



**Vardzia** Vardzia is one of the most fascinating remnants of a medieval cave town. In its heyday, an average of six thousand monks used to live here, and in times of war, up to fifty thousand people took refuge in the caves. An earthquake destroyed much of the complex in the thirteenth century, so that nowadays only a small, but nonetheless fascinating, part can be visited. The unique fresco of King Tamar and his father, King George III, are well worth a visit.



- Day 1 **Arrival at Tbilisi**
- Day 2 **Tbilisi city tour**
- Day 3 **Excursion to Uplistsikhe, transfer to Borjomi**
- Day 4 **Excursion to Timotesubani and Sapara**
- Day 5 **Excursion to Vardzia, transfer to Tbilisi**
- Day 6 **Visit to the National Museum**
- Day 7 **Excursion to David Gareja**
- Day 8 **Departure from Tbilisi**

**This tour will allow you to re-connect with your spiritual side by encountering the unique religious life of Georgia.**

It will be a profound experience in two main ways. On the one hand, you will be given the opportunity to explore several ancient cave towns with rich historical legacies. On the other hand, you will be given the chance to meet and interact with a number of monks and nuns who now spend their time rehabilitating the churches of these ancient cave towns and other monasteries in the area. You will be overwhelmed by the peace and tranquility of the regions that you will visit and as a result may well find yourself feeling more assured about your own place within the order of the universe.

The town of Uplistsikhe, near Gori, hewn from sandstone in the sixteenth century BC, is the oldest known cave town in Georgia. Today, more than one hundred rooms, a palace, a central street, remnants of a freshwater and sewer system, an antique theatre, wine presses,

and a pharmacy are still visible, making visitors marvel at the sophistication of our ancestors and allowing them to immerse themselves in a rich way of life that existed millennia ago.

Vardzia, more to the south, gives off a somewhat similar yet quite unique aura, even though the complex is much younger. This area was closed to the public for many years because of its position a few kilometers away from Turkey, a country that was on the other side of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. While this cut the monastery off from outsiders, it also had the effect of sparing the church from the worst of the Communist attempts to wipe out religion. Whereas other historical religious centres came under considerable pressure from the Communists and saw many frescoes whitewashed this church was spared such violations. You will have the opportunity to meet some of the monks who are trying to

rebuild a monastery within the old walls and will learn about the foundations and history of the Georgian Orthodox faith.

We will then take you to visit the monastery of David Gareja, which is also undergoing a process of renovation. You will have the opportunity to go on a short pilgrimage, hiking up to Udabno monastery and contemplating the numerous frescoes that tell the story of Jesus and recount the legends of St. David, the founder of the monastery. The atmosphere of tranquility is only disrupted by the sight of Soviet bullet holes in the frescoes. While disturbing and out of place, one must remember that these too form a part of Georgian history ...

