The Capital of Love



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For those yet to visit Kutaisi and curious why this city attracts scores of people from all over the world, we can furnish a laconic response and explain in plain language that Kutaisi has everything that can possibly draw interest.

However, not all who have been to Kutaisi know that the city is as old, as the world itself because its history traces its roots back to the time when the adventures of mankind began.



The history of this city began even earlier before the Ancient Greeks discovered that a certain advanced land bordering the Black Sea had been in possession of the world's greatest secret. That land is known as Ancient Colchis, one of the ancestor states of modern-day Georgia, with its capital in Kutaisi, and said major secret referred to as the Golden Fleece.

In reality, the Golden Fleece stood for a knowledge lacked in even by Hellenic civilization itself. To solve this mystery, the Greek Argonauts embarked on a journey to Colchis.

Those familiar with Greek mythology know that the Greek found a lavish palace and a flourishing city in Kutaisi where the famed King Aeetes resided at that time. A similar electrifying description of Kutaisi and Ancient Georgia is found in the Argonautica by Apollonius Rhodius.

Although Kutaisi today is totally different from the first capital of Georgia visited by the Argonauts, modern-day Kutaisi continues to boast most beautiful women as gorgeous as Medea of Colchis who, some 3 000 years ago, had no trouble charming and mesmerizing Jason, the leader of the Argonauts.





Speaking of Medea, the word medicine stems from her name, by the way.

Even today, this city, and its inhabitants, is capable of mesmerizing any visitor who, unlike the Argonauts who sailed down the Rioni River, now has a variety of routes to choose from, because modern-day Kutaisi can be reached by land or air, so that guests can see for themselves that Kutaisi is the most Georgian and yet most European city in the country.

The city acquired its European features for the second time since classical antiquity in the Middle Ages by establishing a European-style university at the Gelati Monastery near Kutaisi.

This University, known as the Gelati Academy, was founded by Davit Aghmashenebeli (the Builder), a 12th-century king from Kutaisi, who proved to be the most successful Georgian politician, ruler, and statesman in the history of our nation.

On the other hand, the Bagrati Cathedral, which can be seen

virtually from any spot in Kutaisi properly, was built as one of the major symbols of united Georgia a bit earlier, in the 11th century, on the order of King Bagrat.

Yet what has united our people and country through the centuries is, first of all, ancient Georgian language and Georgian script, and the education centers operating at Kutaisi's monasteries have produced both hagiographic work and significant pieces of secular literature.



Of course, the best Georgian literary works were not limited exclusively to Kutaisi-based authors. However, the Public School #1 (former classical gymnasium), which still operates in Kutaisi, has produced the majority of classic Georgian writers.

Vladimir Mayakovski, the best known Georgian-born poet in the world, took a course at this school, and so did its graduates, the brilliant Akaki Tsereteli, whose poems put to music you will surely enjoy at one festive supra table or another while in Kutaisi.



After (or even before) feasting at the traditional Georgian supra table, Kutaisi's foreign visitors must visit the building of the school, located next to the Kutaisi Opera House, as it is unrivaled in the world in terms of a multitude of successful alumni.



The plaque on the façade of the building's main entrance offers an incomplete list of its graduates from different times, whose names are closely tied to the advancement of Georgian and world poetry, cinema and theater, visual arts and music, philosophy and psychology.

Besides literature, science, and arts, Kutaisi is also a major hub of sports, as football, rugby, and basketball players born and raised here have defined Georgia's major achievements in the European and international arenas.

Despite the fact that, in the 19th century, Kutaisi, similar to the rest of Georgia, was incorporated into the Russian empire _ involuntarily, of course, _ the residents of Kutaisi nonetheless have managed to take in every European novelty and progress.

For example, just a few years after the invention of cinema in France, the first movie theater opened in Kutaisi.



It is here that the first full-length documentary in the history of cinematography was screened, a film by Kutaisi's own Vasil Amashukeli; this outstanding Georgian film director buried at Kutaisi's Mtsvanekvavila Cemetery.

Along with the city's many other attractions, Kutaisi's guests are advised to visit the Mtsvanekvavila Pantheon, not only to enjoy its spellbinding landscapes but also to pay due homage to those lain in rest there, including such international celebrities as George Balanchine, son of classical music composer Meliton Balanchivadze, and acclaimed choreographer recognized by every ballet aficionado.

Ballet connoisseurs also know that, while George Balanchine dominated the Western Hemisphere, the Eastern Hemisphere

was run by Vakhtang Chabukiani, also a Georgian dancer and choreographer, this way dividing the world of ballet between these two brilliant Georgian artists.

Also buried at the Mtsvanekvavila cemetery is Rezo Cheishvili, a remarkable Georgian author and screenwriter who personally made us children fall in love with Kutaisi through his book with a very enticing and exciting title for both children and adults, Dinosaurs Roaming the City.

Those into dinosaurs, especially Kutaisi's guests, can see their authentic traces with their own eyes near Kutaisi, just a



few kilometers away from the city, at a place that also offers incredible views of the Caucasus Mountain Range where, by the way, Prometheus, known in Georgia as Amirani, was chained…

Incidentally, Kutaisi was the first city, after its French counterparts, where cognac and champagne factories opened. One such factory employed Mitrophane LAghidze, a young unskilled laborer at the time and genius in the making who subsequently went on to invent magic recipes for some of the world's sweetest and most delicious beverages.

In 1912, Kutaisi, as well as the rest of small but independent and democratic Georgia, once again found itself occupied, this time by Soviet Russia, isolating Soviet citizens from the rest of the world. Otherwise, nobody knows which would prove more popular throughout the world, Coca Cola or Mitrophane Laghidze's heavenly beverages (By the way, the foregoing is not just our subjective and strictly patriotic opinion but a suggestion from prominent German filmmaker Stefan Stoltz, and this notion, most likely, will be seconded by any international visitor tasting Georgian lemonade).



Although most delicious, sweet, refreshing, sparkling or non-carbonated spring waters abound in Georgia, the first drink offered to you in Georgia is wine, of course, and this priority is preconditioned by a number of both subjective and objective reasons. The major, and objective reason lies in history, and since Georgia is the cradle of wine, no host in Kutaisi, or elsewhere in Georgia for that matter, will or can opt for anything else but wine. No matter the origin of a visitor, he or she is treated as a guest in Kutaisi, and, as the saying goes, a guest is a gift from God…





Of course, exceptional hospitality is a general all-Georgian characteristic, and you are guaranteed to be treated with due honor and generosity in every village or city throughout the country. Nonetheless, the Georgians, who seem to vie one another over pretty much everything, agree on the special status of Kutaisi as the center of hospitality, the most elevated and pure supra festive table, and love in Georgia and the whole world, for that matter…

And that, too, is easy to explain given the fact that the main source of celebrated, diverse, rich Georgian cuisine is Kutaisi, and the legendary Imereti festive table has been forged in this city for centuries, with local culinary wizards have come up with numerous genuine, unbelievably scrumptious dishes.



It is common knowledge that Georgia is the homeland of wine, but not all Georgians themselves know that the cradle of Georgian wine is Imereti. Even before the Soviet era, Imereti boasted more vineyards and varieties of grape than any other Georgian region.

This is why, as soon as you find yourselves at the truly magical supra table in Kutaisi, do not refuse the offer and, along with the amazing, heavenly dishes, enjoy white or red Imereti wine. You are guaranteed to come across a unique vintage that will make a lasting impression on you and make you consider returning to Georgia.



That is exactly why great American writer John Steinbeck kept returning to Georgia to write and state repeatedly that, after



visiting Georgia, he had come to understanding why every Soviet citizen dreamed of coming to Georgia at least once in life. Yet he never described the aspirations of Georgian citizens themselves, because they never discuss their dreams openly, especially in the company of foreigners, for what every Georgian is dreaming about is visiting Kutaisi, at least once in life, or to be more correct, at least once again.

If you have already made your dream come true by visiting Kutaisi, and if after attending a Georgian supra festive table, you discover that you have put on some weight – because you could not help trying every dish – you absolutely must promenade through the city where you will surely discover some of the most amazing sites. And if you need any help, we will be more than happy to guide you.

Although there are several bridges in Kutaisi worth mentioning, the White Bridge is still easiest to find (and probably historically most prominent), and this may be where you want to start your journey by contemplating the Rioni River and the



white stones under the bridge, just like the UNESCO Committee members have been doing with special diligence for years.

The bridge itself, namely its guardrails, features a sculpture of Picasso's boy poised to dive into the water. People actually do dive into the Rioni River from the spot in summer. With any luck, you may witness what half the world flocks to the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia and Herzegovina to see.

If you observe the riverbank from the other side of the bridge, you will discover the Residence of Imereti Kings, known as Okros Chardakhi (the Golden Canopied Mansion) – a genuine discovery because the residences of Georgian kings, although referred to as palaces, are a far cry, to put it mildly, from typical European royal palaces, all of which



marks yet another praiseworthy detail about our praiseworthy history, as our kings lived the same way as the people for whom they fought. Of course, not all of them were as wise as King Solomon, but their vast majority prioritized the welfare of their country over their own, and loved their homeland more than their own selves (Children born to the royal house and noble families, in line with a Georgian custom originating in Imereti, where raised by peasant families, so that they could grow up together with their commoner peers and learn to appreciate and love equality from childhood).

Since we mentioned love, you may want to drop by the Garden Love near the White Bridge, just briefly, though, lest you scare off Kutaisi love birds. Yes, couples in love make the most beautiful picture, but please keep in mind that Kutaisi has many more exciting places and things to offer, so you must keep going until you reach another, somewhat larger garden, for example.

This larger historic garden, known in Kutaisi as Boulevard, served different functions in different eras, though presently it is



the major public space, and the garden claims this status thanks to the events that have taken place here in the course of the past two centuries.

What has been happening here in the past two centuries is much more than part of the city's adventures because, in terms of democratic change, and not only, Kutaisi in the 19th century bore the same significance to Georgia as France to the rest of Europe in the same period.

Everything that happened here subsequently triggered major changes both in Georgia and beyond, and the democratic movement has always found necessary preconditions for development in Kutaisi where people of different ethnicities and creeds have coexisted since ancient times, and where a synagogue and Roman Catholic churches can be found next to Orthodox Christian cathedrals. Before we leave this garden to enter the Catholic Quarters, however, let's pay attention to the statue celebrating four Kutaisi women singers, a monument erected back when only men enjoyed this honor throughout the world. Of course, there is nothing extraordinary about statues honoring four singing boys from Liverpool, or Khasuri for that matter, but appreciating (four!) women in this manner is surprising and praiseworthy, indeed. The



Ishkhneli Sisters statue testifies that, when it comes to equality, Kutaisi residents have proved decades, if not centuries, ahead of the rest of the world.

As for the road leading to the Catholic Quarters, where you will find Zacharia Paliashvili's House Museum, try to walk down another street as well, which you will easily find if you ask for directions to the Museum of sports, where Mr. Zurab Javakhadze will show you George Best's genuine uniform t-shirt. He will also reveal why the Irish swarm this place, and why the t-shirt in not up to sale. Period.



Genuine jeans pants and cigarettes, along with other items that the Soviet Union could not manufacture despite its achievements in outer space, could be bought down

Jewish Street, which is why this neighborhood used to serve as a window peeking from the Soviet empire into the rest of the world.

No wonder, then, that the city, where the issue of equality has never even been up for discussion, has given rise to the tradition of charity as well. The entrance to the Kutaisi Women's Gymnasium is adorned with a statue of the gymnasium girl student directly related to the Gviriloba Chamomile Festival in early May, an event held dear by every Kutaisi resident, during which the whole city celebrates love. Without visiting every statue dedicated to women in Kutaisi, we only state with pleasure and pride that no other city features so many of them, and the theater across from the Women's Gymnasium, by the way, also deserves special mention in this regard. The repertoire of this small puppet theater includes Little Red Riding Hood, which is not surprising at all, because probably every children's theater showcases this play. But nowhere in the world does the wolf treat the grandmother as humanly as here in this Kutaisi theater, and even the hunters use kind words and Imereti songs to reform the untamed wolf and transform him into a law-abiding citizen.



Speaking of puppets and geniuses, the guests of this city may want to know that Rezo Gabriadze, the founder of puppetry in Georgia, and a director, author, and screenwriter recognized in global cinema and theater communities, was also from Kutaisi.

Very close to the theater, the famous café of the legendary Tsisperkantselebi (Blue Horns) poets' society used to operate. The group's members, who took their first steps in this very city, maintained the level of friendship unmatched in the history of world literature. The influence of this literary order was so great that, after the poets relocated to Tbilisi, their fans followed the suit.

Since we once again mentioned literature, we advise everyone to visit the Parliament of Georgia, a building reminiscent of that unforgettable drawing from the Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery because, quoting this remarkable French author, "All grown-ups were once children".

And returning to childhood is something everyone (every adult) craves. And if we accept that Kutaisi is the cradle of civilization, then the desire to revisit it only makes sense _ ancient mythology confirms that the childhood of mankind is closely related to the banks of the Rioni River and this city.



Had it not been for Soviet isolation, the whole world would have probably long known everything there is to know about Kutaisi, and now so many people would not have to discover this marvelous city, with its history spanning, and its most Georgian heart beating continuously despite everything, for at least 3,700 years.

Every household in pre-Soviet occupation Kutaisi owned all kinds of musical instruments, especially the then-popular grand piano. When after a month of battles, Soviet troops entered Kutaisi in 1921, the women residents of the city, disregarding frosty winter, opened their windows wide and performed Chopin, Schubert, Mozart, and Beethoven as a sign of protest.

Before Soviet Russian occupation, Georgia was conquered and annexed by Tsarist Russia, back when Kutaisi Mayor Luka Asatiani told Emperor Alexander III, "We do not have lapis lazuli seashores like those found in Batumi. We cannot boast Tbilisi's luster, but we have a different kind of love _ we are the city of love".



P.S. The story has not changed. While Tbilisi is Georgia's capital, Kutaisi is the capital of love. So welcome to the capital of love!





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first impression is

Imereti

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