

Georgia

8 June 21

TLV Israel to Batumi Georgia

LLBG TO UGSB

790nm - 3hr

Handler: Fattal FBO TLV

The plane has been parked for a few months and it is absolutely filthy, except for where the cover protects the top and windows, that is fairly clean but it is a sorry site to see her in such a state. The logistics involved with having a wash was an impossible task not to mention the cost!

Standard TLV procedure E1 DAFNA departure out of Ben Gurion straight to 3000 feet, a few turns then direct to DESPO, in general terms we take off heading straight towards the Mediterranean, turn right to fly along the coast of Israel until the sight of land disappears in the haze of distance and altitude. Haifa and Mount Hermon are the last notable land marks we see after being in Israel for 2 months.

We fly over Cyprus, which is on standby as our alternate if Turkey airspace deny our crossing. We need to make a weather deviation direct to INPOR which also saves us from a dog leg manoeuvre and sparing a bit of time, so far so good.

Just a little over the coastline of Turkey we receive a GPS LOI taws unavailable GPS jamming.

There are a few developing thunderstorm cells on our

given heading which we report a left of heading required path, that is narrowly



alongside a forbidden area but not entering and we notice a lot of radio interference also happening as we proceed through Turkey. Once over the other side and in view of Georgia miraculously all our GPS returns 🤔 and we are clear to take an ILS approach into Batumi, a runway that only works one way in from the Black Sea and out to the same sea as at the end of the runway are some nice mountains, not very high but enough to cause aviation problems given the close proximity.



A quick clean of the Icing boots to get all those bugs off - by the air hostess and maintenance wench!

Batumi, is a sub tropical climate with very cold winters and mild pleasant summers the life is simple and self sufficient, not to get mixed up with the word poor, as this is not correct. They own beautiful estates on pure water rivers and grow their own organic produce; make their own cheese, bread, wine and Rakia, it is a life full of good family values, friends and devout Orthodox Christian religious faith.



A people of great warmth and strong character given a little respect they will give you their wife 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!



The drive to Tbilisi (the Capital) only 380 km away is a 5 hour trip just because the roads are so poor. A massive road project is underway building tunnels bridges and a highway to support the transportation by semi trailers between the Port of Poti and Batumi at the Black Sea through the Caucasus Mountains to Russia, at present there is only one road through Georgia so the road trip is long and slow.

In Georgia people talk in time-lines; BC DC and AC (unlike the band AC/DC), before, during and after Soviet communist rule called the great recovery aka modern era. The country has a lot of ancient great interesting history BC- once a part of the Silk Road, many past rulers some great and some not so great - Ottoman rule and now 90% Orthodox Christianity, the country has many churches old and new. The first Christian cross was established here from two grape vine branches tied together, it is still used today.

One of the cities on the way to Tbilisi is Kutaisi which was once the capital and a very grand summer vacation place for the Russian in DC times. Still a thriving city but those old days of Russian mansions are now abandoned buildings, resorts and grand estates left to grow moss and vegetation. There is a modern glass dome building in a very big complex with another glass 4 or 5 story building all empty and abandoned.

Our driver tells us the story:



Tbilisi old town

The great recovery leader wanted to bring the Parliament back to Kutaisi and he wanted transparency so created the glass dome, also all the police buildings in glass. This leader lost the parliamentary lead to the present government who returned all the Parliament back to Tbilisi and the glass buildings remain empty and the police station blinds are now all closed.

There are many monuments to David the Builder from the 12 century and also their Queen that was referred to as a King : Queen Tamar. I personally can relate to her 😊

Walking around Tbilisi there are beautiful buildings, wide old boulevards, a historic old town with an old mosque covered in the colourful tiles and ritualist hot spring baths. Today the town is full of funky and fun lively cafes.

Travel on day trips and we find very old Monasteries from 6th Century and Churches from 4th Century.

The town Gori was the birthplace of Stalin and a museum dedicated to him, with no mention of any questionable attributes. His birth home a humble 2 room wooden cottage is preserved for all to see.

The train and carriage he rode on in high opulent luxury is on display still in its original condition.



Sighnagali - east of Tbilisi is the wine region, with a Great stone wall 6 km long, 27 towers each representing a region that was to ward off the Dagestan (Russian) from the Caspian Sea.

Now a beautiful area high on a mountain for tourists and beautiful restaurants within old buildings and walls, built with the local smooth round pebble stones and flat thin clay bricks. The restaurants balconies hanging over the ridge spanning a view that goes for miles.



Georgia is like a little Israel only on the sense that the main tourist who travels here are the Israeli so the restaurants, businesses, signage, fun adventure spots are all catering to them. Israeli music plays in all these places welcoming them and most locals speak a basic Hebrew to converse. On our fourth day in Tbilisi we pick up our new Israeli friend and travel to the Caucasus mountains. Being avid kefir makers and drinkers we are excited to see the birth place of this very important probiotic. We are told it can be bought in the local shouk or market. When I think of the Caucasus mountains I think of snow covered cold mountains but it is summer time here and the weather is blue skies and warm days, all the snow has melted down to the 25,000 rivers!, packed full of minerals the drinking water is fresh clean and tasty.

I imagine the stories that I have read of the local houses that have an animal skin bag full of kefir grains and goat or buffalo milk hanging and brewing; the people of the Caucasus are well known to live long healthy lives, contributing to the organic growth of vegetables fruit , hand raised meat , cheese, yogurt and kefir fermented products.

Our driver Raz, a Georgian who speaks perfect Hebrew, thinks we are crazy, he has never seen any house in Georgia making kefir but when he asks the ladies who are making our breakfast about it they know immediately what we are talking about.

On our way to the mountains the local housing being close to the city are modern and the place we picked up our friend was a huge shopping and apartment complex all build by the Chinese who are also building the new road project. It is not the platform to talk about labour camps here so let's just leave it at that.

As we venture up the mountains the landscape is rolling green hills and many market stalls with good toilets for breaks and to see the view, a large glacier

water lake is reminiscent of our Icelandic adventure and as we ascend the road is in very fair condition and full of trucks, as this one road is the only passage through to Russia when we get to the Kazbeti mountain the highest of the Caucasus and bordering Russia there is a line of trucks over 3km all parked waiting to cross through!



The mountain pass has some old tunnels in curving sections of road that are only used when there is an avalanche or very snowy conditions. They were built by the German POWs , the water running off the mountain has been channeled over the tunnel which is a nice site in the summer as the water flows.

What happened to the kefir? Nobody can give us a clue, the closest we come to our hunt is in a supermarket where there is only one variety and



the yogurt “kefir” drink called Matsoni, which we are told is their kefir. So it is a mystery what happened to the kefir grains.

Perhaps after the Tzar stole the grains they no longer want to let anyone know they have them - the mystery will remain.

Everywhere you go in Georgia there is tall memorial statues of important leaders all having fought for their Country and independence being taken and pressured by surrounding nations throughout the centuries is all apart of the Georgian culture and shapes their persona. Still to this day they are warding off the pressure of those that 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 with one eye in their back.



View over the glacial lake on the road up to the Caucasus Mountains



Mountain cave fun with our driver





Soviet times housing



Suspension bridge

On our way back to Batumi - that 5 hour potty holed truck infested road that I grew to hate, we stopped for a break in a higher altitude to cool off from the heat and the terrible roads. Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park area has at least 150 water springs popping up all over the area. The water is the number one export of Georgia and has high amounts of mineralisation including Magnesium, salt, hydro-carbon, and calcium.

The original water bottling factory is still on the main site renovated and now a museum with historic photos from the times and some interesting photos of the Romanov Family who had their summer palace here (in good times). No miraculous waters could save them.

The main Catherine Spring is still flowing since the early 1810 taps were installed in 1958 and the water comes up from a depth of 8-10 km under natural carbon dioxide pressure, coming out of the tap at a temperature of between 38C to 41C. The taste is very strong and not a lot of people like it by the look on their face as they drink it. Some almost gagging as they try to swallow it!



Georgia

We found it very pleasant and drank copious amounts and can verify the health benefits were immediately felt in the stomach and the other end if you know what I mean.

Some more pics oh and the food - WoWser! That Borjomi water came in handy...



Dumplings (Khinkali) the national food - Khachpuri, vegetable pickles - those flowers are yummy.