Monday, September 24, 2018
Arrival to Tbilisi. Transfer to the Hotel. Rest. Welcome Dinner. Hotel for overnight: Gallery Palace, Tbilisi

Tuesday, September 25, 2018
9:00am  Walk to the Persian bath-houses (17th c.), then across the bridge of 100,000 martyrs noting the church of St. Abo Tbiliseli, ending at the Metekhi Church (11th c.), site of the holy relics of the princess-martyr St. Shushanik. Continue walking tour to the Sioni Cathedral (14th c.).
10:45am  Walk to the Icon Museum for a tour of the Christian treasury of Georgia (opens at 11am). This museum houses the majority of famous icons, chalices, and artifacts from the medieval Georgian Christian church including the miracle-working icon of Anchi, and the Khakhuli triptych. These items were saved from destruction by St. Ekvtime Taqaishvili, who secured their safety in France between the years 1921-1956.
12:30pm  Walk to a khachapuri restaurant for lunch
2:30pm  Walk to National Museum for a guided tour of the Gold exhibit and the Christian artifact exhibit (1st floor). Then there will be free time to explore the Soviet Occupation exhibit (4th floor), or Persian art-ceramics exhibits (4th floor), the archeological and historic gold mine exhibit (3rd floor), or ethnographic weapons and costumes exhibit (2nd floor). Gift shops on the 2nd floor. We'll designate a departure time, and meet in the foyer before departing.
4:30pm  Free time to explore the city. Option to walk along Rustaveli Avenue past the Tbilisi Opera House.
7:30pm  Dinner in the city

Wednesday, September 26, 2018
8:30am  Load suitcases onto bus. As the bus cannot fit down the narrow road to the hotel, our staff will be responsible for transporting one suitcase for each person from your room entrance to the bus parked down the street. We will count the suitcases to make sure we have 26 suitcases, one for each guest.
9:00am  Depart for Sighnaghi (2 hours).
11:30am  Walking tour of the fortress town of Sighnaghi, views to the north across the lush Alazani Valley to the Great Caucasus Range. Option to visit the Sighnaghi museum: the permanent exhibits include the paintings of avant-garde painter Niko Pirosmani (1862-1918), as well as a small but remarkable collection of archeological and ethnographic artifacts from the Alazani Valley region dating to the 3rd millennium BC. Also an option to stop into a local atelier to view traditional carpet-making techniques.
1:00pm  Lunch and bread-baking demonstration. Then free time before a traditional feast with toasting and singing at the Pheasant's Tears winery and restaurant. Unique local recipes from highly profiled chef, Gia Rokashvili, will be paired with organic Pheasants Tears qvevri wines.
2:30pm  Drive to the nearby 9th c. Bodbe Convent (10 minutes), final resting place of the 4th century saint, St. Nino Enlightener of Georgians. The complex features a 9th century basilica with 19th century frescoes and a refurbished, multi-storied wooded Russian iconostasis; a 19th century Russian bell-tower, a gift-shop, and a brand new cross-and-dome church to accommodate the crowds that come on pilgrimage to the Bodbe convent for the feast of St. Nino on January 27th (still under construction). We may have a meeting with the nuns.
4:00pm Depart for the 19th c. Tsinandali summer palace (1 hour), summer palace of the poet and diplomat Alexander Chavchavadze and family (30 minutes). We’ll take a tour of the summer palace, and hear about a daring raid on the site in 1854, when forces allied with the Muslim freedom fighter Shamil managed to capture the Chavchavadze princess and her retainers. According to legend, all were eventually exchanged for the return of Shamil's captive son and a payment of 40,000 gold coins. (Time permitting, stop and walk 20 minutes to the Kvelatsminda double-dome monastery (8th c.).

6:30pm Drive 20 minutes to Villa Iqalto hotel (staying two nights), passing through the city of Telavi, passing the fortified residence of King Erekle II (1720-1798).

7:30pm Dinner at the hotel restaurant will feature a menu of dishes from the Kakheti region, accompanied by a wine tasting or East Georgian varietals.

Hotel: Savaneti, Iqalto

Thursday, September 27, 2018

9 am Depart for the 11th c. Alaverdi Cathedral Complex (20 minutes), founded by the Syrian monastic Joseph in the sixth century. St. Joseph was one of thirteen Syrian fathers who immigrated to the Mtskheta area before founding monasteries throughout East Georgia. We will be visiting several churches related to their monastic efforts, which remain some of the most important religious sites in the region.

10:30am Depart for the 16th c. Gremi Church and Basilica (30 minutes), founded by King Levan. We will visit the Church of the Archangels, then walk down to the smart exhibit on the history of the complex at the Gremi Museum.

12:30pm Continue to Napareuli winery and qvevri museum (20 minutes). Tour of the grounds, then lunch.

2:30pm Depart for 4th-12th c. Nekresi Monastery (30 minutes), founded by the 6th century Syrian father Abibos. At this stop, we will need to depart our bus, and take the shuttle bus up the steep road to the monastic complex. Tour of the complex.

4:30pm Return to hotel (1 hour) for a rest by the pool. (Time permitting: see the Iqalto monastery and academy if we are interested in seeing more churches!)

7:30pm Dinner at the hotel will feature a distinct menu of dishes from the Kakheti region, accompanied by a wine tasting.

Hotel for overnight: Savaneti, Iqalto

Friday, September 28, 2018

9am Depart for the Telavi vegetable-cheese market (15 minutes)

10:00am 16th c. New Shuamta convent, founded by Queen Tinatin (15 minutes).

11:00am Continue over the Gombori Pass, optional stop for scrambling around the 3rd c. Ujarma fortress ruin, said to be where the 5th c. King Vakhtang Gorgasali is buried.

1:00pm Lunch in Tbilisi

2:30pm Drive to Makhata Cathedral (new construction site)

3:30pm Tour of Sameba (Trinity) Cathedral, opened in 2004

5:00pm Free time/ evening in Tbilisi (everyone on their own for dinner)

Hotel for overnight: Gallery Palace, Tbilisi
Saturday, September 29, 2018
9am Depart for the 6th c. Jvari Monastery (45 minutes), one of the earliest surviving examples of the "cross-and-dome" architectural style that flourished in the 6th century. From the vantage of this cliff-hugging church, we gaze down on Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, standing on a bluff above the confluence of two rivers.
10:30am After driving down into Mtskheta, tour the 11th c. Svetitskhoveli (Life-Giving Pillar) Cathedral. This site is the spiritual heart of the Georgian Orthodox Church, the place of royal coronations, royal burials, and containing important relics such as the tunic of Christ. The West end nave has been replaced, but most of the building remains from the original 11th-12th century construction. The wall paintings date from various periods, the most famous of which is a 16th c. circular fresco depicting the zodiac surrounding the four evangelists and Christ, found in the South apse. Also of interest: note a reconstruction of the hagiopolite Church of the Sepulcher in the southwest corner of the nave.
12:30pm Visit to the nearby Samtavro Convent, built on the site where St. Nino (4th century) prayed, lived, and converted King Mirian and Queen Nana in 337 AD. All are designated as UNESCO world heritage sites. The Samtavro Convent is now the final resting place of St. Gabriel (1929-1995), a fool for God and recently canonized saint of the Georgian Orthodox Church.
1:30pm Lunch in Mtskheta
3:00pm Depart for Kutaisi (3 hours), the ancient capital of Kolchis. According to Greek Mythology, the land of Kolchis was the destination of the Greek heroes, Jason and the Argonauts. Kutaisi is one site where scholars believe King Aeetes held court.
6:00pm Check into the hotel (staying two nights). Option to walk through downtown Kutaisi.
7:30pm Walk to dinner nearby. The menu includes only dishes from the Imeretian region, paired with wine varietals only grown in Imereti.
Hotel: Argo Hotel, Kutaisi

Sunday, September 30, 2018
9am Depart for the Gelati Monastery complex (30 minutes), founded by King David the Builder in the 12th c. Remarkable mosaics and wall paintings date from the 12th-17th centuries. We'll stay for the liturgy. The complex includes the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the church of St. George, the university refectory building, a belltower with medieval water source, two historic gatehouses, and various other buildings and monastic cells. Learn about St. Ekvtime Kereselidze (1865-1944), who slavishly copied the Georgian chant manuscripts while living in the Gelati monastery from 1912-1923. The manuscripts were later kept in tin boxes buried in the monastery yard of Zedazeni from 1924-1936, when they were given to two museum directors for safe keeping.
12:30pm Depart for lunch at the Kolkha restaurant in Kutaisi (30 minutes).
2:30pm Following lunch, we depart for the 7th c. Martvili Monastery (1 hour), a model of the Jvari cross-and-dome church in East Georgia. As legend has it, the church was built on the site of ancient barbaric pagan rituals where infants or virgins were sacrificed on the hilltop under a giant oak tree. The ringed floor plan of the church recalls the site where none other than Apostle Andrew cut this historic tree to the ground.
5:00pm Visit the Martvili Canyon (15 minute drive), a natural wonder featuring a narrow canyon with gushing waterfalls and a unique
micro-climate. Well-designed walkways lead us to exquisite vantage points, and only take 15 minutes to walk in entirety.

6:00pm Return to Kutaisi (1 hour)
7:30pm Dinner featuring West Georgian cuisine.
Hotel for overnight: Argo hotel, Kutaisi

**Monday, October 1, 2018**

9 am Visit to the Bagrat Cathedral and Fortress ruins, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The cathedral was completed in 1003 AD, and at its commemoration, many kings and patriarchs attended from neighboring countries. Unfortunately, the cupola and roof were destroyed by Turkish invaders in 1691, but both were controversially replaced in 2012. The cathedral now serves as a functioning religious space again, where liturgy is served daily.

10am Option to walk the vegetable and spice market in Kutaisi.

11am Depart for the Ubisa Monastery, founded in the 9th c. by disciples of St. Grigol Khandztelii (2 hours). Restoration of the unique 14th c. Byzantine frescoes has recently been completed, attracting the interest of international art historians. The outbuildings feature a stylelt-type tower where hermits locked themselves away for years.

1:00pm Lunch at the nearby restaurant, a destination spot on the Dzirula riverbank. The lunch features mushrooms and greens sourced in the local mountains.

3:30pm Continue driving over the Likhi Mountain range, through the historic towns of Surami and Borjomi before entering the Borjomi gorge, gateway to southern Georgia (2 hours).

Check into the Lomsia Hotel in Akhaltsikhe (staying two nights).

6 pm Drive to the Rabat Fortress of Akhaltsikhe for a brief tour of the castle reconstruction before dinner at the Gino Restaurant inside the walls! Cuisine will feature dishes and wines from the Javakheti region.

Hotel for overnight: Lomsia, Akhaltsikhe

**Tuesday, October 2, 2018**

9:00 am Depart for the Vardzia Cave Complex (1 hour). Built in Queen Tamar’s reign in the 12th century, the monastic and village complex was a major pilgrimage site between Cappadocia, Mtskheti, and the Bodbe Convent in East Georgia. It was once home to more than 700 residents before a 14th c. earthquake devastated the site. Hiking shoes recommended.

1 pm Drive to lunch at the Vardzia Resort restaurant with a view of the cave complex.

2:30 pm Following lunch, we will return towards Akhaltsikhe (1 hour) to visit the Rabat Fortress museum. The recently opened National museum features a superb collection of artifacts from the Akhaltsikhe region dating back to 3000 BC.

4:30pm Depart for the 10th-14th c. Sapara Monastery complex (30 minutes). The Jaqeli family, the local patrons, are visible in wall paintings in the south apse.

6:00pm Return to the Lomsia hotel in Akhaltsikhe for dinner and overnight

**Wednesday, October 3, 2018**

9:00 Depart for 16th Ananuri fortress (3 hours), with rest stops along the way as necessary.
12:30pm After a tour of the fortress complex, lunch along the river in the nearby town of Pasanauri.

2:30pm Continue up the Russian Military Highway into the Great Caucasus mountains, stopping for photos at special viewpoints.

4:30pm Cross the Jvari Pass and descend into the Kazbegi highland region

5:30pm Check into Rooms Resort Hotel, staying one night. Enjoy aperitifs at the bar, or a swim in the indoor pool.

7:30pm Dinner at the hotel.

Hotel: Kazbegi Rooms hotel, Kazbegi Thursday, October 4, 2018

9:00am Depart for the 13th c. Gergeti Sameba Monastery (30 minutes by 4x4 jeep)

11:00am Return to Stepantsminda by 4x4 jeep, then take bus down the Terek river through the scenic Daryal Gorge to the Russian border (30 minutes).

12:00pm Tour of the 21st c. Monastery of the Archangels

1:00pm Return to Stepantsminda (30 minutes) for lunch with a local family, who will teach us to make traditional khinkali dumplings

2:30pm Depart for Tbilisi (3 hours), with stops along the way

6:30pm Check into the Gallery Palace Hotel

7:30pm Dinner in Tbilisi

Friday, October 5, 2018

9:00am Option to attend Liturgy at Sioni or Sameba cathedrals. OR: Drive to the Dry Bridge market, peruse the artwork and trinkets for sale.

10:30am Visit the National Gallery of Art

12:30pm Drive to the funicular station, take the funicular to the top of Mtatsminda (Holy Mountain) for spectacular views of Tbilisi.

1:00pm Lunch at the Funikular Restaurant

2:30pm Return to Tbilisi for an afternoon of souvenir shopping, carpet shopping, and last-day requests. Option to branch out on your own to see more museums, meet local people, etc.

4:30pm Option to attend Vespers at Sioni or Sameba cathedrals

7:30pm Final banquet with singers! End of official tour.

Hotel: Gallery Palace Hotel, Tbilisi Saturday, October 6, 2018

Departure back home. Airport transfers as scheduled.
GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE TOUR:

Financial arrangements:

- Group size 20+ pax: 2850USD
- Group size 25+ pax: 2700USD
- Single occupancy: 400USD

Fees include:

Transportation:
- chauffeured coach
- Airport transfers
- extra taxis and 4x4 jeeps as necessary

Meals:
- delicious full meals, three per day, unless noted otherwise
- all house wines and beers
- includes desserts, coffee, tea, extras

Hotels:
- boutique hotel rooms with private bath and shower

Entrances and Tips:
- includes all museum entrance fees
- includes all restaurant and hotel tips

Special Events:
- the tour includes access to special events such as meetings with local monastics, contact with local musicians and artisans, viewings of traditional bread baking and wine making

Guides:
- John A. Graham – lead guide and organizer. John holds a Ph.D. in Musicology from Princeton University. He has lectured at Princeton, Wesleyan, and Yale, and is fluent in the Georgian language.
- John is flanked by two English-speaking Georgian co-leaders who are semi-professional singers of the unique polyphonic Georgian traditional song and chant repertory.

(Special feature: In a tasteful way, these three singers will test the acoustics of each medieval Orthodox Church we visit; while enlivening our meal times with folksong and instrumentals)

Fees Exclude:
- Airfare*
- Hotel nights and meals outside of those designated on the itinerary
- Tips for driver and guides (suggested $20 per person for each of the four Georgian staff (guide, 2 chanters, and driver)
-- Anything that is not specifically mentioned in “Price includes”

* We could offer a compatible individual or round-trip group airfare (15+ people) from any major US airport for your consideration. For details please contact Father Ilya Gotlinsky at 607-797-1058 or Gotlinsky@msn.com

Preferred method of payment is by check made to: "Palomnik, LLC" and mailed to: 53 Baxter Street, Binghamton, NY 13905. Any returned checks are subject to $25 fee. For payment with a Credit Card and for domestic or international bank wires, please contact Fr. Ilya directly.

A deposit of $700 is required when you sign up for the trip. Your deposit is non-refundable, unless pilgrimage is cancelled by the organizers due to lack of participation or for some other valid or unforeseen circumstance. In order to avoid any money loss, emergency/travel cancellation insurance strongly recommended.

The deadline for signing up for the trip is June 24, 2018. The entire amount is due by the deadline. Failure to pay in full by June 24, 2018 without written notice of explanation may lead to the cancellation of your participation, with no refund of any previously committed funds. If you decide to join the pilgrimage after the deadline, please contact tour coordinator regarding the availability.

If you need to cancel after you signed up, please note the schedule of charges in addition to the amount of non-refundable deposit:

• 30% of the tour cost, 90 to 61 days prior to the departure
• 50% of the tour cost, 61 to 45 days prior to the departure
• 100% of the tour cost 45 or fewer days prior to the departure

All cancellations must be in writing and sent directly to agent/coordinator - Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky and must be received for reimbursement by the dates shown in the cancellation schedule.

Passport and Visa:

A valid passport is necessary for travel to Georgia. No visa required for the US citizens if you do not plan to stay for more than 365 days.

Rules on the road:

It is strongly suggested that you

Obtain insurance covering medical needs and coverage of personal property

Be aware that financial coverage for all emergency medical and other emergency needs will be your sole responsibility. We will provide all possible logistical and personal assistance, but the financial aspect is your responsibility.

Act in a manner consistent with the surrounding environment

Make arrangements to have access to sufficient funds to cover personal needs and unexpected events

Be aware that the places that we will be visiting may not have the same amenities that you are accustomed to. Medical facilities in most areas are limited. Because of the difference in language and customs, it is expected that the traveler will follow the directions of the Tour Director at all times.

The Director reserves the right to restrict a person’s participation in the group’s activities, including exclusion from the group, when, in the opinion of the Director, such action is appropriate.

Please note: The Director of the trip, Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky, does not hold any legal responsibilities
concerning any of the arrangements, but acts only as an agent/coordinator.

HELPFUL TIPS:

LUGGAGE — Take only as many pieces of luggage as you can manage yourself.

MEDICATION — Bring any prescription medications you need, as well as over the counter treatments for common ailments such as colds, upset stomach, and the like.

BE SURE TO BRING - comfortable shoes (we will be walking on an uneven terrain); rain coat, something warm as to wear in the evening, as it gets frisk very quickly after the sunset; electric outlet adapters, extra batteries, and memory cards for your camera, phone, and other gadgets; an alarm clock; Kleenex. Some travelers also recommend bringing hand sanitizer or wipes, a wash cloth (not typically provided in hotels). DRESS -- We are going to visit a lot of churches and monasteries. Women should wear head-coverings and [preferably] skirts when visiting churches and monasteries. Men should wear regular shirts and trousers. The weather during this time of the year will be changing, please be prepared accordingly.

GEORGIAN CUISINE – considered to be one of the best in the World. Lots of grilled meats, oven baked breads, lots of herbs (not very spicy), lots of local greens and vegetables. Wine is absolutely delicious.

WATER – It is advisable to drink bottled water, which is not expensive and is widely available.

SECURITY - Don't keep all of your cash in one place, and carry important documents (like your passport and visa) with you in a hidden pocket or secure bag. Expensive jewelry and fancy electronic devices are best left at home.

CURRENCY – Most places take only local currency: Georgian lari. In time when you could exchange cash upon your arrival to Tbilisi, it is advisable to use credit card whenever credit cards are accepted (Visa, MasterCard, don’t count on American Express as much). For cash you always could withdraw necessary funds from the ATMs.

If you are interested in joining the tour, please contact
Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky for more information at:
53 Baxter Street, Binghamton, NY 13905
(607)-797-1058 & ortours@gmail.com
www.orthodoxtours.com

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