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Living in Georgia

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Introduction

Georgia, perched at the vibrant crossroads of Europe and Asia, is a country steadily capturing the attention of expats, digital nomads, and global citizens seeking a unique new home. With its dramatic mountain landscapes, centuries-old cities, and an infectious spirit of hospitality, Georgia presents an inviting mix of old-world charm and modern dynamism. In recent years, policies favoring foreigners, affordable living, and a growing international community have transformed what was once a hidden gem into a lively hub for people from around the world.

What makes Georgia so attractive for expats? The answer is multi-faceted. The country combines a low cost of living with a high quality of life, making it possible for individuals and families to thrive on budgets far lower than those required in most Western countries. Friendly visa policies, including generous visa-free entry and fast-track digital nomad programs, remove many traditional barriers newcomers face when moving abroad. And in Georgia, it's not just about saving money—it's about embracing an enriching lifestyle shaped by vibrant traditions, renowned cuisine, locally produced wines, and stunning natural beauty.

As an expat destination, Georgia offers a diversity of experiences. Tbilisi, the ancient yet forward-looking capital, buzzes with creativity, energetic startups, and a thriving café culture. Batumi tempts with Black Sea beaches and a more relaxed, subtropical pace. Wine regions exude charm for those seeking quiet and culture, while mountain towns offer solace and adventure. Wherever you land, you're met with the open-armed hospitality for which Georgians are known.

Of course, every move comes with its own set of challenges, and Georgia is no exception. Expats may encounter language barriers, navigate unfamiliar bureaucracy, or adjust to local customs and transportation styles. Healthcare and education options require thoughtful research, business formation must adhere to local legal frameworks, and the nuances of property ownership merit careful attention. Yet, by understanding the landscape—both the opportunities and hurdles—foreigners are well-placed to make Georgia not just a place to live, but a true home.

This guide distills essential knowledge, practical advice, and insider tips from experienced expats and local experts. Whether you're considering a short-term stay under a digital nomad visa, relocating for work, or planning a long-term move with your family, this book lays out everything you need to know. From finding housing and schools, to securing healthcare and tackling taxes, to forming friendships and immersing in culture, "Living in Georgia: A Guide for Expats" serves as your trusted companion for life in this remarkable country.

Embarking on an international relocation is both exciting and daunting. With careful preparation and the right guidance, your move to Georgia can be smooth, rewarding, and truly transformative. Welcome to a land of endless possibilities—your adventure in Georgia starts here.

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CHAPTER ONE: Understanding Georgia: Geography, History, and Identity

Nestled in the Caucasus region, Georgia is a land of dramatic contrasts and profound history, a country where ancient traditions meet a burgeoning modern outlook. To truly live in Georgia, and not just merely exist within its borders, requires an appreciation for its unique geographical position and the historical currents that have shaped its resilient identity. This understanding forms the bedrock for any expat seeking to make Georgia their home, providing context for everything from its vibrant culture to its distinctive political landscape.

Geographically, Georgia is a captivating tapestry woven between the towering peaks of the Greater Caucasus Mountains to the north and the lesser Caucasus range to the south. This mountainous terrain is not just picturesque; it has historically served as both a protective barrier and a conduit for trade and conquest. To the west, the country meets the Black Sea, offering a subtropical coastline that stands in stark contrast to the alpine landscapes inland. This diverse geography contributes to a remarkable range of microclimates, from the humid Black Sea coast to the arid plains of the east, and the vine-laden valleys of Kakheti. It also means that a short drive can take you from sun-drenched beaches to snow-capped peaks, a dynamic environment that contributes significantly to the Georgian way of life and its agricultural bounty.

Georgia's position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has imbued it with a fascinating cultural synthesis. It's a place where Eastern hospitality intertwines with a distinctly European aspiration, where ancient Silk Road influences meet contemporary global trends. This geopolitical location has, however, also made Georgia a coveted prize for various empires throughout history, each leaving an indelible mark on its culture, architecture, and, crucially, its collective memory. Understanding this historical tug-of-war is key to grasping the Georgian psyche and their fiercely independent spirit.

The earliest human settlements in Georgia date back almost 1.8 million years, making it one of the oldest inhabited regions in the world. The discovery of hominid fossils in Dmanisi provides compelling evidence of early human migration out of Africa, placing Georgia at the very dawn of human history. Fast forward to antiquity, and the regions that now constitute Georgia were home to powerful kingdoms like Colchis and Iberia. Colchis, famed in Greek mythology as the land of the Golden Fleece and Medea, demonstrates Georgia's deep roots in the classical world and its connection to ancient trade routes. These early kingdoms developed sophisticated cultures and maintained complex relationships with their powerful neighbors, laying the groundwork for a

distinct Georgian identity.

The adoption of Christianity as the state religion in the early 4th century CE was a pivotal moment in Georgian history, profoundly shaping its cultural and national identity. Georgia was one of the first countries in the world to embrace Christianity, a decision that aligned it with the Byzantine Empire and differentiated it from the predominantly Zoroastrian or later Islamic powers surrounding it. This religious identity became a cornerstone of Georgian nationhood, inspiring magnificent churches and monasteries that dot the landscape and fostering a rich theological and artistic tradition. The Georgian Orthodox Church remains a powerful and respected institution today, playing a significant role in social life and national celebrations.

The medieval period witnessed a golden age for Georgia, particularly during the reign of King David IV the Builder (1089–1125) and Queen Tamar the Great (1184–1213). Under their leadership, Georgia expanded its territories, flourished culturally, and became a regional powerhouse. This era saw the creation of masterpieces of Georgian literature, architecture, and fresco painting, and established a strong sense of national pride that resonates to this day. The memory of this golden age, a period of strength and artistic achievement, remains a potent symbol of Georgian resilience and aspiration.

However, Georgia's strategic location also meant it was frequently subjected to invasions and occupations by various empires, including the Mongols, Persians, and Ottoman Turks. These periods of foreign domination were marked by immense struggle and sacrifice, yet the Georgian people consistently resisted assimilation, holding fast to their language, culture, and Christian faith. This long history of defending their identity against overwhelming odds has forged a deep sense of national pride and a powerful collective memory of both triumph and suffering. When you observe a Georgian toast to their homeland, you're witnessing the echoes of centuries of struggle and survival.

By the 19th century, Georgia had been gradually absorbed into the Russian Empire. This period brought some modernization and infrastructure development but also saw attempts to suppress Georgian language and culture. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, Georgia briefly enjoyed independence from 1918 to 1921, a cherished period that demonstrated the nation's longing for self-determination. However, this independence was short-lived, as the country was invaded by the Red Army and incorporated into the Soviet Union, eventually becoming the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The Soviet era, lasting from 1921 to 1991, left a complex legacy. While it brought industrialization and a degree of social welfare, it also involved political repression, collectivization, and the suppression of national expression. Yet, even within the Soviet system, Georgian culture managed to thrive in subtle ways, and the national spirit

endured. Many older Georgians still recall aspects of this period, and its impact on the country's infrastructure, urban planning, and demographics is still visible. Understanding this recent Soviet past is crucial for comprehending modern Georgian society, its challenges, and its aspirations.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia once again declared its independence, a moment of profound national jubilation. However, the early years of independence were marked by significant challenges, including civil unrest, economic hardship, and conflicts in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These internal and external pressures tested the young nation's resolve but ultimately strengthened its commitment to sovereignty and its westward orientation. The "Rose Revolution" of 2003, a peaceful popular uprising, ushered in a new era of reform and a renewed push towards democratic governance and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Modern Georgia, therefore, stands as a testament to its enduring spirit. It is a nation intensely proud of its ancient heritage, its unique language (one of the world's oldest living languages with its own distinct script), and its vibrant cultural traditions, particularly its polyphonic singing and rich winemaking history. Simultaneously, it is a country looking forward, actively pursuing closer ties with Europe and the West, and embracing economic liberalization and modernization. This duality – rooted in the past, aspiring to the future – defines much of contemporary Georgian identity.

For an expat, understanding this historical narrative provides essential context. It explains the deep reverence Georgians hold for their land, their traditions, and their independence. It sheds light on their legendary hospitality, often seen as a protective embrace born of centuries of welcoming (and sometimes fending off) strangers. It helps to contextualize the pace of change, the lingering Soviet-era architecture alongside gleaming new developments, and the generational differences in outlook. Embracing this rich tapestry, rather than viewing it through a purely Western lens, will profoundly enrich your experience of living in Georgia.

The Georgian language itself is a window into the country's soul. Belonging to its own Kartvelian language family, it is distinct from Indo-European tongues and boasts a beautiful, unique alphabet. While English is increasingly spoken in major cities, especially among younger generations and in tourist-oriented businesses, making an effort to learn even a few basic Georgian phrases will be met with genuine appreciation and can unlock deeper connections with locals. It is a gesture that demonstrates respect for their culture and their history.

Furthermore, Georgia's deep connection to viticulture is not merely an economic fact but a fundamental aspect of its identity. Archeological evidence suggests Georgia is the birthplace of wine, with winemaking traditions dating back 8,000 years. The traditional method of fermenting wine in large clay vessels called qvevri, buried underground, is recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. Wine is not

just a drink; it is woven into the fabric of Georgian social life, celebrated in feasts (supras), and integral to their hospitality. Sharing a glass of Georgian wine is often a communal experience, a way of forging bonds and celebrating life.

This rich historical and cultural backdrop permeates daily life. From the architectural styles of Tbilisi's old town to the traditional dances performed at festivals, from the hearty, flavorful cuisine to the warmth of personal interactions, Georgia's identity is constantly expressed. Being an expat here means more than just navigating logistics; it means immersing yourself in this profound and captivating narrative. As you settle in, you will find that the more you understand Georgia's past and its geographical heartbeat, the more deeply you will connect with its present.

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