

MindStormPhoto Georgia 2017



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Georgia 1 – Tbilisi



We have completed the Silk Road tour (aka "-Stan countries"), and have now entered Georgia with [Mehmet Özbalci](#). One of our stops on this first day was at the [Metekhi Georgian Orthodox church](#). A wedding was being photographed while we were there, and the groom's men were willing to pose for us in front of the church (center image).



We got up around 4 AM, well before dawn the second day, to photograph the Freedom Bridge (center plus upper-left) before the sun rose, and before the bridge became crowded with people. We also wandered around town and caught some other random images, including the aerial view from the castle. The Mercure Hotel is our absolute favorite to date, with views of the castle and high speed internet – it was the lap of luxury, and we were tempted to just stay there and have Mehmet pick us up on the way out!



On a day when the two of us were alone, we wandered down the street near the hotel, and were introduced to a wine tasting store (by Karin) advertising free visits to a 17th century wine cellar (middle). The owner pointed out a tiny tunnel where Stalin used to hide when he was being hunted by the military, before his rise to power. One can only wonder how history might have changed if the military had found him...



Tbilisi is a colorful town, full of rundown apartments, but also with both reconstruction and new construction. There is a type of string candy sold in numerous shops (center bottom) that consists of various nuts or fruits on a string, then dipped into boiling honey & starch.



We walked into several Georgian Orthodox churches. Some were not much more than simple dark caves, while others were elaborate cathedrals, like the one shown above.



We also visited Dezerter Bazaar, another market in town, so we will end Tbilisi with another block of the faces of the people that welcomed us to their city.

, June 8, 2017

[Tour, Travel](#)

Georgia 2 – Kutasi



We spent our second night in Georgia in Kutasi. Enroute, we made several stops for photography. Our local Georgian guide, Gvantsa, liked daisies and picked them whenever we stopped. Seen above, she has found another field of wild daisies, and is picking a bouquet for her seat on the bus. Throughout Georgia, we often pressed her into modeling service, as she turned out to be very photogenic.



That night we visited the 11th century Bagrati Cathedral, and stayed until the church was lit and the "blue hour" appeared in the sky. It was interesting to see a Georgian Orthodox monk bring out a tripod and photograph the scene right along side us (lower right). In addition to the tripod, we also observed him driving a new BMW, smoking cigarettes on a nearby hill, and chatting on his smart phone. We concluded that Georgian monks must be paid quite well.



Earlier in the day, we had stopped at Uplistsikhe, also known as "God's Castle." This monastic cave settlement is carved out of the rock, and reminded us much of the cave homes in Cappadocia, Turkey.



In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Georgia declared independence, along with all the other satellite countries. During their retreat, the Soviet army took whatever they could, and destroyed much of what they could not carry. Along the road to Kutasi were scores of dilapidated factories and mines, remnants of that period.

We stopped by one sand cleaning factory (above block), which had been made inoperable in that retreat. It made for an interesting documentation in urban decay, which is significant historically. There was also an abandoned railway car near the factory that provided some of the most colorful images (center and lower-right).



There was also a stop at the confluence of the Aragvi and Kura rivers, with the old city of Miskheta in the background (upper-second). Then a view of Katskhi Pillar, a single 120 foot tall towering pillar of rock with a small cell for a single monk at the top (center). Other images above were from other smaller churches we visited, with the lower-right being a photograph of Karin from our group, whose sunglasses show Evelyn and Marla reflected in them.

, June 10, 2017

Tour, Travel

Georgia 3 – Mestia



Our tour included a visit to Ushguli, a tower village, and a stop at Lover's Tower in the Mestia area in 4-wheel drive cars. Mehmet hired two models to dress in traditional clothing (above block) to pose, and to thus add color to our shots. I thought it was interesting to see our local guide to use her iPhone in selfie mode as a mirror for the model to check her hair (lower left), and for Mehmet (our tour guide) to prop himself in the crook of a tree for his own photos of the event (upper right).



Georgia is very religious (Georgian Orthodox Christian being overwhelming majority) country, so it is not surprising that we keep finding beautiful churches to photograph.



Of course, every town has its own market for the locals to purchase food and dry goods. We often stop in these to get a look at a slice of life for the townspeople, and to capture images of them going about their daily lives.

There is a local home-made alcoholic beverage called cha-cha which is quite popular, and presented in reused water or CocaCola bottles. We decided to buy a small bottom from the woman top-left, as she offered a sample. This stuff is 90 percent alcohol, and tasted like it was vintage last week... After one night to imbibing part of the bottle and waking up to a headache, we left the remainder in the hotel room when we checked out...



Most of these small villages and towns have many buildings that have fallen into disrepair with significant deferred maintenance. Some may call them an eyesore while others call them charming. However, they make for fascinating photographic subjects.



Let's finish with some random images we took around Mestia in the Caucasus mountains. Captive bee hives (upper right) dot the landscape, and are the source for honey in the markets, plus pollination for the numerous fruit trees in the area. Upper left was Ushguli, a village populated with dozens towers built 800 years ago to defend against frequent invaders. Upper middle was a view outside our hotel window. Bottom two were images of the local market, while lower-right shows our local guide again, with her love for daisies.

, June 11, 2017

Tour, Travel

Georgia 4 – Akhaltsikhe



We finished our tour of Georgia with a long travel day on the bus going from the far north (Mestia) to the far south of the country to reach Rabati castle, staying in the town of Akhaltsikhe (and no, I still cannot pronounce it even after staying there for a day...). Lower-left is the view from our hotel room the previous evening in Mestia, a Unesco world-heritage site, when the towers are lit. The other images are landscapes enroute to the castle with views of the Caucasus mountains.



Our main photographic target today was the castle of Rabati, originally built during the 13th century. We arrived in the late afternoon, and then stayed to photograph into the "blue hour" (the hour after sunset when the sky turns a deeper blue if weather cooperates), when the lights from the castle are lit up.



We also stopped by a small village to capture a view of the castle and to stretch our legs during this very long travel day. Our cameras caught some scenes of local daily life. Center image shows Mehmet (our tour leader) photographing and talking to a local farmer. The lower group shows a couple of kids that were playing together, at first unknown that we were taking their photos, then with them hamming it up for the cameras and for our local guide.



Here is another view of Rabati castle, showing the overall complex just after sundown.

, June 12, 2017

[Tour, Travel](#)
