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GEORGIA (Hall 3.2 Stand 114). This fascinating country on the Black Sea and between the mountain chains of the Greater and Lesser Caucasus inspires visitors with its many facets, spectacular natural setting and the heartfelt hospitality of its people.

Few countries in the world offer so much variety in such a compact area. Georgia is about the size of Ireland and has a population of roughly 4 million.

Despite its tradition during the Soviet period as the vacation destination *par excellence*, independent Georgia has remained almost unknown in Western Europe. The country is better known for its conflicts than for its natural beauty and its cultural monuments, many of which are on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Following the conflict in August 2008, and Russia's invasion of parts of Georgia, many people have lost badly needed income from tourism even though the vast majority of the country was not directly affected by the fighting and the security situation has not worsened. That remains true for all of the regions that could be visited before the conflict. The exceptions were and remain South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which are completely closed.

Top destinations:

+++ Tbilisi, the country's vibrant capital, featuring hot mineral springs and a romantic old city. At present probably one of the safest capitals in the world. Georgia's economic and cultural center.

+++ Kakheti, a winemaking region with 5000 years of vintners' tradition and many wonderful Georgian Orthodox monasteries, some dating back to the 4th century. In addition: virgin forests and semi-desert areas. Kakheti is in the country's southeast corner.

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+++ The breathtaking mountains of the Greater Caucasus, with towering peaks that reach above 5000m and deep gorges carved by wild rivers — and also beautiful meadows of flowers and a living tradition of highland agriculture: Tusheti, Khevsureti, Kazbegi and Ratcha, as well as Upper and Lower Svaneti. The mountainous regions of the Greater Caucasus form the country's northern border.

+++ Black Sea coast in Guria and Adjara, with beaches made in part from magnetic sand and glowing, colorful stones. Groves of mandarin oranges dot the steeply climbing interior, and fascinating primeval gorges are home to unusual rhododendron forest in these western regions.

+++ The somewhat gentler, forested mountains of the Lesser Caucasus and the lake-dotted high plateaus of Samtskhe-Javakheti. This melting pot of cultures, with its cave monasteries and numerous historic monuments, stony tablelands, vast forests and one-time rural retreats of the tsars is one of the country's most diverse regions, nestled along the southern border.

+++ The central region of Imereti offers Kutaisi, Georgia's second city; ancient, water-formed caves in the karst area; and picturesque vineyards.

+++ Kartli, another central region, features numerous churches and monasteries, as well as secluded forest valleys.

All of these regions can be visited, and travelers will not come into contact with the effects of the conflict. Borjomi National Park can also be visited with no problem. The forest fires of August 2008 affected an area that is far from hiking trails. Insider tip: the variety of Georgia's national parks and their spectacular flora and fauna, along with improved infrastructure, are still not widely known.

In short, despite the economic difficulties and the events of summer 2008, Georgia does not deserve the negative image that it has in Europe.

As representatives of the local tourism industry associations, we are happy to provide detailed and up-to-date information, as well as to recommend guides, specialist companies, activities and routes. In addition, we arrange press and informational tours, and on request we can set up trips to photograph or film the country's regions. Further, our contacts in Armenia and Azerbaijan enable us to provide top-quality advice for trips that include the entire South Caucasus.

Contact:

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