



# Highlights of Turkey and Georgia (ZIT)

# Istanbul to 21 days, departing 12 May 2013

Comfort Zone: Basic Luxury
Physical Challenge: Easy Hard

Trip Style: Overlanding

**Route:** Istanbul to **Length:** 21 days

Transport: Overland vehicle

Accommodation: Hotel (6 nts), Georgian homestays (6 nt), campsites (5 nts), wildcamps (3 nts) Upgrades from camping to rooms usually available on the road. 20 Breakfasts, 18

Lunches, 13 Dinners



# **Ratings for this trip**

#### **Comfort Zone: Moderate**

Moderate Comfort Level. These trips allow you to get off the beaten track with a few of your home comforts. On OVERLAND TRIPS expect there may be some wild camps, but with a predominance of campsites with good facilities (often with upgrades to rooms available) or staying in small hotels. Hotels will range from basic up to reasonably comfortable. Sharing will be on a 2, 3 or 4 person basis. On ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS we will have standard style accommodation, usually budget or tourist-class (2-3 star) accommodation with private facilities. Some accommodation may be on a multi-share basis. Transport will be a mixture of local and privately hired.

#### **Physical Challenge: Moderate Fitness**

MODERATE FITNESS: You will travel through areas that may be physically challenging. For example you may be at altitude some of the time. Depending on the trip, activities may include treks of 3-4 hours across hilly terrain, horse-riding and other adventurous activities. A moderate level of fitness is required.

#### **Countries Visited**

#### Georgia

Georgia is a mountainous country with spectacular Caucasus scenery, and warm generous people. It is a strongly Christian country and has some of the most historic Christian monuments on the planet. The age and condition of the churches and monasteries, many dating back to the Fifth Century, is staggering. Being such a small country it is possible to see and do a great deal in a short time and yet, because of its geographical and cultural isolation from the West, it is seldom visited by Western travellers.



#### **Turkey**

Turkey is a rapidly modernising and western orientated secular state with a free enterprise economy. Historically it has its religious routes firmly entrenched in Islam, and the majority of Turks are Muslim. However, the religion does not dominate the country as it does in some of Turkey's neighbours. The Turks are friendly to visitors, the cuisine is a savoury surprise, and the cities are dotted with majestic old buildings. Turkey's topography ranges from Mediterranean coast to the high rugged mountains of Eastern Turkey. The country combines stunning scenery, immense history and wonderful beaches.

In the capital of Ankara lie many archaeological sites. Theatres, temples and Roman Baths all create an interest as people want to know about Turkeys illustrious history. Ankara is the capital but Istanbul is the life



and soul of country. There are restaurants, galleries, bars and clubs that scatter across the city. It is full of life and there is always an activity available to take part in. Find the markets and you will probably find traditional Turkish food and music. With many ranges of Turkish delights and kebabs it might be difficult to pick just one, but the cuisine has so much more to offer. Try a Sigara borek. This is melted cheese wrapped in a light pastry.

In the heart of Cappadocia is the town of Goreme. Known as the Enchanted Valley, this is a fantastic region of cones, needles and columns fashioned by nature from the soft volcanic tuff rock. It is honeycombed with caves scooped out to make churches and dwellings that are known as fairy chimneys and castles. The most interesting are the rock chapels and frescoes of Goreme, the monastic complex of Zelve and the fairy chimneys of Avcilar. Nearby are the remains of underground cities, the most extensive of which housed up to 50,000 people at any one time.

Goats and Sheep roam about the lower mountainous areas of the country, whereas in the Coruh Valley the home of over 250,000 wild fowl. With quite a lot of these birds of prey, it makes them the largest collection of migrating birds in the world.

# **Daily Itinerary**

# Day 1: Istanbul

Sun 12 May 2013

**Border Information:** If Joining in Istanbul, enter Turkey at Istanbul.

Welcome to Istanbul. There will be group meeting at 10.00hrs. Your leader will leave a note at reception telling you where this meeting will take place. Your leader will collect your kitty and check your passport and insurance details at this meeting. The afternoon is free to explore this magnificent city. Tonight you will stay in a comfortable Hostel.

Hotel for the night: Orient Hostel Orient Hostel Akbiyik Caddesi no:13 Sultanahmet Istanbul +90 212 517 9493

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided city tour of Istanbul	USD 33
Aya Sofya, Istanbul	USD 12
Basilica Cistern, Istanbul	USD 6
Topkapi Palace (incl. harem), Istanbul	USD 12
Turkish Hamam (incl. massage), Istanbul	USD 56
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul	USD 6
Chora Church, Istanbul	USD 8

#### Istanbul

Istanbul is the only city in the world to straddle two continents, so it will come as no surpise that this vast metropolis has is home to a beguiling mix of different cultures and traditions, blending the influences of both



east and west. The city has a rich and intriguing history, originally founded by Greek settlers over 2000 years ago, Istanbul originally went by the name of Byzantium, later renamed Constantinople by the Romans who made

it the captial of their eastern empire. Today the city is the largest in Turkey, a bustling mega-city with a population of over 12 million people in total.

The old town is a good place to start you explorations. The Grand Bazaar is a paradise for souvenir hunters and you may well find yourself drinking tea with the shopkeepers whilst haggling over prices. Then there's the Topkapi Palace and Harem, Istanbul's iconic Blue Mosque and the incredible ancient church of Aya Sophia. The Archaeological Museum which contains the tomb of Alexander the Great is also worth a look. After all that sightseeing, take a stroll down to the waterfront and maybe take a boat ride up the Bosphorus, this is a great relaxing way to experience the city from a different angle, with excellent views of the minarets and towers that give the city its distinctive skyline. You might also like to visit an authentic Turkish bath, where attendants will pummel your body as though it was a lump of meat and walk over your back as a form of massage. Just around the corner from the baths is the 'Pudding Shop', infamous amoung travellers embarking on the hippie trail back in the 60's and 70's, a great spot to relax, recover and chat to other travellers at the end of the day.

# Day 2: Eceabat, Gallipoli

Mon 13 May 2013

Today you leave Istanbul behind and head to Eceabat (Approx. 400Kms) visiting Gallipoli peninsula.

Tonight you will stay in a friendly hostel.

#### Activity

**Approximate Cost** 

Visit to the Gallipoli beaches & museum

#### **Eceabat**

On the eastern shore of the Gelibolu peninsular, is the town of Eceabat. Lying at sea level, the surroundings include glistening waters, fantastic reflections and brings the feeling that you want to explore further into the town. Do this and you will find historic memorials of fallen soldiers during World War One in the nearby Gallipoli Campaign battlefields. This town might not live up to the highlights of other places in Turkey, but relaxation and exploration blend together to create wonders that make Eceabat the fascinating place it is.

#### Gallipoli

Gallipoli was the site of the Anzac landings in the 1914-18 war and one of the Allies great disasters in World War One. Gallipoli was the plan created by Winston Churchill to end the war early by creating a new war front that the Central Powers could not cope with. The stark memorial at Lone Pine is inscribed with the names of the many fallen Anzacs. The nearby museum with its memorabilia is well worth a visit.

# Day 3: Selcuk, Troy

Tue 14 May 2013

Full day journey to Selcuk today (Approx 515Kms), visiting the ancient city of Troy en-route. Staying in well-equipped campsite.

#### Activity

**Approximate Cost** 

Drive down the stunning wild Aegean coast via Bergama Ruins to Roman Ephesus at Selcuk

Explore the ancient ruins at Troy

Included in tour

#### **Selcuk**

Selcuk is a town retaining many Turkish cultures and traditions. Normally used by tourists as a stopping point before Ephesus, it has many wonders of it's own. Come in winter and you can see the annual camel wrestling championship. The town itself is usually undisturbed, which gives the opportunity to experience "Real Turkey". On the slopes of Ayasoluk Hill lies several historical buildings including the Isa Bey mosque and the Grand Fortress. This quiet town has many things to offer and a short time here is enough to explore the beauty of Selcuk.

#### **Troy**

We stop at Troy on the Aegean coast. Destroyed and rebuilt in its chequered history, it is one of the most famous of the ancient cities. A replica of the Wooden Horse reminds us of the many fables written about Troy.

#### Day 4: Selcuk

Wed 15 May 2013

Today you have a guided visit to the awe-inspiring Ephesus and surrounding temples. You will spend a second night in the campsite.

#### Activity

**Approximate Cost** 

Guided tour of the Roman ruins of

Ephesus

Included in tour

#### Day 5: Pamukkale

Thu 16 May 2013

After Breakfast you set off for Pamukkale. This afternoon there will be free time to wander around the gleaming white travertine terraces of Pamukkale. Overnight at a comfortable camp site.

#### Activity

**Approximate Cost** 

Admire the ruins of Hierapolis, Pamukkale

Included in tour

#### Day 6: Konya

Fri 17 May 2013

After a relaxing morning you will leave for the traditional Turkish city of Konya, you will set up our camp on the outskirts of the city before heading into town.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Explore the Mevlana Museum, Konya	USD 5

#### Konya

Focus of Sufic mystical practice and teaching for the Middle East, Konya is a place of pilgrimage for the whole of the Muslim world. It is surrounded by some of Turkey's most fertile countryside with many Byzantine churches, substantial Selcuk ruins and the Mevlana Shrine, which is counted as one of Turkey's most rewarding experiences.

#### **Day 7: Goreme**

Sat 18 May 2013

Overland across central Turkey to Goreme. You will stay for 2 nights in Goreme in a well-equipped hostel.

#### Goreme

Goreme is a small town in the heart of Cappadocia in Turkey. Known as the Enchanted Valley, the cones, needles and columns fashioned by nature from the soft volcanic tuff rock found here form a



unique and surreal landscape. The area is riddled with caves, scooped out of the rock to house churches and dwellings that are known as fairy chimneys and castles. Perhaps the most interesting are the rock chapels and frescoes of Goreme, the monastic complex of Zelve and the fairy chimneys of Avcilar. Nearby you can also see the remains of a number of underground cities, the most extensive of which housed up to 50,000 people at any one time. These cities could be shut up in the event of an invasion and the population kept safe below ground until the invaders departed.

More modern attractions include a local winery and the workshops of local craftsmen who produce skilled onyx carving and pottery. In Urgup, near Goreme, you can also enjoy a traditional Turkish bath, sip tea while playing backgammon with the local men, or enjoy a walk through the unique scenery. We can also arrange a group evening out perhaps to one of the underground nightclubs hollowed out of the soft rock. Entertained by local Cappadocian folk dancers, you can sample traditional foods washed down with some of Turkey's excellent wines, beers and Raki.

#### Day 8: Goreme

Sun 19 May 2013

In the morning you set off in the truck for a guided tour of stunning Cappadocia. The rest of the day is free time to explore Goreme.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided tour of Cappadocia a underground troglodyte cities a caves	
Take a hot air balloon flight ov Cappadocia	ver USD 210

#### Day 9: Zara

Mon 20 May 2013

You leave Goreme behind and drive North. You will stop in Zara en route to shop for supplies. Wild camp for the night.

#### Day 10: Sumela

Tue 21 May 2013

Today You will reach Sumela (or in colder conditions you will make our way to a hotel in Trabzon). The afternoon is free to explore the area.

#### Sumela

Set in the cliffs is the beautiful monastery of -Sumela. The monastery clings to a sheer rock wall high above evergreen forests and a rushing mountain stream.

#### Day 11: Batumi, Sumela

Wed 22 May 2013

Border Information: Exit Turkey & Enter Georgia at Sarpi

This morning you will visit Sumela Monastery. You then continue to the border and cross into Georgia. Your first night will be spent in the port town of Batumi in a comfortable hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Exploration of the Black Sea mountain monastery at Sumela	Included in tour

#### **Batumi**

Situated on the black sea coast Batumi has the feel of a resort town, nicely situated between the sea and the green hills. It is a great place to relax and there are plenty of cafes where you can enjoy a Turkish coffee and watch the world go by.

#### Day 12: Mestia

Thu 23 May 2013

After breakfast you leave Batumi behind and make your way to Mestia passing through uniquely picturesque villages and snow-covered peaks. You will arrive in the late afternoon. Tonight you'll stay with a local family in a homestay.

#### Day 13: Mestia

Fri 24 May 2013

Full day for optional activites including an optional hike to Chalato Glacier. Tonight you set up your wild camp and enjoy the stunning views.

# Activity Approximate Cost

Hike to Chalato Glacier near Mestia.

# Day 14: Kutaisi

Sat 25 May 2013

An early start today as we drive back down through the Mountains and continue your journey towards Kutaisi. Overnight at a homestay near the city.

#### Kutaisi

Kutaisi is one of the cradles of Georgian civilisation and the people here are renowned for their hospitality. Kutasi is home to the Bagrati Cathedral which sits high on a hill overlooking the town. This immense building was started by Bagrat III in 1003. It is in a state of ruin, but is still an impressive Christian monument.

Whilst visiting Kutaisi we organise a traditional homestay with local families which gives us a good insight into local life.

# Day 15: Gori

Sun 26 May 2013

Today you continue your drive to Gori . This afternoon you will have the opportunity to visit Gori. Tonight you will camp if conditions allow near the city.

#### Gori

At Gori we will visit Stalin's House and Railway - Carriage. The museum houses many photographs, some documents, some furniture and gifts presented to the dictator. It also houses Stalin's death mask. Outside the museum is the railway carriage which Stalin used for 12 years.

About 10kms outside the town is the cave town of Uplistsikhe, one of the oldest places of settlement in the Caucasus. Here we will find another ancient monastery and city with a Second Century Roman theatre and a more recent Ninth Century church. The site was started as a trading centre on the famed Silk Route in the Fifth Century.

# Day 16: Kazbegi

Mon 27 May 2013

Early start today for a beautiful drive to Kazbegi. Overnight at a homestay.

#### Kazbegi

Kazbegi is a small town in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region of north-eastern Georgia, an area famed for it's natural beauty.

#### Day 17: Kazbegi

Tue 28 May 2013

Morning walk and visit to the Tsminda Sameba Church. Overnight at a Homestay.

# Activity Approximate Cost Hike to Tsminda Sameba Church (approx 1.5 hrs), the 14th-century Holy Trinity Church above Kazbegi

#### Day 18: Telavi

Wed 29 May 2013

Drive to the Telavi wine region, overnight at a homestay.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overland through eastern Georgia and the wine growing region - time to stock up	Included in tour

#### **Telavi**

Telavi is the capital of the wine growing region of Kakheti and is situated in the valley of Alazani, near the Gombori Mountains. Telavi is a charming place and has fine views of the Caucasus. Nearby we visit the Sixth Century Shaumta Monastery, which is beautifully located on an isolated forested hilltop. There are hundreds of different grapes grown here, and every village has its own particular variety. We will hopefully see some of the local traditions, including grape harvest, wine making, and most importantly, the keipi (banquet), and also visit some of the local vineyards.

#### Day 19: Telavi

Thu 30 May 2013

This morning you will visit the Tsinandali Winery.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Shaumta Monastery, Telavi	Included in tour

#### Day 20: Tbilisi

Fri 31 May 2013

After an early breakfast you begin your drive to Georgia's capital, Tbilisi. This afternoon you will have a guided tour of the old town. Overnight in a hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided city tour of historic Tbilisi with its hilltop fortress and churches	Included in tour

#### **Tbilisi**

The city of Tbilisi is very historic. It was founded in the Fifth Century and by the Twelfth Century it had become a very important cultural and economic

centre. Its geographical position gave it control over the Silk Route and hence it became a regional super power. The Old City is full of churches and ancient wooden houses. It is easy to spend a day wandering around this charming city. It is also worth visiting the oriental markets and making a visit to the Narikala Fortress, which dominates the city skyline.

#### Day 21: Tbilisi Sat 01 Jun 2013

Today is your departure day. No activities are planned for today.

# **Visa Information:**

# **Important Notes**

# The routes, activities and places visited described in these trip notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

We intend following the planned route but exact night stops cannot be guaranteed. It sometimes happens that we decide to make a change to our basic planned itinerary. This may be for a variety of reasons - climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions may demand it. By their very nature overland itineraries need to be flexible and the regions that we are travelling through are often unpredictable. We run adventure journeys in off the beaten track areas, often in areas without western infrastructure. You should expect that some these areas do not adhere to western safety standards.

# **Physical Preparation**

Physical preparation for Asia Itineraries

In Asia you will need to be healthy enough to cope with extremes of climates from the hot deserts through to the colds of the high mountains. Overland travelling can be demanding - long, rough travel days, dusty conditions can be challenging to some. You will need to be fit enough to help every day with the camp chores (cooking, washing up, general camp set up) as well as putting up and taking down your own tent. There are some long driving days and some early morning starts. The step up into the overland vehicle, while not overly high can become tiring and you need to judge yourself to be physically fit enough to haul yourself up and down the step at least 8-10 times a day. By and large our Asia trips have a good range of hotel accommodation mixed up with camping so that life is not too rough.

#### **Altitude**

Please note that this trip spends time above 2800 metres/9200 feet where it is possible for travellers to experience some adverse effects on your health due to the altitude, potentially including Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE).

Because of this it is very important that you make yourself aware of the cause and effects of travelling at altitude and monitor your health during this trip.

For further information please click here to download our AMS information sheet or check out the following website <a href="www.high-altitude-medicine.com">www.high-altitude-medicine.com</a>

Your leader will also hand you a copy of the AMS information sheet during your trip as well as holding a short meeting prior to travelling to altitudes above 2800m/9200ft for the first time.

If you are starting your trip in a destination above 2800m/9200ft we strongly advise reading this information prior to arrival.

#### **Visa Information**

Most countries we visit on our travels will require visas. Some are best obtained before you leave home and others can be obtained en-route. Whilst the ultimate responsibility for obtaining visas is yours, we will endeavour to assist you wherever possible.

The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. The information provided is given in good faith and we do try to keep the visa information as up to date as possible. Please be aware though that rules do change, often without prior warning, which is why it is important that you check for yourself.

For visas that are needed in advance you can choose to submit the applications directly to the relevant embassy /consulate. However our recommendation is that you use a visa agent to assist you with your applications. While this does increase the cost it will make the process much easier for you. Dragoman have teamed up with 'The Visa Machine' to create a safe, secure, hassle-free way of obtaining visas and visa advice. Our unique link within their website is designed to make the visa process as straightforward as possible. Simply go to <a href="https://dragoman.thevisamachine.com">https://dragoman.thevisamachine.com</a> and click on your region of travel followed by your trip route and 'The Visa Machine' will advise you about not only the required visas but also the dates by which you should apply. 'The Visa Machine' can then assist you in the actual visa application thus taking all the worry and hassle out of the process. This should apply for ALL nationalities and countries of residence.

As you will need to submit your passport together with your applications, we recommend that you avoid making any travel plans in the weeks leading up to your departure. However if you do need to travel in this period please let us know as soon as possible so that we can help you work out the options for your visa application process.

#### **Turkey**

An entry visa is required for citizens of the US (USD20), Canada (USD60 on arrival, CAD75 for advance application), the UK USD20 or GBP10 on arrival, and Australia (USD20 on arrival), while a valid passport is sufficient for citizens of most other countries, including New Zealand, for stays up to 3 months. The visa costs can change depending on the political climate of the region. It is unnecessary to acquire an entry visa prior to departure as visas can easily be obtained on arrival. Visas obtained on entry must be paid in cash. A number of currencies are accepted including Euro, Pounds and US Dollars.

#### Georgia

Citizens of the following countries **do not** require a visa to Georgia for stays of up to 360 days: All European Union Member States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and United States of America.

All Nationalities should check with the nearest Embassy or Consulate for the latest visa information as this is subject to change at short notice.

# **Personal Spending**

Based on the range that previous travellers have spent on this trip, we recommend you allow between a minimum of US\$15 and a maximum of US\$30 per day for Central Asia, China and Burma and between a minimum of US\$10 and a maximum of US\$20 for India, Nepal and South East Asia.

This will cover individual expenses such as drinks, meals whilst out and also when staying in hotels, souvenirs, tips and personal permits.

**Please note:** For trips in Southern India that occur over Christmas and New Year please allow approximately \$130USD extra on the kitty for seasonal increases in accommodation costs

# What else you need to know

#### Currencies & Cash

It is not really worth trying to buy local currencies before you travel. Do also bear in mind that many countries have strict regulations about the amount of their own local currency you are allowed to import - if you are found with amounts in excess of the allowed amounts, it may well be confiscated!

For trips in Turkey, South East Asia, India and Nepal a sensible mix of cash and ATM cards is best. However, most of our past passengers have said they wished they had been told to bring more cash. Apart from the convenience of being able to change money in many more places, you will sometimes get a much better exchange rate for cash.

For trips in Central Asia, China, Burma and Mongolia please refer to the money exchange notes.

You should take a mixture of denomination notes. Banks and moneychangers in most countries will now only accept bills with a metallic strip running top to bottom of the bill and which are dated from 2003 or later. You should not take worn or damaged notes, or any that have been written on. Cash machines are readily available in most areas but are not always reliable therefore we recommend that you do not rely on them as your only source of cash. Credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard and American Express are the most commonly accepted, but be prepared for very high commission charges. Please do not rely on cards for daily use, as they are not always accepted outside of larger towns and cities. Please bring a mixture of small and large denominations as in more remote areas it can be hard to change amounts over \$50.

These trip notes have been compiled to help you prepare for your journey, once you have booked. They include the full itinerary and dates, information and kit lists, meeting hotels, insurance, vaccinations, visas, and other information that will help you get ready for your trip.

Please ensure you have an up to date version of these Trip Notes

These trip notes were printed on 19/05/2013