

# WILD GUANABANA WELCOMES YOU TO RUSSIA !



## ENTERING RUSSIA

### VISA

The Russian visa is a bit complicated and you have to apply for it a bit early as it takes nearly a month to obtain, so just make sure you check with the embassy/consulate in advance to make sure you have sufficient time and all the documents needed to apply for the visa. We'll also be helping you through the process with the invitation letter.



### WEATHER IN THE MOUNTAINS

*June- August*

*On The Mountain*

**SNOWY**

*During Acclimatization Hikes*

**AVERAGE 20°C**

### CURRENCY



**RUSSIAN RUBLE**

*Exchange Rate*

**USD 1 = 56.93 RUB**

### LANGUAGE

How are you?

как дела  
*kak dela*

**RUSSIAN**

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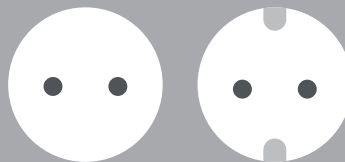
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### PLUGS & VOLTAGE



*Plug*

**TYPES C & F**

*Voltage*

**220 V**

### DIALING CODE



**+7**

## STAYING SAFE!

*Russia is not a dangerous country to travel in, but it is not crime-free either*

**CHECK THE SAFETY LINK FOR MORE DETAILS**

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# QUICK FACTS ABOUT RUSSIA & ELBRUS

## RUSSIA

- **Population:** 144.4 million
- **Capital:** Moscow
- **Area:** 17,075,200 sq km
- **Land border:** Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland, Ukraine
- **Languages:** Russian
- **Major religion:** Eastern Orthodox Christianity
- **Government:** Federal Semi-Presidential Republic
- **President:** Vladimir Putin
- **Monetary unit:** Russian Ruble (RUB); US\$1=RUB 56.93
- **Time zone:** GMT +2 to +12
- **Voltage:** 220 V
- **Dialing Code:** +7

## MOUNT ELBRUS

Elbrus is the highest mountain in Europe, and the tenth most prominent peak in the world. A dormant volcano, Elbrus is in the Caucasus Mountains in Southern Russia, near the border with Georgia.

Elbrus has two summits, both of which are dormant volcanic domes. The taller west summit is 5,642 metres and the east summit is 5,621 metres.



# A GUIDE TO TRAINING FOR MT. ELBRUS

## GETTING YOUR BODY PREPARED

The best training for Elbrus would be to go on long hikes with a pack and even better to do that at altitude. However, very few people have this luxury and so we want to make sure you're fully prepared given the resources you would have access to in your own city or town; at a gym or even in an open space like a park or the track.

A good way to think about Elbrus from an effort point of view is that it's a long day hike that you get up the next day and do again several times. Essentially the only activity you're doing is walking which is why this mountain can be climbed by anyone who has the right determination and is willing to put in the effort to prepare – no previous experience is necessary. Please note that this document is a guideline on how you should approach your training. It's not a training program.

As a general concept you should take note of the following:

- Hiking at altitude is different in that your heart rate is elevated constantly. To prepare for this you should engage in workouts that keep your heart rate elevated throughout. The ideal form of training is known as HIIT or High Intensity Interval Training. The idea is to do an exercise like burpees for 50 seconds non-stop then take a 10 second rest and repeat for 5 sets. Ideally you will have a group of exercises constituting a set with short breaks and repeat that group of workouts 4 to 6 times before moving on to something else.
- Do not train until the last day before the climb. Make sure to taper off your training a week before and just rest 3 days before your flight.
- Getting sports massages is excellent for taking away all the lactate acid build up in your system and sending off to the mountain is fresh as possible.
- Think of your whole day as an opportunity to get fitter and break in your hiking boots (to minimize the occurrence of blisters – wear them to work even!). For example walk or cycle to a meeting instead of driving or climb up the stairs regularly instead of taking the lift. Some clients completely stop taking lifts a couple of months before the climb. You will be amazed what something like that will do for your cardio and general well being.
- If you're working out well, make sure to eat well too. Don't approach this as an opportunity to lose weight by reducing your food intake. The more you exercise the higher your metabolism will get and you will be losing the right kind of weight regardless.
- In order not to get bored, you can mix up your workout routine with other aerobic sports you enjoy like swimming, tennis, basketball etc.

## A POTENTIAL 3-MONTH TRAINING PROGRAM IS AS FOLLOWS:

### **Climb Date Minus 3 Months**

- Gym / fitness class / any selection of fitness session x 2 times a week: choose workouts that make you work hard and increase fitness and push your heart rate up rather than build muscle.
- Walking: walk whenever possible – short 10 minute walks are fine, go to the shops, see friends, short trips you might normally take a bus or taxi for.
- Diet: cut out soft drinks with sugar or sweeteners and junk food. Remember this is a once in a lifetime event – use it as a great excuse to get healthy!

### **Climb Date Minus 2 Months**

- Gym session x 3 times a week: again choose workouts that make you work hard and increase fitness rather than build muscle. No need to go crazy, but doing 3 workouts a week creates discipline and mental stamina as well as improving physical conditioning. You can even substitute 1 gym session for an alternative activity such as Yoga or swimming.
- Walking: keep walking – short 10 minute walks are good, but increase your distance to at least 1 hour once a week. That's only 4 x 1 hour walks for the whole month!
- Diet: keep healthy but remember to feed the fire! When you exercise you will burn lots of calories and so replace lost fuel and keep very well hydrated – water is life, drink, drink. Lots of water helps flush out toxins and maintains a healthy perfusion of the body's cells.

### **Journey Date Minus 1 Month**

- Gym session x 3 times a week: no need to go crazy on the gym sessions, simply keep up a good routine. Do not over exercise! 4 times a week is also good but going over that will increase the risk of injury and muscle damage which may prevent you from even starting, which is not what we want.
- Walking: be realistic and set 4 hikes for this month of around 3 – 2 hours each. Keep walking whenever possible. Again, overexertion and strains should be avoided at all costs, but some hill work and distance will definitely help wear in those thighs and boots. It will also prepare you mentally.
- Diet: a good well balanced diet is the way to be. Any loss of body weight or toning should really have been done in the last couple of months and now keeping healthy and maintaining the status quo is our goal. Make sure to drink a lot of water and have enough calorie intake to complement your exercise routine.

## Journey Date Minus 1 Week

- Taper off then RELAX. No need for last minute blasts or burnouts. Exercise gently at the beginning of the week, take a good walk and then simply relax. If you haven't prepared up to this point then training one week from your arrival is not going to help (people that take that approach should expect to find the hike hard work and possibly be ready to fail). Being MENTALLY RELAXED is as important as physical conditioning. Even if you haven't managed to put in lots of training time the same applies.
- Many people work really hard right up to the night before they leave, and then arrive tired and start climbing tired. A stressed body will not acclimatize as well as a relaxed body so give your body a chance and try to prepare early.

Note: wearing in your boots will avoid discomfort on the mountain – blisters can seriously affect your ability to walk and enjoy the experience.

If you're interested in a more detailed training plan, we partnered up with Uphill Athlete, one of the leading training companies which have tailored training plans for mountaineers.

<https://www.uphillathlete.com/wild-guanabana/>

For Elbrus we recommend the [8 week training plan](#) which is quite intense but if followed it will really help put your fitness in the right level for this challenge.





# ELBRUS EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

This list is only a guide. While you are required to bring everything on this list (unless otherwise stated), there are numerous options, brands, and versions of each piece of equipment. Please let us know if you need advice on what product to go with.

CLIMBING EQUIPMENT	
<b>Adjustable Ski/Trekking poles.</b> 1 pair with snow baskets.	
<b>Head torch.</b> Bring extra batteries (preferably Lithium).	
<b>Alpine Climbing Harness.</b> It should have at least 3 gear loops and fit over all clothing with adjustable leg loops. It should feel comfortable.	
<b>Crampons.</b> Steel with anti-balling plates.	
<b>Carabiners.</b> 2 locking and 1 non-locking	
<b>Ice Axe w/ leash.</b> General mountaineering alpine axe (non-technical). Pick the length of the axe depending on your height as follows: >185cm use 70cm axe, between 170-185cm use 65cm axe, <170cm use 60cm axe.	
FOOTWEAR	
<b>Double plastic climbing boots.</b> With inners. Comfortable. Need to be broken in to avoid blisters. They need to be comfortable and one size bigger than normal to account for altitude swelling and thick socks. Boots with integrated gaiters – the type used for 8000m climbs – are also good. Ask us for brand recommendations if you want.	
<b>Light Hiking Boots or trekking shoes.</b> 1 pair of sturdy boots in which you can wear a light synthetic sock (optional) under a heavy sock comfortably, either wool or synthetic. Shoes should be very Water Proof and Warm. This is for acclimatization days.	
<b>Gaiters.</b> 1 pair used to keep rocks/snow out of shoes and boots dry.	
<b>Wool or Synthetic Socks.</b> 3 pair heavyweight socks (wool is warmer). If you're going to be layering socks, check fit over feet and inside boots. Remember to keep one fresh, dry pair of socks available for the summit.	
<b>Liner Socks (optional).</b> 3 pair of smooth thin wool, nylon or Capilene to be worn next to the skin. This reduces the incidence of blisters and hot-spots and makes the outer sock last longer before needing to be changed. They should fit well with your heavyweight socks.	
TECHNICAL CLOTHING	
<b>Lightweight Long Underwear.</b> 2 pairs of Tops & 1 pair of bottoms, Capilene, other synthetic or wool. No Cotton. Lightweight is preferable as it is more versatile. Zip-T-neck tops allow more ventilation options. If available, bring 1 set of white or light colored for intense sunny days and 1 pair of dark for other days.	

<b>Synthetic Shirts.</b> Sweat wicker material. No Cotton Preferably 1 short sleeved and 2 long sleeved. Light colors preferred.	
<b>Soft Shell Jacket.</b> Mid to heavyweight. A full-zip is easier to wear on the mountain and has better ventilation than a pullover version.	
<b>Soft Shell Pants.</b> Mid to heavyweight for use over long underwear and under hard-shell pants on cold days or on their own for warmer days.	
<b>Down or Synthetic jacket.</b> Medium weight for summit day and evenings. Should go below the waist and have a hood.	
<b>Hard Shell jacket w/ hood.</b> We recommend a waterproof breathable shell material with full front zipper, underarm zips, and no insulation. This outer layer protects against wind and rain.	
<b>Hard Shell Pants.</b> Waterproof, breathable. Full-length side zippers preferred because it allows easy removal of pants.	
<b>Underwear.</b> Synthetic preferred but cotton is also okay.	
<b>HANDWEAR</b>	
<b>Lightweight synthetic gloves.</b> Quick drying material. Should fit comfortably inside heavy gloves. Can also be worn for sun protection on hot days.	
<b>Heavy Gloves.</b> A good pair of heavy gloves. Should not be too tight or too loose so that it is warm enough.	
<b>Heavy Mitts.</b> With removable liner mitts. Waterproof and breathable. Once again make sure that you can fit your lightweight gloves inside your mitts and its inners.	
<b>HEADWEAR</b>	
<b>Balaclava.</b> Look for a simple lightweight model for windy days.	
<b>Warm Lightweight synthetic/wool hat.</b> Should cover ears.	
<b>Baseball cap/sun hat.</b> with a good visor to shade your nose. Preferrably made of a synthetic material for quicker drying.	
<b>Bandana/Buff.</b> Used to shade your neck from continuous sun exposure. A buff is better than a bandana.	
<b>Glacier glasses.</b> 100% UV, IR, high quality optical lenses with no more than 8% light transmission (category 3 or 4). If you wear contact lenses we recommend packing a spare pair of glasses – it's a good idea to have these with "photo-gray" or equivalent light-sensitive material so they can double as emergency sunglasses. Regular sunglasses do not provide sufficient UV protection.	
<b>Ski Goggles.</b> 100% UV, and IR protection. Necessary in case of high winds and snowy days where sunglasses tend to fog up.	
<b>PERSONAL EQUIPMENT</b>	
<b>Trekking Backpack.</b> A large lightweight backpack (40 - 50 L).	
<b>Water Bottles:</b> 3 Wide mouth bottles with minimum 1 Litre capacity per bottle. No bladder systems as they freeze higher up.	
<b>Water Bottle Insulator:</b> 1 or 2 water bottle covers to protect the water from freezing.	
<b>Sleeping bag.</b> Expedition quality to at least -20c comfort rating. Down is lighter, warmer and less bulky, but more expensive than synthetics.	
<b>Warmers (optional).</b> 2 hand and toe warmers to keep your hands and toes warm on summit day.	
<b>Sunscreen.</b> SPF 30 or higher, Make sure that the sunscreen is not older than 6 months as it would lose half of its SPF rating.	



<b>Lipscreen.</b> SPF 40 or higher, again not older than 6 months.	
<b>Sports Drink Mix (optional).</b> Powdered electrolyte drink mix can help you rehydrate. Bring 2-1 Servings per day for 7 days.	
<b>Trail snack food items (optional).</b> Bring your favorite energy bars, GU packets for summit day, drink mixes etc.	
<b>TRAVELING</b>	
<b>Duffle Bag.</b> A large duffle for transport. This can also be nice for storing things at the hotel during the expedition and extra clothing while traveling. 80L or more is recommended.	
<b>Zip lock bags.</b> To store food, tablets, documents, camera etc.	
<b>Dry Sacks or compression stuff sacks (optional).</b> Keeps clothing and other items dry and organized. As many as you need.	
<b>Travel clothes.</b> Don't forget to bring clothing to wear after the climb on your return home. Otherwise, no one will want to sit next to you on the plane!	
<b>Toiletry bag.</b> Wet wipes, toothbrush, towel, hand sanitizer, foot powder, dust mask and ear plugs.	
<b>Camera.</b> We recommend a small digital camera and not an SLR and definitely not extra lenses.	
<b>MEDICAL &amp; SAFETY</b>	
<b>Personal First-Aid.</b> Blister patches, Band-Aids, Athletic tape, Knee braces if you use it. The guides will have an extensive first-aid kit with them so there is no need to overpack with these items.	
<b>Drugs/Medications/Prescriptions.</b> Pepto Bismol or something for acidity, Ciprofloxacin or other stomach antibiotic for diarrhea and for urinary tract infections, Azithromycin (Z-pak) 250mg tablets for non-gastrointestinal infections, Acetazolamide (Diamox) 125 or 250 mg tablets for altitude sickness, Ibuprofen 200mg to 500mg for altitude headaches, sprains, aches.	

## GEAR & EQUIPMENT RENTAL FROM RUSSIA

Please note that prices are subject to change at the time of rental, and items to be rented and paid for at location.

ITEM	Russian RUB per day	USD per day
Plastic boots	500	9
Crampons	200	3
Ice-axe	150	3
Telescopic poles	200	3
Sleeping Bag	300	5
Down jacket	500	9
Hiking Pants Goretex	400	7
Jacket Goretex	400	7
Selfbelay	50	1
Ski goggles	200	3
Mitten Thinsulate	200	3
Harness	150	3
Carabiner	50	1
Head torch	100	2
Rucksacks	200	3
Thermos	100	2
Glasses	200	3
Gaiters	100	2

## GEAR & EQUIPMENT RENTAL FROM WILD GUANABANA OFFICE IN CAIRO

Please note that the items below are the property of Wild Guanabana and are on loan to you for the purpose of the trip. Should any of the items be damaged/go lost you will be charged the full cost of replacing them. If the item(s) is not available then a similar one will be chosen in its place. A 50 \$ deposit will be returned to you once all items have been inspected.

ITEM	PRICE IN USD
Balaclava	10
Sleeping Bag (-29C)	50
Sleeping Mat	10
Therm-A-Rest	25
Hiking Pole (single)	15
Gaiters	20
Head-Torch	15
Thin Gloves/Liner Gloves	10
Thick Gloves	20
Thick Gloves with Inners	30
Rain Jacket	30
Rain Pants	25
Mid-Layer/Convertible Pants	20
Water Platypus/Bottle	10
Mid-Weight Fleece	15
Heavy Fleece	20
Warm Hat	10
Sun Hat	10
Dry Sack	10
Synthetic/Down Jacket	40
Pair of Socks (4 season)	10
Pair of Socks (3 season)	10
Duffel Bag	30
Backpack	30

*Take nothing but memories and leave nothing but your footprint.*



# TIPS & TRICKS

## TIPPING GUIDELINES

The tipping guidelines are around \$100 - 150 per client. So each of you would tip anywhere in that range and just give it to the head guide in an envelope and he will distribute it to the team. This is just the suggested range so please feel free to tip more if you are feeling the extra love.

## DRINK A TON OF WATER!

No seriously, if you want to summit and be headache free then water, water, WATER! The best way is to sip every few minutes, your body will hydrate better that way versus stopping and gulping a lot of water and moving on. It will just make you feel full and heavy and your body won't hydrate as efficiently. So take small sips every few minutes and before you know it you'll have had your MINIMUM 3 liters and you should be set.

## PASSPORT AND TRAVEL INSURANCE

Make you sure you keep your passport and travel insurance papers, and visa voucher and documents ON YOU at all times. The best way is to put them in a zip lock bag and keep them in the top pouch or lid of your hiking backpack so that way if it's needed, then it's easily accessible.

## ZIP LOCK BAGS

Zip lock bags are KEY. If you pack all your items in zip lock bags you are set. Because they are see-through, it makes it easy to find your items and it also keeps them separate and dry. So keep your summit socks in a zip lock away from the rest of the stuff. Your dirty underwear/clean underwear in zip locks. Your tooth brush/toothpaste in zip lock bag, etc... You get the idea :)

## CLOTHES

Don't forget your **comfy clothes** for the refuge! At the end of every day, you're going to want to take off your hiking gear and get cozy, so bring nice sweat pants and easy-to-slip on/off shoes so if you need to go to the bathroom late at night you're not fumbling to put stuff on.

## DIAMOX

If you've made the decision to take DIAMOX for acclimatization then make sure you start one day before reaching altitude. You would need to take one pill of 250gm every day as that helps with altitude sickness. You can either break it up into halves to take one half in the morning and one half at night or just one full pill. Make sure you take it at the same time everyday. This is really important as it will help with altitude sickness and it's the only medicine proven to help. Also please refer to the gear checklist document for the rest of the medicine we recommend that you should take with you. It's better to have it on you, again, in a ziplock bag :)

## HIKING BACKPACK

Don't over pack your hiking backpack. You may put it on in the morning and think it's light but after 5 or 6 hours of walking your shoulder will cramp up and you will be miserable (we don't want that!). Keep in mind also that you can not access your duffel bag on the trek. So, whatever you have in your hiking pack you are stuck with until you get to the refuge. So only put your camera, snacks, an extra layer of clothing and your water, your hat, sunscreen, and lip screen - should not need more than that.

## HYGIENE

Take enough baby wipes/Dettol wipes for the duration of the climb but don't go overboard with it. You will need them for bathroom use and to keep your hands clean before you eat so you do not get sick. You can also use them as your own version of a mountain "Shower"!





# EXTRAS

## STAYING HEALTHY

Russia does NOT require any immunizations for entry, although it recommended to be vaccinated against Polio & Tetanus (if nil in last 10 years), Thyfoid (if nil in last 3 days) and Hepatitis A. Since most vaccines don't provide immunity until two weeks after they're given, we recommend a visit to the doctor three to eight weeks before departure.

Even though Traveler's diarrhea is the most common illness affecting travelers, involving a substantial number of international travelers each year, you can minimize the risk for Traveler's Diarrhea by avoiding to eat foods and drink beverages in places with poor hygienic conditions, abstaining from consuming raw or undercooked meat and seafood, and avoiding raw fruits and veggies unless they can be peeled. Drinking mineral water is also recommended. Needless to say that frequently washing your hands is the prudent thing to do, whether at home or abroad.

Altitude sickness can occur in high altitude regions from 3,000 m upwards, and can be an issue on the Mount Elbrus trek as it goes to high altitudes, possibly causing the risk of being affected by Acute Mountain Sickness. People who arrive from lower elevations may experience some shortness of breath, dizziness, insomnia, and a loss of appetite during the first couple of days as their bodies adjust. This can be prevented by appropriate acclimatization beforehand. The avoidance of alcohol, cigarettes and heavy food can also help prevent altitude sickness. If you have specific concerns about acclimatization or a history of medical problems or altitude related issues, please let us know and consult with your physician.

While on the trip, you will have access to an extensive first-aid kit, which includes meds such as Ibuprofen, Tylenol, Aspirin, Immodium, Pepto Bismol, Diamox, and some common broad spectrum antibiotics. If you wish to bring a small med kit of your own, feel free to do but keep it simple.

For travel insurance, we usually recommend [World Nomads](#). They are great since you can get full coverage just for your trip dates and they are actually backed by BUPA. But it's up to you if you have another preference.

## CUSTOMS & DUTY FREE

**Duty Free:** 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco, alcoholic beverages not exceeding 3L, articles for personal use

**Prohibited Imports:** Arms and ammunition, narcotics.

**Prohibited Exports:** Cultural articles, plants and seeds, vegetables, raw precious metals, minerals, wild plants and animals and endangered species.

## SAFETY

Russia is not a dangerous country to travel in, but it is not crime-free either. Petty crime does exist, particularly in tourist areas. Be careful when using ATM machines and try not to walk alone at night. Do not exhibit valuable personal belongings (camera, iPod, passport, credit cards, watch, jewelry, etc) when you don't need to.

Never leave your bag(s) out of your sight or unattended. Keep your important documents and money safely hidden under your clothes (not in your backpack or day pack) or locked in a secure place. Care should be taken throughout your stay in Russia. Use your common sense and vigilance to minimize the risk of becoming victim to crime.

## CLIMATE

The climate of the Caucasus Mountains, in which Mount Elbrus is located, varies both vertically (according to elevation) and horizontally (by latitude and location). Temperature generally decreases as elevation rises. Average annual temperature at sea level is 15 °C while on the slopes of Mt.Kazbek at an elevation of 3,700 metres, average annual temperature falls to -6.1 °C.

The Caucasus Mountains are also known for the high amount of snowfall, although many regions which are not located along the windward slopes do not receive nearly as much snow. This is especially true for the Lesser Caucasus Mountains which are somewhat isolated from the moist influences coming in from the Black Sea and receive considerably less precipitation (in the form of snow) than the Greater Caucasus Mountains. The average winter snow cover of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains ranges from 10 to 30 cm. The Greater Caucasus Mountains (especially the southwestern slopes) are marked by heavy snowfall. Avalanches are common from November to April.

## FLORA & FAUNA

North of the main ridge valleys and lower mountain slopes (1900 - 2300m) are covered with pine forests mingled with birch and mountain ash. Vegetation here clearly indicates lines of old avalanches - these are marked by deciduous forests of birch, mountain ash, aspen and others. Between 2300 and 3000m the forests have been replaced by alpine meadows rich in flowers. Closer to the edges of glaciers and snowfields snowdrops bloom and colourful lichens cover stones free from snow.

The Caucasus also has a rich fauna; the forests are home to the Caucasian brown bear, wolf, lynx, wild boar, Caucasian deer, marten, forest cat, pole cat, mole, squirrel, and mouse. High in the mountains Caucasian goat and chamois are often encountered.

Many forest birds live in Elbrus Region. Among birds of prey there are eagle and kite, and Caucasian heath-cock hide in rhododendron bushes. On lower slopes the colourful Caucasian pheasant may be found, and higher in the mountains - ular (mountain turkey), keklik (stone partridge), rock pigeon, alpine daw and others.

Rivers are rich in trout and other fish.

## PEOPLE OF CAUCASUS

The region is the border area between two countries - the Russian Federation and the Republic of Georgia. Kabardino-Balkaria, as part of Russia, and the historic province of Svanetia in Georgia face each other across the Main Caucasian ridge. In spite of the territorial proximity of the Caucasian peoples, their development took place in certain isolation due to the mountainous terrain. Kabardino-Balkaria is a member of the Russian Federation, lying in the centre of the Greater Caucasus, and occupies its highest section and adjacent plains. In an area of 12400 sq.km, mountains occupy 70% of the territory. The population is 768,000 (1990), comprising Kabardinians, Balkarians and Russians. The capital is Nalchik.

Kabardinians ethnically belong to the group of Northern Caucasian peoples. Their Kabardino-Cherkess tongue belongs to the Iberian-Caucasian languages of the Indo-European language family. The written language is based on Cyrillic.

Balkarians are related to Turkic peoples and speak a Turkic type of language. Their written language is also based on Cyrillic. Both Kabardinians and Balkarians are mostly Muslims (Sunnites).

Upper Svanetia is the historic province of Georgia and lies in the central part of the main Caucasian ridge to the south of the watershed. This is the world of glaciers, narrow canyons, wild rapids and is the symbol of a majestic love of freedom. It occupies an area of 3154 sq.km. The present population is hard to estimate due to recent natural and political disasters; in 1970 it was 18,000. The capital is Mestia. Svans are one of the main ethnic groups making up the Georgian nation, itself an ancient one belonging ethnically to European peoples and mainly Christian.

## CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

Various ethnic groups live in the Caucasus, a geographically complex area of mountain ranges, plateaus, foothills, plains, rivers, and lakes, with grasslands, forests, marshes, and dry steppes. The complex of regions harbours more than 50 separate peoples, ranging from language communities with only a few hundred speakers to large national groups numbering millions. Arab geographers called the Caucasus Jabal al-Asine, Mountain of Languages. Traditionally, the major religions in the Caucasus have been Islam (notably the Turkic groups), the Eastern Orthodox church (chiefly Georgians), the Armenian Gregorian church, and Judaism. There are also numerous minority sects.

**Cuisine:** Staples from the Caucasus include foods made of grains, dairy products and meats. Among the traditional dishes are khinkal (spiced meat stuffed in a dough pouch); other dough casings of various kinds, filled with meat, cheese, wild greens, eggs, nuts, squash, fowl, grains, dried apricots, onions, barberry; kyurze (A kind ravioli stuffed with meat, pumpkin, nettles or something else); dolma (stuffed grape or cabbage leaves); various kinds of soup made with beans, rice, groats and noodles); pilaf; shashlik (a kind of scrambled eggs); porridge made with wheat, corn or maize and cooked with water or milk. Flat loaves of unleavened or yeasted bread called tarumi or tondir are baked in clay ovens or on a griddle or a hearth. The dough is pressed against the wall of the oven. Foods introduced by the Russians includes borscht, salads and cutlets.

**Music and Literature:** The Narts is a series of tales originating from the North Caucasus that form the basic mythology of the tribes in the area, including Abazin, Abkhaz, Circassian, Ossetian, Karachay-Balkar and Chechen-Ingush folklore. Many Caucasus cultures preserve the Nart in the form of songs and prose performed by bards and storytellers. Professional mourners and lamenters are a feature of funerals. Folk dancing is a popular among many of the groups. Caucasus folk music is known for its passionate drumming and clarinet playing,

## MONEY

Traveling with large amounts of cash is NOT recommended. There are several ATM machines that accept debit cards, VISA, and MasterCard in Mineralayne Vody. If you choose to bring an ATM card, alert your bank before leaving the country that you will be traveling in Russia to avoid any problems with access to your account. Travelers Checks are an alternative, although you are limited in where and when you may cash them.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS

With or without a backpack, trekking can be quite exhausting, especially at high altitude. The better physical condition you are in, the more you will be able to enjoy the experience. Being able to walk 4 miles in a day is the minimum requirement for all of our trips. If you do not already practice a regular fitness routine, please begin training for your trip at least 6 weeks prior.

Training can involve running, hiking, walking, swimming, yoga, martial arts, aerobic-style classes, weight lifting, biking. The activities should be conditioning your body in both endurance and strength.

## TRAVEL GREEN TIPS

- Sign the Responsible Travel Pledge and commit to preserving the natural and cultural attributes of the destination you will be visiting ([http://www.globalproblems-globalsolutions.org/site/PageNavigator/FWH\\_survey\\_travelPledge](http://www.globalproblems-globalsolutions.org/site/PageNavigator/FWH_survey_travelPledge))
- Unplug your home and office appliances before leaving for the trip
- When researching your destination, try to go paperless and avoid printing unnecessary materials
- Pack lightly and leave the extra shoes and clothes at home
- Bring your own water bottle for filtered water instead of purchasing endless plastic bottles
- Pack a re-usable food container for snacks and meals on the go
- Bring a re-usable shopping bag to carry purchases made on the trip
- Bring rechargeable batteries and a battery charger
- Minimize your waste by not buying disposable items for which there are reusable alternatives
- Avoid pre-heating or pre-cooling your hotel room when you are not around
- Turn off the lights and appliances when you leave your hotel room
- Try to wash your own clothes as laundry service can waste a lot of precious water
- Eat local foods and order only ocean-friendly seafood
- Stay at small, locally owned and operated hotels
- Support sustainable tourism practices by forgoing certain comforts while on the journey
- Buy from local artisans and co-ops not department stores
- Do not purchase items made from endangered species
- Lend a helping hand to the communities you visit whenever you can - volunteer
- Stay on the trail - take only memories leave only footprints
- Respect the local culture and be mindful of cross-cultural differences when interacting with locals
- Plan your trip in conjunction with a local festival/event to get an insight into local culture and customs
- Try to fly with on-time airlines that fly non-stop whenever possible
- Consider offsetting your travel through carbon offset schemes or otherwise
- Share your knowledge and experiences with others