Hiker's Journey to the Caucasus

LODGE-BASED HIKING IN THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA



Overview





QUESTIONS?

Our Area Specialists are your single point of contact and would be happy to answer any questions about your trip! 800.368.2794 | 510.558.2488

TRIP DETAILS AT-A-GLANCE

Length:	11 days
Arrive:	Tbilisi, Georgia
Depart:	Tbilisi, Georgia
Lodging:	10 nights hotels and simple guesthouses
Meals:	All meals included
Activity:	Cultural, Hiking & Trekking

Trip Level: 1 2 3 4 5 6

Moderate to strenuous hiking, 4 to 10 miles a day, rocky trails with some ascents and descents, and occasionally we may have to ford a river on foot or on horseback.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike in the alpine landscapes of the Tusheti and Kazbegi mountains
- · Be welcomed like long-lost friends in family-run guesthouses
- Savor traditional Georgian feasts with villagers, including lamb roasts and wild trout with local wines
- Hikes by day, basic lodges at night—no camping!
- · Visit Tbilisi's World Heritage-listed Georgian Orthodox churches
- Learn how European, Asian, and Middle Eastern influences melded together to shape Georgia's unique culture

Introduction



Our adventure with extraordinary Trip Leader Eka Tchvritidze brings us into a realm where, in Eka's words, "the mountains meet heaven." In wild Tusheti National Park, with its untamed alpine beauty and ancient stone towers, our lodge-to-lodge hikes bring us to slate-roofed villages guarded by 17th century watchtowers. Two of the villages have UNESCO "living museum" status for their cultural heritage, and at our guesthouses, feasting is a cherished tradition and way of life—we'll be welcomed with songs, poems, and hearty toasts! Descending to the Kakheti region, we';ll discover Georgia's age-old wine-making tradition and taste a delightful cuisine with influences from Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Join us for an amazing experience of the thriving cultures and soaring landscapes of the Caucasus.

TRIP DATES

June 8-18, 2025 August 31-September 10, 2025 August 16-26, 2026 September 6-16, 2026





Overnight: Vinotel

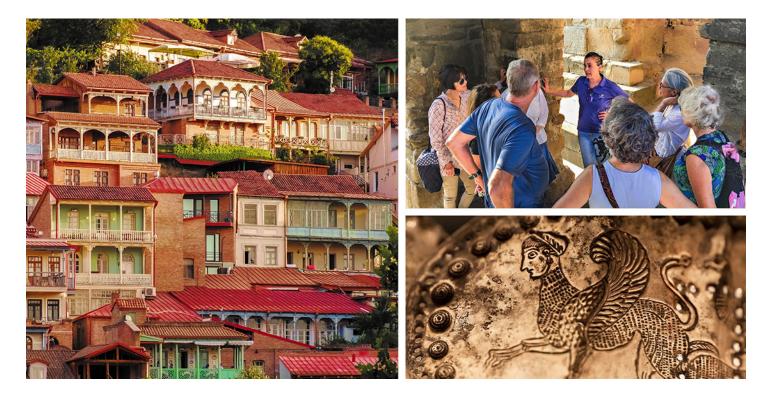
Set near the historic district of Avlabari and only 10 minutes from the Freedom Square in Tbilisi, the family-run Vinotel is a boutique hotel showcasing traditional Georgian architecture infused with modern touches. Recently opened in 2015 yet built upon incredible wine cellars that date back to the 1880s, the hotel's welcoming atmosphere makes you feel as if you're visiting a friend's home. Relax on the garden terrace overlooking the nearby church or in your cozy guestroom, and take time to visit the wine cellar and sample some fantastic Georgian artisan wines during your free time.

Meals: B, D



DAY 1 TBILISI, GEORGIA

Arrive in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia (most flights arrive very early in the morning around 3:00 am). Upon arrival you will be met by a WT representative and transferred to the Vinotel (your room will be ready for you). The remainder of the morning and early afternoon is free to relax after your early arrival. In the late afternoon, we gather for an orientation and trip briefing, after which we drive to the town of Mtskheta, the ancient capital, just five miles outside Tbilisi. Mtskheta is the headquarters of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the 6th century Jvari church and 11th century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, both World Heritage Sites, are among the treasures here. Christianity came to Georgia as early as the 2nd century AD, and Georgian Orthodoxy has been a state religion in parts of Georgia since the 4th century. At our Welcome Dinner at an open-air restaurant overlooking the Mtkvari River, we'll have our first taste of traditional Georgian cuisine—with great Georgian wines, of course!



Overnight: Vinotel Meals: B, L, D

"Georgia is a real hidden gem for anyone who wants magnificent scenery, great food, wonderful wine, and history off of the beaten path of tourism. I can't recommend it highly enough for someone looking for a unique adventure."

-Bill B. Portland, OR

DAY 2 TBILISI

Today we enjoy a walking tour of Tbilisi, an ancient hillside city of balconies and cobbled streets that has been the center of governance in Georgia for 1,500 years. Our explorations include the 4th-century Narikala Fortress overlooking the old part of the city, Semaba Cathedral, the dry bridge market, and charming Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi's favorite strolling promenade, lined with architectural highlights and quaint shops. After lunch, the afternoon is free to relax or explore on your own. We recommend visiting the Georgian National Museum, with its gold and silver artifacts from the pre-Christian period. Dinner tonight is at one of the best restaurants in Tbilisi. Its name, Tsiskvili, means "The Mill," and until 70 years ago it was a mill for old Tbilisi. Georgian cuisine includes delicious mountain lamb roasts, pork, and veal dishes, as well as wild trout in pomegranate sauce and chicken with blackberry sauce. Tonight we'll also enjoy some Georgian folk singing and dancing.





Overnight: Guesthouses in the Caucasus Three of our overnights are in local guesthouses, and they have shared bathroom facilities. Clean, comfortable, and extremely friendly, they typify the culture and traditions of the Tushetians, and offer a fabulous base from which to explore this astonishing region. **Meals: B, D**

Driving Details: 6 hours

DAY 3 SHENAKO, TUSHETI NATIONAL PARK

We head to the Tusheti Mountains, pausing in the Kakheti wine region for lunch at the home of our Trip Leader's parents. After this welcoming meal, we set off in 4WD vehicles to Shenako (6,791'), where our Trip Leader grew up and where, she says, "the mountains taught her how to love life." set on a wide green plateau that connects three beautiful valleys. This is one of the oldest villages of Tusheti— UNESCO has awarded it the status of "living museum". The surrounding landscape is dotted with stone villages that cling to the steep green mountainsides. The residents of these hidden hamlets are the product of 2,000 years of conquest and survival, a challenging heritage that has molded these former mountain tribes into a hardy and proud people who are delighted to share their rich traditions with us. Later we check in to a family-run guesthouse with shared facilities that offers great hospitality, a great way to meet the incredibly warm people of this region. We'll savor a hearty dinner at our guesthouse this evening.



Overnight: Guesthouses in the Caucasus Meals: B, L, D Hiking Details: 5-6 hours

"What a fabulous trip! The Tusheti mountains are beyond beautiful. The food, the wine, the mountains, the people—all was wonderful!"

-Kat C. Albuquerque, NM

DAY 4 SHENAKO

We visit the newly built visitor center, where we learn about the rich flora and fauna of Tusheti, then set off on our hike in Shenako, accessible only since 2006, when a foot bridge was completed over the river. We'll enjoy lunch at our guesthouse and return to Shenako by vehicle. Early in the evening, there is an optional hike to the village of Aguerta, a fascinating area filled with ancient ruins and surrounded by pine forest. This evening, we prepare ourselves for a great Tushetian "Supra." More than just a feast, these important Georgian cultural events are characterized by abundant food and ritualized drinking, and are always led by a tamada (toastmaster). We'll also have a chance to learn how to make Georgian dumplings—Eka's mother is a great cook and she'll be happy to teach us the Tushetian way of making these wonderful treats.



Overnight: Guesthouses in the Caucasus Meals: B, L, D Hiking Details: 7 hours; 10 miles; 1,470' ascent; 2,510' descent

"This was a fantastic opportunity to explore a part of the world with so much history and natural beauty that many people don't get to see."

—Suzanne & Brady M. Friendswood, TX

DAY 5 CHIGO / DARTLO

Today's more challenging hike introduces us to more of Georgia's "living museum" villages. A short drive brings us to the trailhead, from where we start our 1-hour hike past shepherds' huts to the Sanare Pass (6,270'). Once atop the pass, we enjoy great views of the Pirikity Valley with its snow-clad mountains and beautiful villages laced by rushing rivers. Descending steeply, we reach the Pirikity River, then hike up to the holy village of Chigo, known for its annual religious festival. After a picnic lunch, we continue to Dartlo (6,020'), one of Tusheti's most fascinating places, where 400-year-old slate-roofed stone houses are clustered among 12th century defensive towers watching over the village like age-old sentinels. If you're not up for this more challenging hike, you have the option of driving to Dartlo (1 hour) and taking a 2-hour loop hike in the area, visiting surrounding villages including Kavalo, perched high above Dartlo. Overnight at a local guesthouse (with shared bathroom facilities) in Dartlo, set close to the river. The moonlight pouring in through the window is magical!





Overnight: Hotel Samzeo This comfortable but simple mountain hotel features a beautiful modern decor and offers a variety of guestrooms, some with a balcony and some with mountain views. Amenities include a lounge, terrace, bar, and restaurant.

Meals: B, L, D Hiking Details: 6 hours; 7-8 miles Driving Details: 20 minutes

DAY 6 DARTLO / NAKAICHO RIDGE HIKE / OMALO

We drive a short distance to the trailhead and set off on our 3-hour hike to Nakaicho ridge (9,500'), which connects the breathtaking Tusheti, Pirikity, and Gometsari valleys. Our hike offers gorgeous views of the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus, and early summer flowers greet us at every bend in the trail. We'll pass by the village of Bochoma, one of the highest populated villages in Europe (its highest house is at about 7,500 feet), and stop in at a local home for a cup of coffee or tea. Afterwards, we drive to Omalo for overnight at our hotel. Tonight we'll enjoy a hearty Tushetian meal.



Overnight: Hotel Samzeo Meals: B, L, D

"We were surprised and delighted with the variety of activities, the beauty of the countryside, and the amazing food."

-Katy S. Denver, CO

DAY 7 OMALO / SHTROLTA

A 10-minute drive brings us to the trailhead, and we start our steep ascent through a forest of beautiful pine trees. We reach a shepherd's hut where we savor views of the gorgeous mountains of Tusheti and beyond to the peaks of the high Caucasus. After lunch near the hut, we hike an hour down to the village of Khiso, where you have the option to take the short drive in our vehicles to the village of Shtrolta, or continue hiking for another hour or so to Shtrolta. The hike from Khiso to Shtrolta will be either through the forest or through three small villages, weather depending. We'll have some snacks and tea or coffee at a local's home in Shtrolta and later return to our hotel in Omalo.





Overnight: Chateau Ikalto Located in beautiful stone buildings near a vineyard, Chateau Ikalto is a wonderful welcome to the region. Guest rooms are comfortable with nice views and the hotel has a restaurant, outdoor swimming pool, bar, and lounge area, perfect for relaxing after a day's explorations.

Meals: B, L, D

DAY 8 WINETASTING IN KAKHETI

We bid farewell to Tusheti and head to the renowned Kakheti wine region, where fine wines have been produced for more than 6,000 years (it's said to be the birthplace of wine!). Our Trip Leader will lead us in a tasting of different Georgian wine, including Kvevri wines, aged in traditional large clay vessels buried in the ground. These wines are full of tannins yet are very elegant. (A side note: Eka and her Danish husband started a winery a few years ago and produce wines from unique Georgian grape varietals from their own vineyards.) Dinner and overnight at the lovely Chateau Ikalto, set amid vineyards.





Overnight: Rooms Hotel Kazbegi With sweeping views of Mt. Kazbek and the Kazbegi mountain range, the Rooms Hotel is set in one of the most stunning locations in all Georgia. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the town of Kazbegi including the Gergeti Trinity Church, and the interior designs of the hotel reflect the rustic elements from the outdoors with wonderful wood accents and fun antler decorations. Guestrooms are simple with comfortable beds and spacious bathrooms and the lobby has an excellent lounge with a cozy fireplace. Be sure to unwind in the indoor pool, lounge in the library room, or enjoy a drink on the enormous outdoor deck. Meals: B, L, D Driving Details: 4-5 hours

DAY 9 KAZBEGI MOUNTAINS

A short drive brings us back to Tbilisi, where we are treated to a traditional soak at one of the ancient brick-domed bathhouses, noted for their healing mineral waters emanating from local hot springs. After lunch in a local restaurant, we continue to the Kazbegi mountain region. Our accommodation is at the alpine-style Rooms Hotel in Stepantsminda, set at the foot of Mt. Kazbek (16,512'), one of the highest mountains in Georgia. The views from the terrace are stunning!



DAY 10 KAZBEGI / GERGETI MONASTERY

A leisurely walk up through beautiful valleys and woodlands leads to 14th century Gergeti Trinity Church (7,119'), perched in an impressive setting against the background of snow-capped Mt. Kazbek. Weather permitting, we may catch a glimpse of the peak's glaciers. Heading deeper into the mountains, we arrive at the spectacular Sno Valley and the isolated village of Juta (7,103'), an old settlement that preserves its ancient way of life. Surrounded by gorgeous mountains, Juta remains completely cut off from the rest of the country for six months of the year. From Juta, we hike toward the Chaukhi Mountains, beautiful rocky peaks that divide the Kazbegi and Khevsureti mountain regions.

Overnight: Rooms Hotel Kazbegi Meals: B, L, D Hiking Details: 2-3 hours in the morning, 3 hours in the afternoon Driving Details: 80 minutes

"What an extraordinary adventure of beauty, fabulous fruits and vegetables, vast fields of springtime flowers, steep mountains with impressive relief, and immersion in an evolving culture influenced by East, West, Africa, and the Middle East!"

—Victoria T. Mill Valley, CA



Overnight: Vinotel

Set near the historic district of Avlabari and only 10 minutes from the Freedom Square in Tbilisi, the family-run Vinotel is a boutique hotel showcasing traditional Georgian architecture infused with modern touches. Recently opened in 2015 yet built upon incredible wine cellars that date back to the 1880s, the hotel's welcoming atmosphere makes you feel as if you're visiting a friend's home. Relax on the garden terrace overlooking the nearby church or in your cozy guestroom, and take time to visit the wine cellar and sample some fantastic Georgian artisan wines during your free time.

Meals: B, D Driving Details: 3 hours

DAY 11 KAZBEGI / TBILISI

We drive back to Tbilisi and check into Vinotel. The remainder of the day is free to explore on your own. In the early evening we gather for a festive Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant, then transfer to the airport and depart on homeward-bound flights.

Pricing

TRIP COST

Prices are per person, based on double occupancy 2025

\$5,395 (9-12 members)

\$5,695 (4-8 members)

Single supplement: \$665 (singles will share rooms for up to three nights)

Please contact us for future years' pricing

To offer the lowest possible cost, our trips are priced according to the number of participants on the trip. All costs are per person, based on double occupancy. If you wish to have a single room, you must pay the single supplement fee. Please note that Wilderness Travel staff, or guests of Wilderness Travel such as travel writers, photographers, or leaders-in-training, are not included in the tier pricing count.

PAYMENT TERMS

At time of reservation: \$600 90 days prior to departure: Balance

CANCELLATION & TRANSFER FEE SCHEDULE

Up to 91 days prior to departure: No Charge! 61-90 days prior to departure: 25% of trip cost 46-60 days prior to departure: 50% of trip cost 45 days or less: 100% of trip cost

TRAVEL INSURANCE

We highly recommend you purchase travel insurance. You can take advantage of a comprehensive Travel Protection Plan designed for Wilderness Travel by Travelex, or purchase other insurance on your own. See our website for details: www.wildernesstravel.com/insurance

TRIP COST INCLUDES

- Expert leadership of a Wilderness Travel Trip Leader
- Accommodations in hotels and guesthouses
- All meals included except 2 lunches as indicated in Detailed Itinerary
- A glass of wine or beer with dinner
- All ground transportation and baggage handling from meeting until departure
- All activities as indicated in Detailed Itinerary
- Overnights at Vinotel for one day prior to Day 1 and one day after Day 11 to accommodate early-morning flight schedules to and from Tbilisi

TRIP DOES NOT INCLUDE

- Travel to and from the arrival and departure location as indicated in Detailed Itinerary
- Additional hotel nights outside the trip's scheduled dates (except those specified in the inclusions)
- Optional gratuities to Trip Leaders or staff
- Optional travel insurance
- Other expenses of a personal nature (some alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.)

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

Because the prices published for our program are set so far in advance of the trip dates, we are occasionally faced with exceptional cost increases and/or currency fluctuations that affect the actual cost of running the trip. In most years, no price changes are necessary. However, we do reserve the right to raise or lower the trip price if there is a significant change in costs or exchange rates. If this is the case, your final invoice will reflect the difference in trip cost.

Arrival & Departure

ARRIVAL & MEETING PLACE

Suggested Airport: Tbilisi International Airport (TBS) **Suggested Date & Time:** Before 4:00 pm on Day 1.

Meeting Place: You will meet your Trip Leader in the lobby of the Vinotel in Tbilisi at 4:30 pm on Day 1.

Wilderness Travel provides a complimentary transfer from the Tbilisi Airport to the Vinotel. This transfer will be provided at any time of day, regardless of which flight you arrive on. Most flights into Tbilisi arrive at 5:30 pm the night before the trip starts, or at 3:30 am the day the trip starts. Whichever time you arrive, your hotel room and hotel transfer will be available for you. A driver holding a sign with your name on it will meet you directly outside of the customs exit (arrivals) area.

If your flight arrives in the evening, please be sure to book your flight to arrive the day before Day 1 of the trip. The Vinotel will be available for you. We can book any extra nights you may need in Tbilisi before the trip begins. You can check in at the hotel any time on Day 1. The group will meet in the late afternoon for a tour and dinner.

DEPARTURE

Suggested Airport:Tbilisi International Airport (TBS) **Suggested Date & Time:** Late evening of Day 11 after the Farewell Dinner

Most flights depart Tbilisi in the early morning hours. If you are flying out after midnight on the last day of the trip, be sure to book your flight for what would technically be Day 12 of the trip. We will provide a departing airport transfer at any time of the day to the Tbilisi Airport from the group hotel in Tbilisi.

INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for flights to and from Europe. There are many online consolidators for booking travel, but for more personal help arranging air transport, you can contact Exito Travel at (970) 818-8459 in the US or 1-800-670-2605 in Canada. They are very adept at putting flight itineraries together, to even the most far-flung places. More information can be found on Exito's website at www.exitotravel.com.

Depending on your routing, it is necessary to depart from the US one day prior to Day 1 of the trip itinerary. The name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly, and your passport must be valid for at least six months after your date of return to the US.

Please do not purchase your tickets until you are

confirmed on the trip. Once your tickets have been purchased, please send us a copy of your airline schedule so we can reserve your airport transfers. It is your responsibility to ensure your flight times coordinate with the arrival and departure logistics for this trip.

EXTRA HOTEL NIGHTS

We include one night prior to Day 1 and another night after Day 11 to accommodate flight schedules from Tbilisi. If you are staying extra nights beyond what's included, we recommend our group hotel, the Vinotel. It is in the center of Tbilisi and rates start at \$190 per night. Please contact us to request a reservation.

Trip Leaders

Wilderness Travel Trip Leaders have a passion and a joy for creating an unforgettable journey. We are extremely proud of them and the incredible travel experiences they make possible. For more information, including client comments about them and which specific departures they will be leading, please visit <u>wildernesstravel.com/leaders</u>.

EKA TCHVRITIDZE

Eka Tchvritidze, a native of Georgia and skilled mountaineer, has an enthusiasm for the Georgian mountains and its people that is simply unparalleled. She is also a very accomplished Tushetian equestrian. Riding since the age of one—when, as Eka explains, "my grandfather demanded the little bundle of baby to be sat upon the horse!"—in 2000 Eka became the first woman in Tushetian history to win the Tushetoba Horse Race. In her own words, "Every breath I take I think of horses and the mountains." Eka graduated from Trinity Episcopal School in Virginia, USA, earned a BA in International Business at the University of Tbilisi, and has been leading adventures in the Caucasus Mountains for WT since 2011. She is also an official tourism development officer and has worked with many non-governmental organizations in Georgia. On the side, Eka keeps herself busy with her young children and her hundreds of beehives and successful honey business. She and her Danish husband own a winery, producing wines of unique Georgian grape varietals from their own vineyards. Eka loves to share these wines, and above all, to share in the Georgian tradition of making toasts!

What to Expect

WHAT THE TRIP IS LIKE	The hiking on this trip is rated Level 4 , Moderate to Strenuous , according to our trip grading system. On most days, we hike 4-7 hours on rocky trails with some ascents and descents, and occasionally we may have to ford a river on foot or by horseback.
WEATHER	The climate in Tusheti is pleasantly warm in the summer, with temperatures ranging from the mid-70s in the daytime, and nights dipping into the 60s. But as is always the case in the mountains, the weather can turn bad suddenly, so you should carry rain gear in case of sudden rainstorms.
ACCOMMODATIONS	Some of our overnights are in local guesthouses, which have shared bathroom facilities. Clean, comfortable, and extremely friendly, they typify the culture and traditions of the Tushetians, and offer a fabulous base from which to explore this astonishing region.
TRANSPORTATION	Please note: previous horseback experience is not necessary. Eka often hikes with her horses, who carry the luggage, and will be there to help if you wish to ford a river by horseback. On some days, you can elect not to do the entire hike: you can either drive to our village destination and do a short hike in the area, or hike part of the way toward the village.

AVERAGE DAILY MAX/MIN °F													
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	ост	NOV	DEC	
Tbilisi	43/28	46/30	54/36	65/45	74/54	82/60	87/66	87/66	79/59	68/49	55/39	46/32	
Tusheti	24/6	25/7	31/13	42/24	50/32	56/38	59/47	59/47	54/41	45/32	35/23	26/14	
RAINFALL - INCHES													
Tbilisi	0.6	0.8	1.2	2.0	3.3	2.9	1.9	1.6	1.8	1.5	1.2	0.8	
Tusheti	1.5	1.7	2.3	3.8	4.9	5.0	4.3	3.8	2.7	2.2	2.1	1.7	

Additional Information

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRIP

Adventure travel often involves exotic destinations, unusual levels of physical exertion, or activities you may not have participated in previously. We work hard to help you choose the right trip for you, paying attention to your individual interests, abilities, and needs. If you have questions about the level of comfort or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please call Wilderness Travel at 1-800-368-2794 or email us at info@wildernesstravel.com.

REFERENCES

We'd be happy to put you in touch with a past client that has traveled with us.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

At <u>www.wildernesstravel.com</u>, you can book your trip online or find out about added departures, last-minute deals, and one-time Limited Edition adventures that aren't listed in our catalog. You can also access our complete library of detailed itineraries filled with enticing photos and videos, read bios of our Trip Leaders, find descriptions of trip accommodations, and check real-time availability of any trips that interest you.





WILDERNESS TRAVEL HAS BEEN AWARDED:

Best Travel Specialists in the World: Conde Nast Traveler, 2024, 4-time winner World's Best Tour Operators: Travel + Leisure, 11-time winner Best Wildlife, Hiking & Walking Trips: AFAR Magazine, 3 years in a row Best Adventure Travel Companies: USA Today Trip of the Year: Outside Magazine, 9-time winner 50 Tours of a Lifetime: National Geographic Traveler, 9 years in a row Best Adventure Travel Companies: National Geographic Adventure, 3-time winner

Please be advised that California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund under the California Seller of Travel Law that took effect January 1, 1996. This fund is designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices by discount airfare ticket sellers or air charter operators. Unfortunately, this law does not cover non-California residents and, even in the case of California residents, it does not cover any foreign travel where the foreign "providers of transportation or travel services" are not in compliance with the Sellers of Travel Law (compliance being defined as registered as a Seller of Travel in California and a participant in the Travel Consumer Restitution Fund). Thus none of Wilderness Travel's tours qualify and we are required by law to advise each client that they are not covered by the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires sellers of travel to maintain a trust account or bond. This business has a trust account. California Seller of Travel #100769640

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities and trip routing, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the terms and conditions as detailed in the General Information section of the Wilderness Travel Catalog.

Revised: October 22, 2024



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