



GEORGIA

WHY NOW?

Joanna Lumley put Georgia on our minds in her *Silk Road Adventure* TV documentary — just as two new direct flights make it easier to reach the Caucasian country, and new hotels make it comfier to stay. Come for hiking, biking and preserved antique cities — the capital, Tbilisi (pictured), included.

WHY GO?

An unsullied countryside and cities fashionably abuzz are two reasons to fly the five hours to Georgia, a wine-steeped nation the size of Ireland. Its young populace speaks fluent English, especially in the cool capital Tbilisi, doable in a long weekend.

First grab a cheesy *khachapuri* bread from a bakery and explore the Prague-like Old Town. You'll discover one-off boutiques and up-to-the-minute restaurants such as Café Littera (13 Machabeli St; mains about £9), run by the 'queen of Georgian fusion', Tekuna Gachechiladze. Foodie travel

is big these days and Georgian grub is outstanding, with flavours spilling over the borders from Turkey, Russia and Iran.

Tbilisi's historic zone is capped off by Ottoman-era Gulo's Thermal Baths (£20). After a soak and a pummel, hop on the cable car (30p) that wobbles you over to the Narikala Fortress for panoramic views. And do spend time riverside; the River Mtkvari wriggles under the Dry Bridge, where you'll pick up Soviet bric-a-brac, *churchkhela* (candlestick-shaped sweets made from grapes and nuts) and local knitwear.

Tbilisi's new generation of Berlin-boho hotels shows off the city's post-Communist renaissance. River-view Moxy (marriott.com; doubles from £65, room-only) is decorated with Cyrillic maps and model Ladas, while Ilja's Hotel (facebook.com/iljashotel; doubles from £44, B&B) is a '20s Art Deco timewarp.

Got a week to spare? Hike the western highlands on the new Transcaucasian Trail, or make a boozy beeline east to

Kakheti — wine-making began here 8,000 years ago, and has hardly changed since. The region has blossomed with the rediscovery of more than 500 varieties — and lots of tastings at vineyards. Signaghi town is the local answer to Saint-Emilion, with gourmet restaurants and organic winemakers. Try the restaurant at top domaine Pheasant's Tears (pheasantsteers.com; mains about £7). Living Roots (travellingroots.com) runs offbeat nature trips, along with a brand-new guesthouse, Lost Ridge Inn (lostridgeinn.com; doubles from £71, B&B). Coming soon is the Tsinandali Estate (tsinandali.ge), a 141-room wine hotel with rooftop pool, set among vines and parkland.

THE 'NOW' SPOT

The Gudauri ski station, a two-hour drive or quick helicopter hop from Tbilisi, has emerged as the nation's most active resort thanks to night-skiing, splitboarding and year-round heli-skiing options. Both beginners and off-pisters can board Austrian-built ski lifts far above 3,000m; passes sell for peanuts. Come summer the same lifts carry trekkers, bikers and paragliders.

THE 'NEXT' SPOT

Kutaisi, 230km west of Tbilisi, is the nearest city to the new Transcaucasian Trail, the first long-distance walking path through the Caucasus — the world's greatest hiking terrain. Intrepid hikers have begun trekking the first part of the trail in the snow-capped Svaneti region, which passes 5,000m peaks and 1,000-year-old churches; now volunteers are marking the trail into neighbouring Armenia and Azerbaijan.

THINK TWICE IF...

You're a nervous passenger. Road fatalities in Georgia are roughly twice the EU average. At-wheel smoking, texting and gesticulating is common. Your driver (hire one for £50 a day) might slow down if you plead travel sickness.

GET ME THERE

Georgian Airways flies to Tbilisi from Gatwick from £212 return. Wizz Air connects Luton to Kutaisi from £48 return. TravelLocal (travellocal.com) works with local guides to run eight far-reaching tours; its six-night Classic Georgia itinerary starts at £670pp, B&B, excluding flights. Or try Explore (explore.co.uk).

Tristan Rutherford



LES: THE NEW BROOKLYN

Let's face it, New York is Manhattan. Brooklyn might have hipsters scurrying across the East River, but it's over there, overrated and, for many, plain over. Meanwhile, in Manhattan, attention has turned to the once-sketchy Lower East Side, where immigrants mustered in the 19th century — and NYC's coolest now do likewise



SEYCHELLES: THE NEW MALDIVES

The Seychelles has always been just a little more exotic than its Indian Ocean neighbour (it's a sexy Creole melting pot with bonkers wildlife and tongue-popping cuisine). But thanks to a handful of world-class new hotel openings this year — and a handy new direct BA flight — it's now putting those other beachy idylls in the tastefully palm-fronded shade