the home of famous Georgian choreographer Tengiz Suxishvili will follow the performance.

Sunday, 22nd September

Accompanied by a specialist on Georgian ancient art, we first visit the Janashia Museum, home to rare gold artefacts and jewellery from pre-Christian Georgia. We have a special invitation to visit the studio of the contemporary Georgian artist Zurab Nizaradze, a well-known portraitist for Georgia's 'high society', and dine with Mr. Nizaradze and his family.

Monday, 23rd September

We enjoy a lecture on the history of Tbilisi, by Anka Nizaradze, uncovering the city's many layers, followed by a guided walk to its most notable sites, such as Mount Mtasminda, or *Holy Mount*. We will then proceed to the mineral spa baths in the old part of Tbilisi. The most striking is the seventeenth century Orbeliani Bath, with its façade of bright blue tiles and two short minarets, recalling the design of a mosque. Evening hosted by Rezo Gabriadze, a renowned theatre director. After enjoying a performance of his puppet theatre, he will host a dinner in our honor where guests will include noted artists and writers.

Tuesday, 24th September

No trip to Georgia would be complete without viewing its rich historical provinces, such as Kakheti, Imereti, Mingrelia, Abkhazeti, Guria and Svaneti. We will study the distinctive local customs and traditions in each region, tour some of the grand monuments built to memorialize historic rulers and relax in the country air and breathtaking landscape. We will visit Kakheti, in eastern Georgia, famous for both its churches and its old tradition of winemaking, dating back to ancient times. We will visit a vineyard where we will receive a demonstration of traditional winemaking processes passed through many generations to the present household. We then visit the summerhouse of Prince Chavchavadze in Tsinandali, a famous salon in the mid-nineteenth century, where Georgia's leading literary figures would congregate.

In the evening, we will convene for dinner in a large villa, which was used as a vacation home by the presidents of Georgia, and enjoy the unique Georgian tradition of a 'supra,' or banquet, marked by fine wine and a fusillade of toasts. The banquet will also be accompanied by Georgian songs, performed by the Georgian Folk group 'Tsira'.

Wednesday, 25th September

Thanks to its mineral waters and forested mountains, Borjomi is often described as the most beautiful resort in Georgia. Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov, son of Tsar Nicolas I, built a summer residence here in 1871 in the style of a Moorish palace. Russian composer Tchaikovsky also vacationed here. We enjoy a special dinner at the palace.

Thursday, 26th September

For the closing dinner we will go to Tskneti, a summer resort that numbers many rich and famous westerners among its guests. Our closing dinner will feature a performance in traditional Georgian costumes, which are noted for their bold colours, theatrical flourish and style. We will be joined at dinner by an expert on national costumes who explains the variances between each region, and dine among Georgian men and women wearing the national dress of Georgia.

Friday, 27th September

Departure for New York.

Registration

The fee for the program is to be announced. This includes eight nights luxurious accommodation, most meals, wine with meals, private sessions with curators, expert scholars, entrée to museums and palaces, meals at the homes of leading Georgian families and designers, extensive scholarly reading material prepared by Arts to Life, cocktail receptions and luxury ground transportation. Arts to Life reserves the right to make changes to the schedule. Registration must be accompanied by a deposit of \$2,000. Half of the remaining balance is due on December 1st, 2001 and the balance of payment is due on March 5th, 2002, and after this date no cancellations will be accepted and no refunds will be made unless the space can be filled. Any cancellation before the cancellation date will be subject to a processing fee of \$250 per person. We advise all persons to take out travel insurance and can provide information upon request. For more information, please contact Arts to Life on 646-792-2340.

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