

Excursion in the Old Tbilisi



1-st of October, 2018

The Metekhi Church – Abanotubani – Tbilisi Sioni Cathedral – Shardeni Street-Rezo Gabriadze
Marionette Theater – Anchiskhati Basilica- Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi

The Metekhi Church



Metekhi (Metechi; Georgian: მეტეხი) is a historic neighborhood of Tbilisi, Georgia, located on the elevated cliff that overlooks the Mtkvari river. The neighborhood is home to the eponymous Metekhi Church of Assumption. The district was one of the earliest inhabited areas on the city's territory. According to traditional accounts, King Vakhtang I Gorgasali erected here a church and a fort which served also as a king's residence; hence comes the name Metekhi which dates back to the 12th century and literally means "the area around the palace". The extant Metekhi Church of Assumption, resting upon the top of the hill, was built by the Georgian king St Demetrius II circa 1278–1284 and is somewhat an unusual example of domed Georgian Orthodox church. It was later damaged and restored several times. The equestrian statue of King Vakhtang I Gorgaslan by the sculptor Elguja Amashukeli was erected in front of the church in 1961.

Abanotubani -Tbilisi's Historical Sulfer bath quarter



Once Upon a time in the 5th century AD, when Mtskheta was the capital of Georgia, king Vakhtang Gorgasali (wolf-head) was hunting, King's falcon caught/injured a **pheasant** during the hunt, after which both birds fell into a nearby hot spring and they were boiled. This led to a discovery of the hot springs and, subsequently, to founding of a new capital. The name Tbilisi is derived from word Tbili- warm (from sulfuric hot springs).

The “**Abanotubani**” is the name given to the district in the Old Town of Tbilisi where there is a whole street (Abanos kucha) of public bathhouses that use the sulphurous waters of the many hot springs in this area. The bathhouses are located below ground level with only beehive-like domes visible on the surface. Waking in the Abanotubani district tourist can discover the charm of this city. Georgians are proud to have all historical religious buildings in this small area of Abanotubani: Georgian, Armenian and Catholic churches, Mosque, Synagogue and even Ateshga -Zoroastrian fire temple.

Narikala fortress, Metekhi and Betlemi churches are located on the hills offering spectacular views over Tbilisi which is beautiful in the daylight or in the night. There is even a cable car (with a short route) ascending to Narikala fortress. At the root of Narikala fortress The national botanical garden of Georgia is located. There are 2 small waterfalls in the Botanical garden (one can be accessed from Sulfur Baths), Azerbaijani pantheon and opportunity for nice walks in spring especially.

Tbilisi Sioni Cathedral



The **Sioni Cathedral of the Dormition** (Georgian: სიონის ღვთისმშობლის მიძინების ტაძარი) is a Georgian Orthodox cathedral in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Following a medieval Georgian tradition of naming churches after particular places in the Holy Land, the Sioni Cathedral bears the name of Mount Zion at Jerusalem. It is commonly known as the "Tbilisi Sioni" to distinguish it from several other churches across Georgia bearing the name *Sioni*.

The Tbilisi Sioni Cathedral is situated in historic *Sionis Kucha* (Sioni Street) in downtown Tbilisi, with its eastern façade fronting the right embankment of the Kura River. It was initially built in the 6th and 7th centuries. Since then, it has been destroyed by foreign invaders and reconstructed several times. The current church is based on a 13th-century version with some changes from the 17th to 19th centuries. The Sioni Cathedral was the main Georgian Orthodox Cathedral and the seat of Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia until the Holy Trinity Cathedral was consecrated in 2004.

Shardeni Street



Shardeni Street - a small pedestrian street, one of the single centers of the city's cultural and social life. After the reconstruction in XIXc. the street was named Shardeni, in honor of the French traveler Jean Chardin. Nowadays, The main walking street Sharden together with its parallel Bambis Rigi and Rkinis Rigi, and Erekle II a little further north, are narrow pedestrian streets lined with fashionable galleries and cafes.

Rezo Gabriadze Marionette Theater



Though modest in size, The Gabriadze Theater is among the world's preeminent cultural institutions. Presenting mature puppet performances full of depth and meaning, it has gained the respect and recognition of international audiences and critics alike.

Based in its home theater in Tbilisi, Georgia, the company is under the direction of a noted artist, writer, and director Rezo Gabriadze (whose awards include Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters of the French Republic – France's highest recognition for cultural achievements.) The Gabriadze Theater has toured extensively, its recent venues including: Lincoln Center Festival in New York; The Edinburgh Festival; Bogota Theater Festival; San Sebastian Festival, Spain; Toronto World Stage Festival; The Barbican Center, London; Theater de la Ville, Paris; The Kennedy Center Festival, Washington, D.C.; the Theatre Art Studio in Moscow.

The Gabriadze Theater stands in the heart of Tbilisi's historic Old Town. This beautiful building of the unique marionette theatre was designed by Gabriadze himself. Among the shows in its current repertoire are: "The Autumn of My Spring", "Stalingrad", "Ramona", "Diamond of Marshal de Fant'e".

"But my dream came true. I went back to painting and sculpture, and this time forever. I am grateful to my fate, to the puppets, and my small troupe, rustling softly in dark corners of this old building."

Rezo Gabriadze

"Gabriadze himself is a Georgian national treasure. I saw his marionette version of the Battle of Stalingrad when I first came to Tbilisi 10 years ago and fell in love with the city. I was ushered into a dank, run-down basement, where I watched, enthralled, as Gabriadze's tiny puppet tanks advanced to the rousing strains of Shostakovich. It was unforgettable."

The New York Times

“In the old part of Tbilisi is located a very small marionette theatre. There, you will meet marionettes which like angels descend from heaven and which like demons emerge from the bowels of the earth, to tell several dozen viewers their amazing stories”.

24 heures

“It is the particular genius of Gabriadze, founder of Tbilisi Municipal Theatre Studio, to capture epic issues in tiny-scale puppet sketches – some of them slapstick or whimsical”.

American Theatre

“Rezo Gabriadze is the angel of Tbilisi. ‘We should bow to the audience and respect the puppets, who dislike being treated disparagingly’, he says. And who would disagree with that? Not those who refuse to leave after the performance has ended, who gather in front of the stage to look at Boria and his friends, as if unable to believe that these small creatures will stay there through the night, attached to their strings, in the empty room which is just about to close”.

Le Monde

Anchiskhati Basilica



The Anchiskhati Basilica of St Mary (Georgian: ანჩისხათი) is the oldest surviving church in Tbilisi, Georgia. It belongs to the Georgian Orthodox Church and dates from the sixth century.

According to the old Georgian annals, the church was built by the King Dachi of Iberia (circa 522-534) who had made Tbilisi his capital. Originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, it was renamed *Anchiskhati* (i.e., icon of Ancha) in 1675 when the treasured icon of the Savior created by the twelfth-century goldsmith Beka Opizari at the Ancha monastery in Klarjeti (in what is now part of northeast Turkey) was moved to Tbilisi so preserve it from an Ottoman invasion. The icon was preserved at the Basilica of St Mary for centuries (it is now on display at the Art Museum of Georgia).

The basilica was damaged and rebuilt on several occasions from the 15th through 17th centuries due to wars between Georgia and the Persians and Turks. The brick belfry near the Anchiskhati Basilica was built by Catholicos Domenti in 1675.

The look of the structure was drastically changed in the 1870s, when a dome was added. During the Soviet period, all religious ceremonies at Anchiskhati Basilica were halted, and the building transformed into a museum for handicrafts. It was later used as an art studio. From 1958 to 1964 restoration works took place in celebration of the 1500th Jubilee of the founding of Tbilisi, which changed the view of the church back to the seventeenth-century version, however, it was not until 1991, after the independence of Georgia was restored, that the basilica reverted to religious use. Aside from the altarpiece, which was painted in 1683 by order of Catholicos Nikoloz Amilakhvari, all of the remaining paintings in the church date from the 19th century.

The Anchiskhati Choir based out of the Anchiskhati Basilica is the world's leading exponent of Georgian polyphonic choral music.

Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi



The **Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi** (Georgian: თბილისის წმინდა სამების საკათედრო ტაძარი *Tbilisis cminda samebis sakatedro tadzari*) commonly known as **Sameba** (Georgian: სამების ლავრა for Trinity) is the main cathedral of the Georgian Orthodox Church located in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Constructed between 1995 and 2004, it is the third-tallest Eastern Orthodox cathedral in the world and one of the largest religious buildings in the world by total area. Sameba is a synthesis of traditional styles dominating the Georgian church architecture at various stages in history and has some Byzantine undertones.

The idea to build a new cathedral to commemorate 1,500 years of autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church and 2,000 years from the birth of Jesus emerged as early as 1989, a crucial

year for the national awakening of the then-Soviet republic of Georgia. In May 1989, the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate and the authorities of Tbilisi announced an international contest for the "Holy Trinity Cathedral" project. No winner was chosen at the first round of the contest when more than a hundred projects were submitted. Finally the design by architect Archil Mindiashvili won. The subsequent turbulent years of civil unrest in Georgia deferred this grandiose plan for six years, and it was not until November 23, 1995, that the foundation of the new cathedral was laid.

The construction of the church was proclaimed as a "symbol of the Georgian national and spiritual revival" and was sponsored mostly by anonymous donations from several businessmen and common citizens. On November 23, 2004, on St. George's Day, the cathedral was consecrated by Catholicos Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II and high-ranking representatives of fellow Orthodox Churches of the world. The ceremony was also attended by leaders of other religious and confessional communities in Georgia as well as by political leaders.

The Sameba Cathedral is erected on the Elia Hill, which rises above the left bank of the Kura River (Mtkvari) in the historic neighborhood of Avlabari in Old Tbilisi.

Designed in a traditional Georgian style but with a greater vertical emphasis, and "regarded as an eyesore by many people, it is equally venerated by as many others". The Cathedral has a cruciform plan with a dome over a crossing resting on eight columns. At the same time, the parameters of the dome is independent from the apses, imparting a more monumental look to the dome and the church in general. The dome is surmounted by a 7.5 meter tall gilded gold cross.



Iconostasis at the Holy Trinity Cathedral

The cathedral consists of nine chapels (chapels of the Archangels, John the Baptist, Saint Nino, Saint George, Saint Nicholas, the Twelve Apostles, and All Saints); five of them are situated in a large, underground compartment. The overall area of the cathedral, including its large narthex, is 3,000 square meters and the volume it occupies is 137,000 cubic meters. The interior of the church (nave) measures 56 metres by 44 metres, with an interior area of 2,380 square metres. The height of the cathedral from the ground to the top of the cross is 87.1 metres (height of

stairs 1 metre). The underground chapel occupies 35,550 cubic metres and the height is 13.1 metres.

Natural materials are used for construction. The floor is made of marble tiles and the altar will also be decorated with mosaic. The painting of the murals is being executed by a group of artists guided by Amiran Goglidze.

The Sameba complex, the construction of which is already completed, consists of the main cathedral church, a free-standing bell-tower, the residence of the Patriarch, a monastery, a clerical seminary and theological academy, several workshops, places for rest, etc.