



TOUR INFORMATION FOR GEORGIA in autumn

These are designed to help you prepare for the tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING GEORGIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for six months after the date of entry. A visa is not required by citizens of the EU. Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Embassy for entry requirements.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Georgia is + 4 hours (GMT).

CURRENCY: The local currency of Georgia is the Lari (GEL). These can be obtained at the airport on arrival and changing cash is quicker than travellers' cheques and we advise against taking these. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you only need to change enough money to cover items of a personal nature.

LANGUAGE: Few people speak English but a translator will accompany us throughout the tour. Georgian is the common language and Russian is also spoken.

CLIMATE: We may experience a wide range of conditions on this tour. The first part of the tour is spent at Batumi on the Black Sea coast. Here we can expect warm temperatures, but possibly some rain and high humidity at times, so you need to take suitable clothing such as waterproof jackets as well as light summer clothes. When we leave Batumi we travel into the Lesser Caucasus in the south of Georgia and may experience weather typical of higher altitudes, including rain, low cloud and lower temperatures. Sunny and warm days are also perfectly possible!

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: This tour will require some physical effort as the raptor count stations require a short but steep uphill climb along a dirt track and steps. The other birding areas around Batumi are all at sea level and are on grassy or uneven ground. In the mountains, some uphill walking may be required but generally we will not be venturing far from the road. None of the walks are in any way dangerous but some participants might find a lightweight metal walking pole useful. Our days either start at first light with an optional pre-breakfast excursion, or with breakfast at around 06.00. Days typically end when the light fails at around 18.00. We always aim to allow at least an hour before dinner and checklist but on some travelling days we might arrive at our accommodation later and be required to eat dinner soon after arriving.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region you are visiting.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations.

Biting insects are very scarce.

Tap water is basically alright to drink but to be safe drink bottled water, which, along with soft drinks and beer, is widely available. Upset stomachs are possible in Georgia although unlikely. We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium or Arret. Packets of Dioralyte are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea. Make sure you bring a good sun-screen and also sunglasses.

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Finally, ensure you bring adequate supplies of all personal medication as it may be impossible to obtain them during the tour.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION: We will be staying in modern hotels or guesthouses at all sites. Each room has its own bathroom. However, be prepared for a lack of maintenance with things like leaky plumbing and lights not always working.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: This is unlikely to be available.

ELECTRICITY: The current is 220 volts AC, 50 cycles. A continental plug adapter with two small circular pins is required. An international travel plug can be bought in most airport departure lounges. Power cuts are not uncommon so bring a good torch. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: The food of Georgia is similar to that of Turkey and, although meat does feature heavily in most main meals, these are usually served with a variety of vegetable dishes.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer or wine are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

FIELD CLOTHING: Flexibility is the key. Around Batumi, light clothing will be required as protection from the strong sun. When we are out walking in the mountain regions you need to be prepared for changes in the weather and we strongly recommend that you bring lots of layers that can be discarded or added as conditions dictate. We would suggest bringing thermal underwear, good shirts and a sweater or fleece, topped off by a good water- and wind-proof jacket. **Some of the terrain we will be walking over will require good walking shoes or boots.** A good hat to protect from sun is advisable plus a pair of sunglasses for use in snow as well as to protect from strong sunlight.

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT: Please bring the following:

Notebook and pen	Alarm Clock
Small rucksack/Day pack	Sun hat & sun screen
Torch with spare batteries	Sunglasses
Universal plug.	Insect repellent
Personal medication	Walking stick or pole

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Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide. A telescope and tripod are very useful on this tour for watching distant raptors, seawatching and observing birds on the alpine lakes. A 'Finnstick' will also be very useful if you have one (this is a small monopod that fits onto your binoculars enabling extended periods of use without tiring your arms out - made popular in Finland, hence the name). A lightweight portable seat maybe beneficial to some while we at the raptor station, as we may be stationary in one place for several hours.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following for group use:

Telescope & tripod	Basic first-aid kit
Field guides	Reference books
Playback equipment	Laser Pointer

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: There are no restrictions on photography in Georgia but we advise against taking photographs of bridges, stations, airports or 'official' buildings. Always ask before taking a photo of a local person. There are plenty of opportunities for good scenic shots and some of the birds can be reasonably approachable, especially some of the migrant species. The raptors at Batumi may provide some excellent opportunities as they may fly past at eye level or even below eye level. 'Digiscoping' is perfectly compatible with the tour, though you should bring your own telescope! The leader's telescope will not be available for this.

Please note that this is essentially a birdwatching tour. There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: Transportation is in a minibus and four-wheel drive vehicles. There are a few long drives but these are broken by many stops for birdwatching. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible. Note that smoking is an extremely common habit in Georgia and we are sure to find ourselves on some occasions in the presence of local people who will be smoking. A dislike of smoking here is sometimes regarded as a western affectation.

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TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. It is very useful to have a copy of your insurance policy on your person or easy to hand at all times. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

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Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

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Maps: A good map of Georgia is published by International Travel Maps of Vancouver. The scale is 1:625,000. The follow outlets may have a copy in stock.

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
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Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
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