

Tourism report: 266,000 Visitors arrived in Georgia in August



As of August, revenues from domestic tourism amount to more than half-billion gel.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Mariam Kvrivishvili, Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, held a working meeting regarding the tourism numbers as the season is approaching the end. For the past 2 years, due to the Covid-19 related epidemiological situation, including the regulations, the tourism sector has been suffering across the globe. As it was reported at the presentation, the sector has shown some improvement this year: in the first quarter of 2021, the domestic tourism rate recovered by 112 and 119% compared to the same period in 2019 and 2020. According to, the total number of overnight stays increased by 31% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the same period in 2019. Domestic tourists spent 51% and 45% more, respectively, compared to the same period in 2019 and 2020.

In the first quarter of 2021, the total expenditures of domestic tourists amounted to ₾ 553 million. It should be noted that the average expenditure per visit was ₾ 149, which is 35% more than the same period in 2019.

According to Kvrivishvili, the intensification of domestic tourism has significantly contributed to the strengthening and development of the private sector. This was also positively reflected in the increase in the hotel occupancy rate. According to statistics, in contrast to 2020, in 2021 this figure, especially during the summer tourist season, increased significantly and almost approached the record 2019 figures. In particular, if in May and June 2019 this figure was 61.4 percent and 66.3%, respectively, in the same months of 2021 it was 40.3% and 58.3%.

In August 2021, 266,544 visitors visited Georgia, which is a record number since the beginning of the pandemic. According to the National Tourism Administration, compared to last year, the tourist flow has increased by 510%, but compared to 2019, it is still 75% less. Accordingly, the number of visitors to Georgia in August was restored by only 24.5% of

the 2019 figure.

In July 2021, Georgia received \$ 205.3 million in international tourism revenue, a record amount of tourism revenue since the pandemic began. According to the National Bank of Georgia, in total, the economy received \$ 505.1 million in tourism revenue in the first 7 months of this year. This volume of tourism revenue is

93% of what Georgia received in 2020 as a whole. The August calculation will be known in a few weeks.

According to the statistics of the National Tourism Administration, more than half of the visitors arrived in the country during August, which is related to the activated air traffic. As of August 2021, air traffic in Georgia has been restored by almost 90% compared to the same period in 2019. In particular, the number of airlines operating flights to Georgia was restored by 98%. Specifically, the directions of flights were restored by 91%; 81% - frequency of flights; 72% - the number of countries and 70% - the flow of passengers.

Kvrivishvili drew attention to the fact that the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation EUROCONTROL named Georgia as the 2nd country with the fastest recovery dynamics in terms of aviation, ahead of countries such as Spain, Germany, France, Greece, Turkey, and others.

The top 15 countries with the most visitors in August were Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Georgia (non-resident), Armenia, Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Poland, Germany, Uzbekistan, US, India, and Kuwait.

In the conditions of the pandemic, positive dynamics of air traffic were observed in the renovated Kutaisi International Airport. According to the Georgian Airports Association, in August, 52% of the passenger flow was restored at the David Aghmashenebeli Airport, serving 45,922 passengers. At this stage, Kutaisi International Airport operates 3 airlines in 19 destinations in 11 countries.

Out of 188 flights performed at Kutaisi International Airport in August, 165 were regular and 23 were charter flights. In September, there will be 111 regular flights from Kutaisi International Airport to Europe and 52 regular flights to Asia. From September 28, Wizz Air will add the direction of Krakow from Kutaisi.



Air traffic was restored by almost 90% compared to the same period of 2019.

Georgian Dream openly says no to the EU

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Problems between the Georgian government and the country's strategic partners have already become apparent. Georgian Dream first announced the annulment of the April 19 agreement, which, according to Western partners, included a list of reforms to be carried out.

Opposition groups and non-governmental organizations have stated that the Georgian Dream has reaffirmed its commitment to reform and the West, while the Georgian government has repeatedly stated its commitment to the Euro-Atlantic course and made inaccurate statements about its strategic partner. "And Georgia's judiciary is better than many EU countries."

On August 31, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili announced that the Georgian government was refusing the second tranche of EU macro-financial assistance. This was explained by the fact that they decided to gradually reduce the country's foreign debt and in the

current "double-digit economic growth" they no longer wanted to increase the country's foreign debt. However, it soon became clear that Georgia could not receive this tranche from the EU.

No reforms were made as a condition of its adoption, first of all, judicial reform. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, warned Irakli Gharibashvili about the loss of aid without carrying out reforms during an informal meeting in Kyiv on August 23.

According to Charles Michel, "it is time for Georgia to show its commitment to the agreement, especially concerning reforms."

Georgia has received four macro-financial assistance from the European Union since 2008. For a country in crisis, macro-financial assistance is an EU emergency tool and is provided to EU partner countries, although assistance depends on the fulfillment of political preconditions - the protection of the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

2020 In April, in the wake of

the Covid crisis, Georgia requested macro-financial assistance from the European Union. 2020 According to the decision made on May 26, the European Union provided macro-financial assistance to Georgia for 150 million euros, preferential loan of about 2% for 15 years.

The second € 75 million was to be credited this year, depending on the European Commission's positive assessment of the 7 preconditions set by the Georgian government, the most important of which were related to the reform of the justice system. Then the April 19 document, one of the main points of which was the reform of the judiciary, is annexed to the EU.

An independent judiciary does not need to prove what is important for the establishment of democracy. According to Western friends, the reform demanded by the European Union should have led to the establishment of such a judicial system in Georgia. The Georgian government has refused to implement this reform, despite previous consent and

promises.

At the same time, this factual refusal is accompanied by the Prime Minister's assertion that the Georgian judiciary is better than the judiciary of many EU countries and no less incorrect statement that the MEPs are not its heads.

The idea was growing in the EU to stop the second tranche of macro-financial assistance to Georgia, but the Georgian Dream considered such a thing detrimental in the pre-election period and simply attended the EU announcement - we do not need a new loan.

However, this did not prevent the statement made by the EU representative that "Georgia has not been able to sufficiently meet the conditions for receiving macro-financial assistance and, in particular, has increased the independence, accountability, and quality of the judiciary."

The move by the Georgian government has drawn sharp criticism from the opposition and the non-governmental sector. The government has caused significant damage to the country not only economically but also politically. "Georgian Dream" is no longer openly fulfilling its obligations to Western partners and thus threatens the country's Euro-Atlantic course, "Lukashenko" is underway and Georgia is leading to Russian-

style authoritarianism.

In response to such assessments, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Kuchava stated that "the Euro-Atlantic course is not in danger." According to other government officials, no one can name any reforms that have not been properly implemented.

Parliament is due to consider the constitutional amendment provided for in the April 19 document on September 7, but even after the agreement was annulled, the Georgian Dream no longer guarantees that it will support such changes, such as the introduction of a 2% electoral threshold.

The 43% mark that the Georgian Dream must collect in the upcoming self-government elections has been canceled, otherwise, early parliamentary elections will have been called. Today, the leaders of the Georgian Dream are constantly repeating that there will be no snap elections.

Much still depends on how the October 2 self-government elections end. Georgian Dream announces its next victory in advance with a big advantage, but beware of opposition protests. If serious irregularities are observed during the elections, direct sanctions from the West will already be expected.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY
THE MESSENGER STAFF

**Carl Hartzell:
European Union
regrets that yet
another commitment
to reform the
Judiciary was
not upheld today**

"The European Union regrets that yet another commitment to reform the Judiciary was not upheld today," stated Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia Carl Hartzell regarding the constitutional amendments passed in the first reading in the Georgian Parliament.

"Today, the Georgian Parliament voted in first reading on a number of important constitutional amendments that were tabled following the 19 April

Agreement mediated by the European Union. Unfortunately, the key amendment on the election modalities of the Prosecutor General of Georgia was withdrawn.

This amendment was due to address the way in which the Prosecutor General of Georgia is appointed, with the ambition to increase the required majority to a qualified majority, in order to ensure the broadest, cross-party support for appointments and to reduce the risk that one party can, alone, appoint a Prosecutor General in the future. This was another measure aimed to increase the independence, transparency and quality of the Judiciary in Georgia. The principles behind this amendment have been a long-standing Venice Commission recommendation. Following Georgian Dream's withdrawal from the 19 April Agreement, we also took note of the Party's renewed and public commitment on 28 July, to nevertheless implement the judicial reforms and adopt the initiated constitutional amendments.

The European Union regrets that yet another commitment to reform the Judiciary was not upheld today. We recall that last July, further appointments to

the Supreme Court, alongside those made over the past two years, were assessed by the OSCE/ODIHR "to lack integrity, objectivity and credibility". Last week, in the context of the non-disbursement of 75 million Euro in EU macro-financial assistance, the EU noted that Georgia failed to sufficiently address the condition for this macro-financial assistance, and notably to increase the independence, accountability and quality of the judicial system. Today's withdrawal of the amendment is therefore a third setback within only two months, in terms of Georgia's commitments to reform its Judiciary.

The EU considers that strengthening safeguards in the field of the rule of law remains of crucial importance for the effective implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement.

The EU renews its call on all parties to redouble their efforts to work together in an inclusive process in parliament to implement key reforms to the judicial system. We reiterate that while the European Union remains fully committed to support Georgia's reforms in line with the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the EU's assistance to Georgia remains conditional on progress on key reforms," reads the statement.

Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Embassy of Greece in Georgia

Greece bids farewell to Mikis Theodorakis, leading composer and emblematic figure of Greek culture worldwide, who passed away on September 2, leaving behind a legacy of global resonance. His prolific work, which ranged from symphonic and choral music to popular songs, shaped contemporary Greek music and was beloved by generations of Greeks, and by global audiences, who rendered his music a symbol of Modern Greek artistic creation.



Weather

Wednesday, September 8

Day Light Rain
High: 19°C

Night Few Showers
Low: 17°C

Thursday, September 9

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 25°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 17°C

published by
The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi,
0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof.

Zaza Gachechiladze
Tamar Gachechiladze
Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli
Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze
Editor-in-Chief

Natalia Kochiashvili
Executive Editor

Khatuna Gogichaishvili
Layout Designer, Photographer

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact.

All contributions should be submitted by e-mail.

The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and,

therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements.

The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.