



# RIDE WORLD WIDE

## Georgia 2012

Georgia, which was part of the old USSR and lies east of the Black Sea, south of the Caucasus, bordering Turkey and Azerbaijan on its southern border, is a fascinating country with a rich and colourful history. It also 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 a two hour 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 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, are happy to lend a hand in camp, and can cope without luxuries! Anyone considering a visit to Georgia should remember that its borders have only recently opened up 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 late April and October, with other dates available on request. Please see overleaf for departure dates and contact Ride World Wide to check availability.



**The Horses** The horses used for these rides are locally bred thoroughbreds, crossed with Arabs and Akhal Teke. They are generally between 14.2 and 16hh, are responsive and forward going but also adaptable and well suited to the terrain. Russian military saddles are used and tack is quite basic as little is readily available in Georgia. Saddle bags are provided and there are seat savers available for those who wish. The horses are mostly ridden in snaffle bits. Please note there is a weight limit on the rides of 85kg / 13 stone 5 lbs.

**Riding** The 10 night trips include 8 days riding and there is generally between 5 and 7 hours in the saddle each day, with breaks to rest and for lunch, although riding time does vary, particularly as the routes are fairly new and little used. 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 a back up rider.

**Pace** The rides are at a moderate pace overall, with some good opportunities for a faster pace 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 canters 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 reasonably 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. 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 fairly fit - both riding fit and with a reasonably good level of general fitness as there will be some walking each day. 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 in the saddle.

**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 and last nights is in the capital Tbilisi, usually at a comfortable guest-house 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, abandoned monasteries, or close to mountain streams or lakes. Small two man dome tents for sleeping are supplied with a back up vehicle carrying all equipment but a fair amount of help is expected in the camp as there is not a large back up staff, so to get things done you may need to set up your own tent, or wash your own cutlery. You will need to take your own sleeping bag and sleeping mat. 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 country guesthouses are also used, all of which tend to be traditional Georgian houses and very basic. Bedrooms in guesthouses are generally either dormitory style or for two people. **cont. over**

**Accommodation cont.** 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. Guesthouses usually have outside loos (these can be quite unsavoury!) and shared showers which may be a short walk from the bedrooms.



**Meals** Food in rural Georgia is generally organic and full of flavour but the choice is often limited by what is available and you will 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 and might be bread, cheese, cold meat and tomatoes with perhaps some fruit 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 at guesthouses 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 spinach soup (a spring dish), local specialities such as unleavened bread stuffed with cheese, chicken or lamb and various vegetable dishes followed by fruit and pudding. When camping, dinner will be cooked for you over the camp fire or on a small gas stove so meals are simple, perhaps spaghetti with sauce, or beef kebabs (the beef is excellent). 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 at guesthouses is usually washed down with large quantities of Georgian wine and vodka. Wine and vodka 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 of things to bring when you make your booking.

**Dates 2012**

4th to 14th May

25th May to 4th June

15th to 25th June

6th to 16th July

24th August to 3rd September

14th to 24th September

5th to 15th October

**Rates 2012**

£1370 per person (single supplement £70)

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

Small group supplement for 3 riders £150 per person

Small group supplement for 2 riders £250 per person

**Rates include** - 10 nights shared accommodation, all riding, guiding and equipment, all meals except lunches & dinners when in Tbilisi. 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.

**Travel arrangements** The meeting point for the ride is Tbilisi airport. British Midlands (BMI), currently have direct flights from London to Tbilisi on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, departing London about 12-13.00, arriving Tbilisi around 23.00. On return they depart Tbilisi Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, between around 07.00 and 10.00 (depends which day, arriving LHR between 12.00 and 15.30 (same day)). We are very happy to book flights for you (out ATOL number is 6213) and can give you a quote at the time of booking. If you prefer to book your own flights you can call British Midlands direct on 0844 8484888 ([www.fly-bmi.co.uk](http://www.fly-bmi.co.uk)), or you can try Trailfinders on 0207 9383939 who will be able to quote other airlines (eg Czech Airways who fly from London to Tbilisi via Prague twice a week, or Austrian Airways via Vienna, or with Aeroflot via Moscow). Flights range from £450 to £700 plus taxes depending on time of year and availability.



**Example itinerary:**

**Day 1** - Depart London [eg on British Midlands flight BD929 departing Heathrow at 13.20, arriving Tbilisi at 23.59]. You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel for the night.

**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. Night at the hotel in Tbilisi. (B)

**Day 3** - After an early breakfast you will be collected from the hotel at about 8.00am and driven about 1 hour to the village of Jorjiashvili to meet the horses and guides and prepare for the journey. Mount up and set off riding, heading first through lowlands and foothills forested with oak and hornbeam. Continue through valleys of wildflowers and open meadows, crossing the river Algeti then heading towards the small town of Tetri Tskharo (White Spring). Stop for a picnic lunch by the river Algeti and in the afternoon ride on, up into the hills to the village of Gudarekhi, where camp is set up, with its 16th century tower and a lovely view of the Algeti valley. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)



**Day 4** - Breakfast in camp and then a chance to enjoy the scenery for an hour while camp is being packed up. Then set off riding through beech forest to Gudarekhi Monastery. This wonderful 12th century monastery, with its beautiful multi coloured stone bell tower, is now uninhabited. The main church still stands, surrounded by many ruins, and there is a wonderful mythical feel to this fairy-tale place. A picnic is laid out in the walnut groves surrounding the monastery and there is time to explore before lunch. 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. If it is not windy the night is spent camping next to Bediani lake - otherwise dinner and night in a local guesthouse. (B,L,D)



**Day 5** - Set off from Ivanovka riding through forested hills and pasture, before stopping for lunch near the village of Menkalisi. After lunch, ride on climbing steeply uphill until the landscape opens out with wonderful views of the Southern Caucasian Mountains. Ride down from this 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 facade and on the interior walls many of the frescoes remain intact. For the brave there is a chance to wash in Pitareti mountain stream! Dinner and night in camp with an impressive view of the monastery complex. (B,L,D)

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**Day 6** - Breakfast and leave Pitareti. You will 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 Azerbaijanian village of Darbasi. 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 Dmanisi archaeological guest house with a stunning view of this important site. A chance for a shower before a traditional Georgian supper! (B,L,D)

**Day 7** - After breakfast you will have a chance to explore Patara Dmanisi, an archaeological site with 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 orchids. Camp is set up near the small village of Ukangori. The afternoon's ride is short and there will be plenty of 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 Bolnisi Sioni. Riding through the forest you arrive near the small town of Poladauri where you stop for lunch. In the afternoon cross the river Poladauri and continue to St Tevdore church ruins where camp will be set up. Dinner and the night in camp. (B,L,D)

**Day 9** - Set off riding from St Tevdore, riding through woods then acacia spinneys humming with bees and low woodland. Then the landscape opens out towards to the 12th century monastery of Tsugrugasheni and the 4th 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 12th century bell tower next to it. Lunch in the garden of Bolnisi Sioni and then ride on to cross the rivers Poladauri and Mashavera. The route then takes you into the hills, crossing plains of wheat until you reach the village of Didveli. From here it is a short ride down to the river Khrami where camp is set up, perfect for an evening swim! Dinner and night in the camp. (B,L,D)

**Day 10** - Breakfast and set off riding. Cross the river Khrami then climb into the hills, crossing plains of wheat until you reach the village of Samshvilde. Stop to explore the ruins of Samshvilde town and fortress whose location, dominating the river Khrami gorge, shows its importance. After lunch ride on to Tsintskaro, then across the plains until you see the village of Jorjiashvili in the valley below. Ride down the hill and across the river Algeti to the stables. Say farewell to the horses here and meet the car that will drive you back to Tbilisi. 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! Own arrangements for a farewell party with a Georgian 'supra' or feast, sampling local cuisine and wine and then the night at the guesthouse in Tbilisi. (B,L)

**Day 11** - Breakfast and transfer to the airport [eg for British Midlands flight BD928, departing Tbilisi at 08.50, arriving London at 14.00] (B)

**NB.** The above is an example of the itinerary planned but 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.

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

**Visas** As of August 2005 a visa is 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 Polio and Tetanus are recommended - you should consult a health professional for further and more detailed advice in any case.

**(Draft 30/08/11)**

