



Between the Caucasus and Black Sea: Georgia

From 11 October until 30 November 2018

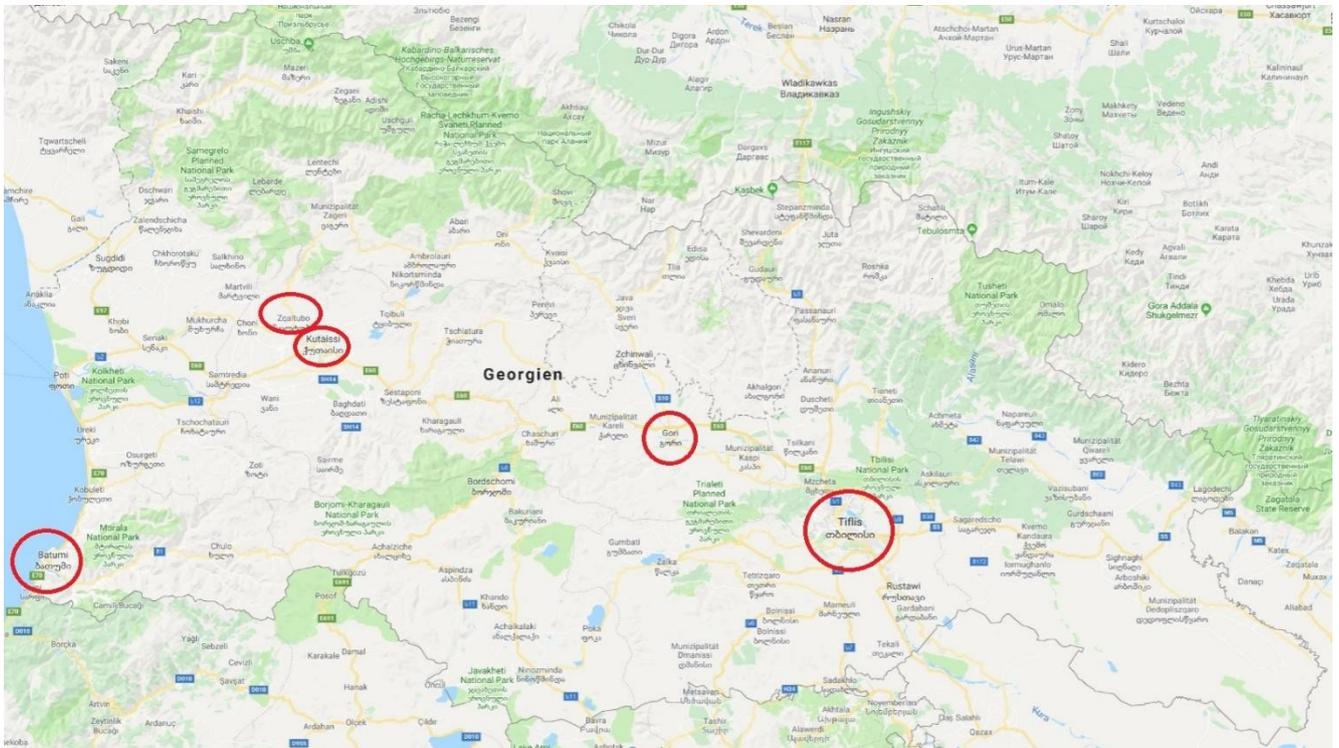
- Press tour:** Wednesday, 10 October 2018, 10am
- Speakers:** Otto Kapfinger and Adolph Stiller
- Official opening:** Wednesday, 10 October 2018, 6.30pm (invitation only)
- Curators:** Irina Kurtishvili and Adolph Stiller
- Venue:** Ringturm Exhibition Centre
Schottenring 30, 1010 Vienna
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)
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This autumn Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein's Architektur im Ringturm series puts the spotlight on the richness of Georgian culture and architecture. Following on from the 2016 exhibition on **Tbilisi**, the scope of this show extends beyond the borders of the country's capital with a look at the architecture of **Gori** – a town lying to the west of Tbilisi in the heartlands of the Georgia – as well as the country's second largest city **Kutaisi**, the spa town **Tskaltubo**, and the port of **Batumi** on the Black Sea coast.

The exhibition showcases a selection of exceptional 20th-century buildings: examples of understated, neoclassical Art Nouveau in the capital bearing Russian influences; architecturally and historically significant buildings constructed during the decades of Soviet rule that tell a story of autonomous development in terms of their dimensions, room design and materials; striking modern architecture built during the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, and recent projects in the up-and-coming port of Batumi.

The show also looks at Tbilisi's centuries-old thermal baths, built in the Persian style.



Map: Google Maps

Tbilisi

Georgia became a republic of the Soviet Union in the first half of the 20th century. The subsequent 'gigantomaniac' planning policy brought an end to individualism, and Tbilisi was chosen as the location for one of the largest architectural experiments in recent history.

Publically-funded housing measures to improve general living conditions ceased in the early 1990s as the state became less interventionist. It was not until Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia's President from 2004-07 and 2008-13, personally advocated a change in policy that new construction projects began across the entire country. These were realised by internationally renowned architects from Germany, Italy and Spain, who were tasked with coming up with designs that would provide a counterbalance to the architecture of the Soviet period.

Tbilisi's 48 Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches, as well as its mosques, synagogues and Catholic churches – two of each – are architectural evidence of the great religious tolerance which has existed in the city for many centuries.

Gori

Gori is situated to the west of Tbilisi, in the heartlands of Georgia at the mouth of the Liakhvi river. The town gets its name from its fortress Goris Tsikhe, which means "fort on a hill". The landmark can still be seen for miles around and marks the historic centre of the town.

In 1949 a general plan for urban expansion was drawn up which set out to preserve the town's historic character. Industrial buildings were located away from centre, where in the main only the construction of low-rise buildings was permitted. A new, broad north-south avenue was built to connect the centre with the railway station, along with a museum complex, a hotel and a research institute.

As the birthplace of Soviet dictator Ioseb Dzhugashvili, alias Joseph Stalin, Gori is also the home of the Joseph Stalin Museum.

Kutaisi

Kutaisi is the cultural and political centre of western Georgia and the country's second-largest city. In 2012 the Parliament of Georgia was moved from Tbilisi to Kutaisi and took up residence in a futuristic, USD 200 million glass building on the outskirts of the city, which is surrounded by Millennium Park. Another large-scale development project, Kutaisi International Airport, was also completed in the same year.

In terms of older buildings, the city has a relatively modest architectural heritage. The 11th-century Bagrati Cathedral lost its status as a UNESCO World Heritage site last year following unsympathetic renovation work. However, Kutaisi's large theatre and several of its 19th-century buildings are certainly worth visiting.

Tskaltubo

Tskaltubo is set in a landscape of luscious green hills surrounded by the Colchis forests, and is internationally renowned for its healing waters. The town's artful neoclassical spa buildings, featuring tall Greek columns, make a lavish impression. Bathhouse Number Six – which has hotel accommodation and can count Stalin among its guests – was recently renovated and modernised.

Tskaltubo even has a museum of crutches – probably the only museum of its kind in the world – which houses an impressive collection of crutches left behind by people who were able to walk again after benefiting from the healing effects of the thermal waters.

Between 1931 and 1956 the town underwent substantial redevelopment. Plans for a new amphitheatre layout which would reflect the natural lay of the land were drawn up, and an 80-hectare site was allocated for a circular spa resort. Residential areas were moved to the south of the centre to make way for the new resort, and in 1953 the town was declared a local administrative centre.

A railway built in the 1940s connected Tskaltubo with the rest of the Soviet Union. Canals were constructed to divert the river away from the spa resort, and orbital roads were built along the canals. The bathhouses occupied the land between the first and second of these roads, behind which was the residential area, followed by parkland and woods. The purpose of the third orbital road was to merge the town into the surrounding countryside.

Batumi

Batumi is the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, a province of Georgia. The city was connected to the Transcaucasus Railway in 1883, and is internationally known for its refinery that processes crude oil from Azerbaijan.

A recent economic boom has resulted in the construction of many new buildings including some bold and spectacular works of architecture. These provide a counterpoint to the predominantly exotic-looking three-storey structures of the old town built in the 19th and 20th centuries, some of which have undergone restoration. Batumi's famous seven-kilometre-long seaside promenade dating from 1881 has been comprehensively redeveloped.

Tbilisi and its thermal baths

Tbilisi's famous baths are located in the Seidabadi quarter in the north of the city. There have been baths fed by hot sulphurous springs in the city for over 700 years. In the 13th century Tbilisi had approximately 65 sulphurous bathhouses. Only a few baths remain in operation today. The oldest of these dates back to the first half of the 17th century.

Tbilisi's Persian-style bathhouses have typical brick domes. Bathers enter the buildings through marble halls. There are benches for relaxing on at the edge of the pools, which occasionally feature elevated narrow seating alcoves.

Catalogue

Architektur im Ringturm LII.: *Between the Caucasus and Black Sea: Georgia.*

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