

---

# Which Georgia is best for business ?

By SHELLEY EMLING

Cox News Service - 17/10/2007

---

Former Soviet republic making a name for itself with investors

LONDON - It's a battle of the Georgias.

In one corner stands the state of Georgia, noted for the beauty of its mountains, the richness of its history, and the warmth of its hospitality. In the other corner stands the nation of Georgia on the Black Sea, with the very same qualities.

But which is the winner when it comes to appealing to new investors? "If you're looking for the climate that, in most economic surveys, better favors overseas investors, head for the Georgia in the east," claims an ad campaign launched by the Georgian National Investment Agency in Tblisi. The campaign, which includes full-page ads in the Economist and other business magazines, is part of a drive to highlight the former Soviet republic's attractiveness to foreign investors.

The World Bank recently hailed the post-Soviet country as the world's number one reformer with an economy growing by nearly 10 percent a year.

"Georgia has really grown and has the most attractive climate for overseas investors," said Lizi Khabazashvili, spokeswoman for the Georgian National Investment Agency.

Alison Tyrer, spokeswoman for the Georgia Department of Economic Development in Atlanta, begs to differ.

"Of course we think the state of Georgia is the best place in the world for business," she said. "If Georgia were a standalone country it would have the 20th largest economy in the world."

Tyrer said that in all international publications and ads, "we are careful to refer to the state of Georgia so that there is no confusion." She said she is not aware that the state has ever competed directly against the country of Georgia for business.

"We certainly feel that the state of Georgia has the resources and business assets to compete with the best in the world," she said.

Tyrer admitted that the state had not done a lot of international marketing except through trade shows and its 10 international offices. But this is about to change.

"The governor and legislature have allocated \$6.1 million for a Global Georgia initiative, with \$3.6 million in marketing dollars to get our message out in strategic markets," she said.

Despite the war of words, Khabazashvili said that the state of Georgia and the country of Georgia have enjoyed an extremely warm decades-long relationship characterized by various educational and professional exchanges. The two capital cities of Tblisi and Atlanta have been sister cities since 1986, and the Atlanta-based Friendship Force has sponsored Georgia-to-Georgia exchanges over several years.

Georgia National Guard Units also have helped with a variety of civilian projects in the nation of Georgia.

Ironically, one of the biggest fans of the state of Georgia is Tamuna Liluashvili, director of the Georgian National Investment Agency.

She spent many years in metro Atlanta as an exchange student at South Gwinnett High School and a student at Agnes Scott College, and eventually wound up working at the Southern Center for International Studies in Atlanta.

"The state of Georgia became my home for 15 years before I recently moved back to the country of Georgia," she said.

Today she is both a U.S. citizen and a citizen of the nation of Georgia.

"Now that I'm back in the country of Georgia, I miss the other one," she said.

---