

Georgia: At the Crossroads of Europe and Asia

Georgia is a truly distinctive country located in the Caucasus region, at the intersection of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, serving as a natural bridge between the two continents. Its geographical position is strategically significant: to the north it borders the Greater Caucasus Mountains and the Russian Federation, to the east Azerbaijan, to the south Turkey and Armenia, and to the west it is bordered by the Black Sea.

Key Facts

- **Area:** 69,700 sq. km
- **Capital:** Tbilisi — the country's largest economic and cultural center
- **Population:** Approximately 5 million
- **Form of Government:** Semi-presidential republic
- **National Currency:** Georgian Lari (GEL)
- **Religion:** The majority of the population (83.9%) practices Orthodox Christianity

Culture and Identity

Georgia is renowned for its **ancient language and unique script**. The official state language is Georgian, and Orthodox Christianity has played a significant role in shaping the country's cultural heritage.

The Georgian Language and Unique Alphabet

A Phenomenon of Global Importance

The Georgian alphabet is considered one of humanity's greatest cultural achievements. Among the very limited number of independent writing systems worldwide—only **14 in total**—the Georgian script holds a distinguished place.

Georgian is spoken by approximately **4 million people**. Notably, for **98% of Georgian speakers living in Georgia**, it is their native language, underscoring the language's vitality and the nation's strong cultural identity.

Major Cities

Georgia's urban landscape is defined by several key cities:

1. **Tbilisi** — political and administrative center
2. **Kutaisi** — historical capital of western Georgia
3. **Batumi** — major port city and tourism hub

4. **Rustavi** — an important industrial center
5. **Zugdidi, Gori, and Poti** — strategically significant regional cities

Climate Diversity

Despite its relatively small territory, Georgia is characterized by remarkable **climatic contrasts**, ranging from humid subtropical coastlines to permanently snow-covered mountain peaks.

Regional Climate Differences

The Likhi Mountain Range divides the country into two main climatic zones:

- **Western Georgia:** Humid subtropical climate with mild winters and abundant rainfall, influenced by proximity to the Black Sea.
- **Eastern Georgia:** Drier, more continental climate with hot summers and significantly less precipitation.

An Ideal Environment for Living and Studying

Georgia is especially attractive to international students due to its **comfortable year-round climate**:

- **Winter:** Generally mild; average temperatures in lowland areas range from 2–3°C.
- **Summer:** Pleasantly warm, with average temperatures around 24°C—ideal for both leisure and an active lifestyle.

Leisure and Recreation Opportunities

Georgia welcomes visitors in every season:

- **Summer:** Subtropical Black Sea resorts
- **Winter:** High-mountain ski resorts and alpine destinations

An Ancient Civilization and Anthropological Discovery

Georgia is considered one of the **cradles of human civilization**. Archaeological excavations in **Dmanisi** uncovered the oldest known human remains in Eurasia. The individuals known as **Zezva** and **Mzia** lived approximately **1.8 million years ago**, confirming Georgia as the homeland of the earliest Europeans.

Tolerance and Cultural Diversity

Throughout history, Georgia has been distinguished by its **cultural diversity and tolerance**, where people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds have coexisted peacefully for centuries.

Due to its complex geopolitical position, Georgia has repeatedly defended its independence against powerful empires, including **Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia**. In the 19th cen-

tury, Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire, followed later by the period of Soviet occupation.

Cultural Heritage

Georgia's rich and complex history has resulted in an extraordinary abundance of cultural monuments, including:

- Unique architectural structures
- Ancient religious sites
- Strategic fortresses
- Significant archaeological locations

UNESCO World Heritage

Approximately **5,000 historical monuments** are protected nationwide. Three of these sites are included on the **UNESCO World Heritage List**, highlighting Georgia's global cultural significance.

Historical Roots and UNESCO Recognition

The history of Georgian writing spans centuries. The earliest surviving Georgian manuscripts date back to the **early 5th century**.

The Georgian script evolved through **three distinct forms**—*Asomtavruli*, *Nuskhuri*, and *Mkhedruli*. This living tradition is recognized on UNESCO's **Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**.

The Cradle of Wine

Georgia is internationally recognized as the **birthplace of wine**. Archaeological discoveries of **7,000-year-old grape seeds and clay qvevri vessels** represent the world's earliest evidence of winemaking.

- Over **500 endemic grape varieties** grow in Georgia
- UNESCO has recognized the traditional Georgian method of winemaking in *qvevri* as Intangible Cultural Heritage
- Linguists believe that the word “wine” (Wine, Вино) originates from the Georgian word “**ghvino**”

Georgian Cuisine and Hospitality

Georgian cuisine reflects the country's rich natural landscape, combining meat-based and vegetarian dishes enhanced with distinctive spices and herbs. The traditional **Georgian feast (supra)** is widely regarded as a global symbol of hospitality.

Ancient Christian Heritage

Georgia is one of the world's **oldest Christian nations**, where churches and monasteries form an integral part of national history. The country has long upheld religious tolerance. Major sacred sites include:

- **Mtskheta (Svetitskhoveli Cathedral):** believed to house the Robe of Christ
- **Bodbe Monastery:** burial place of Saint Nino
- **Zugdidi:** home to the Robe of the Virgin Mary
- Iconic monuments such as **Gergeti Trinity Church, Gelati Monastery, Vardzia, and David Gareja**

Official Public Holidays

- **January:** 1–2 (New Year), 7 (Christmas), 19 (Epiphany)
- **March:** 3 (Mother's Day), 8 (International Women's Day)
- **April/May:** April 9 (National Unity Day), Easter, May 9 (Victory Day), May 12 (St. Andrew the First-Called), May 26 (Independence Day)
- **August/October/November:** August 28 (Assumption of Mary), October 14 (Svetitskhovloba), November 23 (St. George's Day)