

WILD FRONTIERS



Wild Walk in the Svaneti Mountains Georgia

Svaneti, Georgia's most mysterious mountain region is like a fairy tale come to life. The fabled region is renowned for its enchanting stone villages, punctuated by the famous defensive towers, and populated by a fiercely independent race, known as the Svans. Still lying almost entirely off any tourist trail, this is a trip for the travel connoisseur who likes to see things real and wild. And of course, this tour is not only about Svaneti. Georgia in general is one of our favourite countries: its excellent cuisine, delicious wine, stunning mountains, exquisite churches, hospitable locals and rich and varied history make it a perfect adventure travel location. Come and see for yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Old Town of Tbilisi
- A wonderful trek through one of the region's hidden valleys
- Experiencing the famous Georgian hospitality
- Visiting several UNESCO World Heritage Sites
- The bizarre Stalin museum in Gori

'Quite simply the most beautiful and exhilarating walk I have ever done in my life!'
Joanne O'Connor, The Observer

Duration: 11 days

Average group size: 5 - 12

Start: Wed 5 Sep 2012

Finish: Sat 15 Sep 2012



Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

The Traveller's Ethos: WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

Personal Service: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

Small Group Size: We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

Cost of Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Added Value: We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

Our Clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour Operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



Day 1: Tbilisi: Should you take the suggested flights, you will arrive late evening on this first day.

Hotel (no meals)

Day 2: Tbilisi: After breakfast we start our tour of Tbilisi and visit the Old and New Towns. The city offers a great variety of sights, most of them very ancient. All the places of interest in the Old Town are very close to each other, within a few minutes' walk. We start our visit to Old Tbilisi from Metekhi Church (13th century), then walk to the brick-domed Sulphur Baths. From the Baths we head up the hill to visit Narikala Fortress (4th century) - one of the oldest fortifications in the city. Afterwards we continue to the Synagogue, Sioni Cathedral (6th-7th centuries) and Anchiskhati Church (6th century). This marks the end of the Old Town. Finally we visit the stunning treasury of the Georgian National Museum, before taking a stroll along Rustaveli Avenue - the main street in Tbilisi.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 3: Tbilisi - Mtskheta - Kutaisi: We drive to the ancient capital and religious centre of Georgia - Mtskheta - and visit its historic Jvari Monastery (6th century) and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11th century) - both UNESCO World Heritage sites. We then head to West Georgia - the famous Land of the Golden Fleece, where Jason and the Argonauts sailed. We arrive in Kutaisi - the second largest city in Georgia and visit Bagrati Cathedral (11th century) - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 4: Kutaisi - Zugdidi - Mestia: In the morning we visit Gelati Monastery and Academy (12th century), a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its frescos and mosaics. Then it's time to get ready for the most exciting part of your trip - a journey to Svaneti, the region of the highest mountains and glaciers and the most abiding ancient traditions. We drive to Zugdidi and continue our trip into the Svaneti region. Overnight in Mestia in a family guesthouse with shared facilities.

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 5: Mestia - Lakhiri - Mestia: This morning we drive to the village of Zhamushi and then start our walk through the Svanetian villages of Lakhiri and Mushkeli back towards Mestia, stopping for a picnic lunch along the way. We will walk past many Svanetian watchtowers and through an abundance of wild flowers, while taking in the stunning vistas of the Great Caucasus. Returning to Mestia we visit a unique collection of icons and crosses and see traditional Svanetian House model at the Ethnographic Museum*. Dinner tonight will be at the family guesthouse in Mestia. *In 2012 it was muted that that the museum might close for renovation.

Approx walking time 5 hours

Ascent 150m/descent 400m

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 6: Mestia - Chalaadi Glacier - Mestia: In the morning we'll drive for about 40 minutes and then start walking towards the wonderful Chalaadi glacier which starts its journey from the two summit peaks of Ushba. Part of the path is easy to walk but part is steep and

stony, although the scenery throughout is well worth the effort.

Approx walking time of 5-6 hours

Ascent/descent 700m

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 7: Mestia - Ushguli: A three-hour drive in 4WDs will take us to the highest permanent village in Europe - Ushguli (2200m). Ushguli, and generally the whole Upper Svaneti region, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The village is most famous for its abundance of watchtowers and this is where you get the view of the highest mountain in Georgia - Mt. Shkhara (5068m). In Ushguli we visit Lamaria Church (12th century) and then walk up the hill to Queen Tamar's Tower.

Approx walking time 2 hours

Ascent/descent 250m

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 8: Ushguli - Shkhara Glacier - Ushguli: We start our morning walk to the foot of Mt. Shkhara, walking alongside the wonderful Enguri River which will eventually lead us to its origin - the Shkhara Glacier. Afterwards we return to Ushguli. En route we also plan to visit the Lamaria church with its 12th century stone defence tower.

Approximate walking time 5 hours

Ascent/descent 500m

Guesthouse (B, L, D)

Day 9: Ushguli - Zagaro Pass - Kutaisi: Today is a long but exciting day as we take a newly opened route through wild landscapes enjoying stunning views from the Zagaro Pass. Ultimately we'll drive via the lower Svaneti town of Lentekhi to finally arrive in Kutaisi for a well-deserved rest.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 10: Kutaisi - Gori - Tbilisi: Today we will drive back east to the town of Gori, the heart of the Kartli region, and visit the Stalin Museum and Uplistsikhe Cave Town (1st millennium BC) - a fascinating historical spot which was one of the main points along the Great Silk Road. In the evening we'll arrive in Tbilisi and check into our hotel.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 11: Tbilisi: The tour ends after breakfast at the hotel.

(B)

Wild Extensions:

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

Contact the office for extension specifics.

TOUR DETAILS

Tour Code: WWS/B

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

Single Supplements: These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. On this tour we are happy to offer an optional single supplement for all nights of the tour.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers.
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required.
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary.
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips
- Beverages & any costs of a personal nature.
- International Flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flight (subject to change) is:

05SEP BD929 LHR-TBS 13:05/23:50
15SEP BD928 TBS-LHR 07:50/13:00

Key:

LHR - London Heathrow
TBS - Tbilisi
BD - BMI

NB If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

PRACTICALITIES

Accommodation on our tours varies dramatically in Georgia and the Caucasus from smart hotels in Tbilisi to family homestays and small local guesthouses. Please note that any accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality

Transport on this trip will be mini bus, 4WD vehicle if needed and by foot.

Trip Grading:

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖

Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖

Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office.

Fitness...

Anyone in a decent state of health with a relatively good level of fitness will be suitable to join this tour. The trek is graded as moderate.

It may sound obvious but...

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy

will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website www.fsa.gov.uk.

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip. Please pay particular attention to ensuring that you are covered for travelling to 3500m.

Visas: Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) www.travcour.com for the latest advice.

For this tour, UK passport holders currently do not require a visa for Georgia. Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

Responsible Travel: Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

The Wild Frontiers Foundation: In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestation and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a comprehensive list of all partner NGOs please visit our website. Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

The Environment: Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO): The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not necessarily cancel a trip because of the FCO advice. It is recommended therefore

that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

Climate: The climate of Svaneti is generally humid and is influenced by different air masses coming in from the Black Sea. Temperatures vary considerably with altitude.

In general, the lower regions of Svaneti are characterized by longer, warmer summers and relatively cold and snowy winters. Large parts of Svaneti lie above 3000 metres (9840 feet) above sea level, a zone which does not have a real summer, but due to Svaneti's close proximity to the Black Sea, the region is spared from the extremely cold winter temperatures that are characteristic of high mountains.

Further information:

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

GEORGIA & SVANETI - THE FACTS



The Georgians have a saying ... at the beginning of time when God was giving out land to the various nations of the world the Georgians were too busy drinking to attend. Arriving late, God was angry and asked why they had dishonoured him so; there was now no

land left to give them. But the Georgians replied that far from dishonouring God they were late simply because they were drinking to His health and this took quite some time. God was pleased by their answer and so gave them the tiny bit of land he had kept for himself.



Georgia is one of the most beautiful counties you are ever likely to visit. The Grand Caucasus Mountains that stretch all the way from the Black Sea coast to the shores of the Caspian are high and untamed with snowy peaks and lush green valleys that bloom in spring with a million different flowers. Eagles soar above the glaciers while wolves and bears stalk the forest floors. And among them live the Georgians, an independent race whose creed is giving and living with their delicious food and wine.

Georgia is a country that is likely to get under your skin. So be warned; a first visit to Georgia is unlikely to be the last!

History: Georgia is bordered by the Russian Federation to the North, Azerbaijan to the East, Armenia and Turkey to the South, and the Black Sea to the West and formed part of the Transcaucasian SFSR Soviet Union from 1921, became the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936 and in 1991 gained independence from the Soviet Union.

Tbilisi: Tbilisi is the capital of Georgia. It is sited on both banks of the Mtkvari River, in the gorge surrounded by mountains. It is named from the Georgian *tbili* (warm) due to hot sulphur-springs on its territory. Originating in ancient times, it has played an important role in the history of the country throughout the centuries. Tbilisi became the capital of Georgia in the 11th century. The unification of Georgia with Russia contributed to the growth of the city, and

as a result of it Tbilisi became a Transcaucasian centre. The city, especially the Rustaveli Avenue, was considerably damaged in 1991-1992, during the armed struggle between the supporters of the President Gamsakhurdia and the opposition. Today most buildings are restored.



Tbilisi is not only the capital city of Georgia but is also recognised by many as the principal city of the Caucasus. Despite being sacked 27 times in the last 1500 years, it has always managed to claw its way back both culturally and economically. Sitting on sheer cliffs straddling the Mtkvari River it is also undoubtedly the most picturesque city in the region; it is rich in history and culture and offers an obvious *joie de vivre* among its inhabitants. With a recent boom in the economy, Tbilisi has prospered and new bars, restaurants and shops are springing up everywhere. In short, it is a happening city.

Mtskheta: In ancient times Mtskheta was the capital of Georgia and its most important religious centre. Situated in the heart of the Kartli Region it sits at the confluence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers and houses some hugely important religious monuments. The most important among them is the 11th Century Sveti-Tskhoveli Cathedral - or cathedral of the life tree - which local tradition says houses the robe of Christ.



Gori: This is a strange place that was at one time obviously quite a town with pretty boulevards and large townhouses.

But, like many other places across the former Soviet Union, it has suffered economically in recent years and many of the back streets do now look rather drab. However, Gori does hold fame - or perhaps infamy would be a better word - for being the birthplace of the man many say is to blame for more deaths in the 20th Century than any other. Josef Visarionovich Jugashvili - better known as Stalin - is said to be directly responsible for the deaths of 66 million. Stalin was born in a little house in the centre of town where his father was an alcoholic cobbler. It is the only claim to fame the town has and of course they milk it with an elaborate Stalin Museum in the town. But without seeing Gori you would feel you'd missed a vital component of Georgian history.



Svaneti and the mountains: Situated in the northwestern part of Georgia, the historical province of Svaneti is one of the country's greatest treasures. The stunning landscapes are scattered with picturesque villages, which are home to the famous Svanetian towers, and many of the architectural monuments of Upper Svaneti are included as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



The surrounding scenery is simply breathtaking, dominated by mountains and dramatic gorges and valleys which are covered in rich alpine forests and wonderful meadows and grasslands, making it a fantastic area to explore. The mountain regions are probably what

most Georgians would identify as the heart of their country, and their spectacular beauty is a large part of the appeal to the foreign traveller. Here small communities of Svan people, difficult to reach because of the nature of the terrain, have kept their traditions even more tenaciously than the rest of their compatriots, exemplified particularly through their music and dancing.

How to book:

In order to confirm your booking we need to have a completed signed booking form for each client together with a £400 deposit per person. You can either return your booking form to us by post or by booking online at www.wildfrontiers.co.uk or you can contact the office by email to info@wildfrontiers.co.uk or we are very happy to take your call on **020 7736 3968**.

Wild Frontiers is a fully licensed and bonded tour operator and our ATOL number is 5975. You can book your holiday with Wild Frontiers in complete confidence that all monies you pay to us for your tour are fully protected.

We are also bonded with the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). AITO members comply with the highest standards of consumer protection. Every AITO holiday is backed not only by AITO's Quality Charter but also by full financial protection.

We do recommend that you take out adequate travel insurance at the time of booking in the event that you are no longer able to travel as all deposits are non-refundable - full booking conditions can be found on the booking form and online at our website.