

TRAVELOGUE

» Places to Fly and Explore

**Short final to land at Batumi, »
Georgia, (UGSB).** Only one
direction was allowed for jet
aircraft to land and it was over the
Black Sea.



AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER are active aviation travelers, flying themselves throughout the world and writing about their experiences. The Vision Jet is their fourth Cirrus aircraft, a progressive move from their previous SR22N, SR22TN and SR22T that they previously flew on their world adventures. Visit their website for more stories and information: www.VisionJetTravel.com



Traveling the Vision Jet ...

by Amir and Tamra Hyster

We continued our slow meander around the world leaving Ben Gurion Airport (LLBG) in Tel Aviv, Israel, flying to the international airport of Batumi, Georgia, (UGSB) – a 790nm flight.

One thing we learned about flying around the world is the inability to maintain the cleanliness of the outside of the airplane. The logistics involved with having it washed was an impossible task, not to mention the cost! At large international airports, it is impossible to wash

the plane yourself, and the accumulated dust can't be cleaned with the Wizards Mist-n-Shine® because it would create paint scratches. We constantly cleaned and protected the icing boots and spray-cleaned the windows but prayed for a good rain to clean up the rest.

In Tel Aviv and Zurich, all airplanes must have pushback service, which is unnecessary for small aircraft. But we were parked alongside all the big private jets, making us feel like one of the big

An aerial photograph showing a coastal town and an airport runway. The runway is a long, straight strip of asphalt with white markings, situated on a green field. The town is built on a hillside overlooking the sea. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains with patches of snow under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

World in a Visiting Georgia

boys. Every pushback or reposition of the aircraft in Tel Aviv cost over \$150, and most will need a minimum of four pushbacks and/or repositioning, which is very costly.

Once we were on our way, we followed the standard TLV procedure DAFNA 1E departure runway 26 out of Ben Gurion. The procedure required a few sharp zigzag turns (to avoid any missile threat and restricted areas) whilst climbing as quickly as possible up to 3,000 feet to

KESEF, followed by a sharp turn direct to DESPO which is just between the Lebanese Flight Information Region (FIR) and the Cyprus FIR. In general terms, we took off heading straight toward the Mediterranean Sea and turned right to fly along the northern coast of Israel until the sight of land disappeared in the haze of distance and altitude. Haifa and Mount Hermon are the last notable landmarks we saw after being in Israel for several months.

We flew over Cyprus, which was our alternate if Turkey's airspace denied our crossing. A few flight support services advised us that an overflight permit was required to fly over and through Turkey airspace. The process is complex and very costly, requiring special insurance provisions to our insurance policy as well as being written in Turkish language. However, after carefully reading the Turkish AIP (Aeronautical Information Publication), it clearly stated that an

Danger flight zones on flight >>
to Georgia from Tel Aviv,
Israel, with flight restrictions
 near Russian Navy port of
 Sevastopol, Crimea, and
 Odessa, Ukraine.



N-registered aircraft does not require any permits. We took the decision and filed the flight plan that included a long leg over Turkey with an alternate clearance to land in Cyprus just in case we were denied entry into Turkish airspace; a return to Tel Aviv was not an option.

That decision was proven correct and paid off as we were handed over to Turkish airspace without any issues. Just over the coastline of Turkey, we received a CAS message – GPS LOI and TAWS were unavailable – and again, we had GPS jamming. In addition, we noticed a lot of radio interference, making communications with ATC difficult. It became necessary to fly across Turkey using dead reckoning with ForeFlight flight planning report, measuring time and speed to calculate distances, considering that just to our east was Armenia and the less welcoming Islamic Republic of Iran. Once we were on the other side of Turkey and in view of Georgia, mysteriously, all our GPS and communications returned. We were less than 2 miles off our track – a great navigation achievement.

We were cleared to take an ILS approach to runway 13 at UGSB, an airport with only one direction being allowed to land for jet aircraft, meaning you can only approach from above the Black Sea to runway 13 and depart in the opposite direction on runway 31 over the Black Sea. At the other end of the runway are some nice mountains, not very high but enough to cause aviation problems given the proximity.

Batumi

The subtropical climate here provides the city with very cold winters and mild, pleasant summers, and life is simple and self-sufficient. On the surface, the city may look poor, but that is not correct. The residents own beautiful estates on pristine rivers and grow their own organic produce; they make their own cheese, bread, wine and Rakia (high alcohol distilled liquor). The people live a life full of good family values, friends and devout Orthodox Christian faith. Yes, the lifestyle is basic and simple but rich with culture.

The residents show great warmth and strong character; given a little respect, they will give you their life, but if you cross them, they will kill you without a blink of an eye. First impressions are lasting, and disrespect is never lived down!

We hired a driver and car to visit the capital city of Tbilisi, located only 230 miles away, but it ended up being a five-hour trip because the roads were so poor. A massive road project is underway, building tunnels, bridges and a highway to support the transportation by semi tractor trailers between the Port of Poti and Batumi at the Black Sea through the Caucasus Mountains to Russia. There is only one road through Georgia, making the trip long and slow.

In Georgia, people talked in timelines – BC, DC and AC – Before (Soviet) Communism, During (Soviet) Communism and After Communism (1990). The “after” is called “the great recovery,” aka the modern era. The country has a lot of interesting ancient history. Once a part of the old Silk Road and many past rulers (some



⌘ **The glass dome parliament building in Kutaisi** created to portray government transparency.

great and some not so great), it survived Ottoman rule and is now 90% Orthodox Christian. It has many churches from the fourth century and old monasteries from the sixth century. The oldest Christian cross in Georgia, which is still used today, was made from two grapevine branches tied together.

Our driver told us the story of after the Revolution of the Roses in 2003, the new President Mikheil Saakashvili brought the Parliament back to Kutaisi. He wanted to clean up past corruption and create government transparency by creating a glass dome parliament building (inaugurated in 2012) and constructing the police buildings with glass walls so that ordinary citizens could look inside to ensure transparent and honest public service. Saakashvili lost the parliamentary lead, and in 2019 the Parliament promptly returned to Tbilisi, and the glass buildings remain empty without use. The police stations immediately received blinds to ensure they were closed to outside scrutiny.

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⌘ **Amir in the foreground of historic old town in Tbilisi** that is now filled with lively cafés.

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The 18th century, 4-mile-long fortress wall in Sighnaghi built to defend the country from Dagestan.



Many monuments are dedicated to David the Builder from the 12th century and Tamar the Great, the queen who was referred to as a king. Walking around Tbilisi, there are beautiful buildings; wide, old boulevards; a historic old town with an old mosque covered in colorful tiles and ritualist hot spring baths. Today the city is full of funky and fun, lively cafés.

A short daytrip took us to Gori, a small town that was the birthplace of Josef Stalin, considered to be the true “father” of socialism, and one of the 20th century’s most significant and controversial figures. Gori has a museum dedicated to him with no mention of any questionable attributes or totalitarian actions that resulted in millions of deaths. Despite his past, Stalin has large popularity in Georgia. Russian and political socialist parties worldwide consider him the true implementer of communism and the creator of the former Soviet Union. Preserved for all to see is his birth home (1879), a humble two-room wooden cottage.

Stalin was afraid to fly and had a personalized luxury green Pullman train carriage, armor-plated and weighing over 80 tons, which is on display in its original condition. We had a special tour inside, and when Amir sat in Stalin’s armchair, he said he felt chills going down his spine.

East of Tbilisi is the wine region, where the city of Sighnaghi sits on a high hill. In the 18th century, a fortress wall was built to defend the country from the Dagestan (Russian). The 4-mile-long stone wall with 27 towers represented each region of Georgia.

Now a beautiful tourist area, cobblestone roads and old buildings are all built from local smooth, round pebble stones and flat, thin clay bricks. The restaurant balconies hang over the ridge, spanning a view for miles.

On our fourth day in Tbilisi, we traveled to the Caucasus Mountains. It was summertime and the weather provided us with blue skies and warm days. All the

snow had melted down to the 25,000 rivers! Full of minerals, the drinking water was fresh, clean and tasty.

As we ventured up the mountains, the landscape was rolling green hills and many market stalls with good clean toilets for breaks. We drove to the small town of Stepantsminda, where the main attraction was the Gergeti Trinity Church, perched high on a hill that spans a view to the seventh highest peak of the Caucasus range, the Kazbek Mountain (elevation 16,580 feet).

The mountain pass had old tunnels in curving sections of road that are only used when there is an avalanche or very snowy conditions. Melting snow ran off the mountain and was channeled over the tunnel, which was a nice site to see as the water flowed.

Everywhere you go in Georgia are tall memorial statues of important leaders, all having fought for their country and independence. Being overtaken



N16AT parked at Batumi airport (UGSB).

and pressured by surrounding nations throughout the centuries is part of the Georgian culture and shapes their persona. Still to this day, they are warding off the pressure of those who still seek to take them. We take for granted in our times that a country and our homes are safe and belong to us, but unfortunately, this is not the case for many countries around the world. They live looking over their shoulder.

On our way back to Batumi on that five-hour, pot-holed, truck-infested road that we grew to hate, we stopped for a break at a higher altitude to cool off from the heat. Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, also known as Borjomi's Mineral Water Park, has at least 150 water springs popping up all over the area. The Borjomi water is closely associated with the Russian Imperial Dynasty of Romanov and is the No. 1 export of Georgia. The Borjomi water is high in minerals, including magnesium, salt, hydrocarbon and

calcium, and is known for its healing effects and treatment of many digestive diseases.

The original water bottling factory is still on the main site and has been renovated into a museum with historic photos from the times and some interesting photos of the Romanov Family who had their summer palace there (in good times).

The main Catherine Spring is still flowing and has been since 1810; taps were installed in 1958. The natural carbon dioxide pressure pushes the hot 105°F water from a depth of 6 miles. The taste is very strong and not many people like it, some almost gagging as they try to swallow it! We found it very pleasant and drank copious amounts and can verify the health benefits were immediately felt in the stomach and the entire digestive system.

The food all over the country was outstanding, and we considered it to be

one of the best culinary destinations we had visited, which says a lot as we just came from Tel Aviv, which is probably the best in the world. Fresh fish, seafood, organic vegetables and meat make the most interesting dumplings and stews. The traditional khachapuri is a flat, boat-shaped bread filled with cheese and eggs and baked in a wood oven. The khinkali dumplings, where you bite into the pastry and suck out the soupy contents, were amazing! That Borjomi water really came in handy! ☺

**Note: This trip was taken well before the conflict with Russia and Ukraine.*