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**Volume 20  
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**THIS EDITION:  
Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi, GEORGIA**



# WANDER to WONDER

by MARTINA NICOLLS



**The world will never starve for wonder, but only for want of wonder.  
G.K. Chesterson**



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## editor's note

*Welcome to the 20th edition of WANDER to WONDER*

This edition of Wander to Wonder focuses on Shota Rustaveli Avenue, the main avenue in Tbilisi, Georgia, named after a 12<sup>th</sup> century Georgian poet: one of the finest poets in the world. Shota Rustaveli Avenue, from the Shota Rustaveli statue to Freedom Square is the cultural avenue of Georgia.

Until next edition, with another theme,

*Martina*

MARTINA NICOLLS



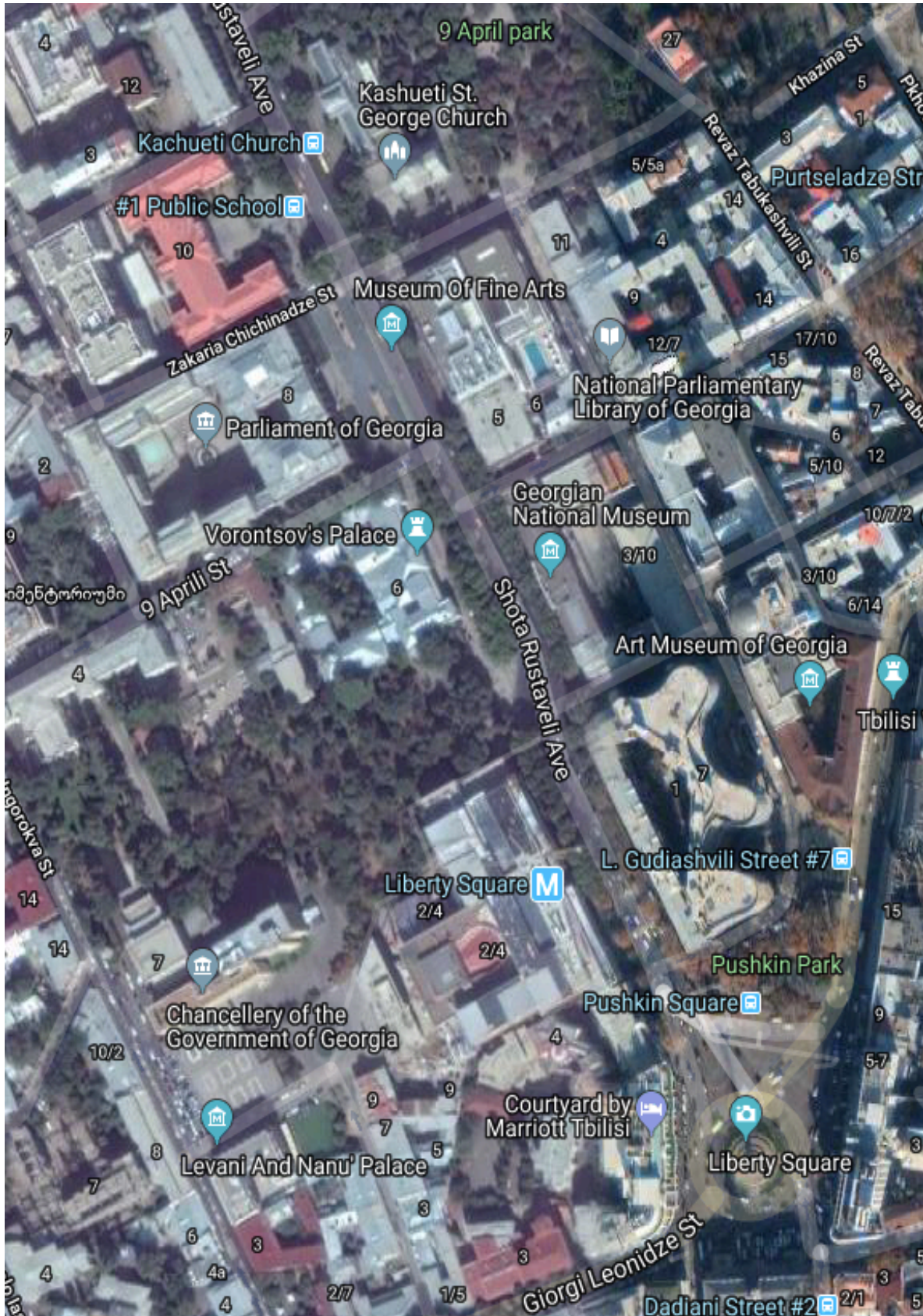
# maps















## shota rustaveli

Shota Rustaveli was a 12th century medieval Georgian poet, writing in the time of the Georgian Golden Age when King Tamar – the female king – ruled the land.

Rustaveli was born between 1160-1166 and died between 1245-1250, having produced his major work around 1205 to 1207. Rustaveli is considered to be the greatest of all poets in Georgia, and the world. His major poem – a *magnum opus* – is *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* – an epic ballad of 1,656 verses separated by chapters, and probably the longest in poetic history. The poem is in NASA's International Space Station – in space.

The main avenue of Tbilisi, Georgia, is named after him: from his fountain (near McDonalds) to Freedom Square (near Marriott Courtyard Hotel). It is an avenue of museums, art galleries, shops and malls, the Opera House and Ballet Theatre, the Rustaveli Theatre, Old Parliament House, Number 1 School, hotels, residences, restaurants, a public garden, two Metro stations, and a church.











## the knight in the panther's skin

First published in 1712, the epic poem, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, has undergone many translations. The latest is Lyn Coffin's 2015 English version, and the best because it remains faithful to the rhyme, lilt, metre, humour, and verse of the famed poem and poet.

Tinatin, King Rostevan of Arabia's daughter, loves the knight Avtandil, and he loves her.

Verse 368 from Avtandil:

'The doctor's could do nothing. A dark twilight on my heart now pressed,  
I was on fire because of love, but nobody knew or guessed.  
They blamed my blood. The king decided bleeding my arm would be best;  
I let it be done to hide the suffering I had not confessed.'

Avtandil sees a knight in a panther's skin weeping, who subsequently kills the king's soldiers, sparing the king. Before Tinatin weds Avtandil she requests that Avtandil spend three years searching for the knight in the panther skin to find out who he is. With a month before the deadline, Avtandil finds the knight. His name is Tariel, and he has a tale of woe – which he tells Avtandil. Tariel loves Nestan-Daredjan, the daughter of a king. She loves him too, but she requested that he fight the Khatavians.

Verse 459 from Tariel (the knight in the panther's skin):

'We dismounted on the battlefields, and took a much-needed rest,  
My arm had a sword-cut: it seemed to me fit subject for a jest.  
I took it as a mere scratch, but my soldiers were very impressed,  
Some were speechless. Others their admiration forthrightly expressed.'

Even though Tariel defeated the Khatavians, Nestan's mother (the Queen) wanted her to marry the son of the King of Khvarazm.

Verse 519 from Tariel :

'The queen said: 'The King of Khvarazm is mighty, and holds great sway.  
To have his son for our son-in-law is something for which to pray.'  
How could I dare dispute whatever the queen thought was right to say?  
So I agreed. I gave my assent. For me, it was heartbreak day!'

Nestan and Tariel plot a scheme so that they can marry. Alas, the scheme backfires. Tariel is ousted from the kingdom. This is how he comes to wear a panther's skin:

Verse 662 from Tariel :

'Because I see her as a beautiful panther, worthy of note;  
For this I love its skin, and for myself preserve it as a coat.  
This woman sews it, sighing and moaning, as she stitches by rote.  
I whetted my sword in vain: I didn't use it to slit my throat.'

A year later Tariel meets King Nuradin Pridon who has news of Nestan, if Tariel helps him conquer his enemies, which he does. The news is not good, and that is why Tariel is crying when the knight Avtandil sees him. Now that Avtandil knows the story, and the two men have bonded in friendship, Avtandil can go back to Tinatin, and relieve Shermadin, his deputy, of his duties.

Verse 705 from Avtandil to Tinatin:

He told her then what he'd seen and heard; the whole story he gave.  
'Like a panther he roams, and for his house and abode he has a cave.  
A damsel is there to maintain his life; she used to be a slave.  
Alas! Fate makes all who dwell in the world shed tears, even the brave.'

Avtandil and Tinatin can now marry (because Avtandil found the knight in the panther's skin), but Avtandil says he must go back and help Tariel first. Avtandil's father, King Rostevan, is angry and says he cannot go, but Avtandil defies him (but leaves a note). He goes back to Tariel, vowing to help him win the heart of Nestan, if they can find her. Will Tinatin wait for Avtandil's love? But Avtandil has an admirer who flirts with him.

Verse 1097:

Patman Khatun sent the letter, hoping Avtandil's heart to win.  
He started reading as if it had come from a sister or kin.  
He said, 'Who's this flirt trying to come between me and Tinatin?'  
'Patman, and my beloved: how can a comparison begin?'

But Avtandil changes his mind about Patman. Thinking that she might be helpful, he agrees to see her. Just as Avtandil and Patman are embracing, they are discovered.

Verse 1107:

They sat down and began to kiss, to sport pleasantly and to preen.  
When a certain youth appeared in the doorway, of a graceful mien,  
Followed by a servant holding a shield and a sword that looked keen.  
The youth seemed startled and said, 'The road is rocky,' seeing the scene.

But Patman and her husband Usen are indeed useful. Avtandil learns from Patman that the Kadjis have Nestan-Daredjan, and that a mighty woman is their leader.

Verse 1229:

'Dulardukht was a woman, but hard as a cliff, a rock, a wall.  
Other men may be wounded but to her, no injuries befall.  
She had two nephews, Rosan and Rodia, who were still quite small.  
Now she sits as sovereign of Kadjeti, mightiest of all.

Verse 1250:

'The city of the Kadjis is unassailable by their foes.  
The center of the city does a huge rock, high and long, expose,  
Inside it is a hollowed out passage, and to the top it goes,  
She, who consumes those who see her with fire, that rock does enclose.

How how can Avtandil and Tariel rescue Nestan? Ah yes, Nuradin Pridon will help.

Verse 1418:

Pridon and Avtandil are men of unrivalled valor and might,  
Yet nobody desires to fight Tariel, the greatest knight.  
The sun overshadows planets and the Pleiades with its light.  
Now pay heed, listener: you shall hear a story about a fierce fight.

The reader does hear a story about a fierce fight.

Verse 1499:

This hidden truth was revealed to us by Dionysus, the wise:  
God creates only good; he lets no evil in the world arise.  
He makes the good unending; the bad, a momentary surprise.  
His creation He makes perfect; He makes sure it never dies.

In the poem, Avtandil is the ‘lion’ and Tariel is the ‘panther’ – both brave knights. The two knights are very similar – which could explain their eternal friendship. They both love the daughters of kings. Both kings have only one daughter, and no sons. Both daughters profess their love to the knights and both knights vow never to love another woman. Both knights are requested to fulfill a task before claiming love and marriage as their reward. They are both ready for the task. Both are also sentimental – they cry, swoon, and faint a lot!

Shota Rustaveli, the author, declares himself the narrator in the prologue, where he also explains why he has written such a long poem:

Verse 17:

Another kind of shorter poem is meant to be a simple song -  
It's good for wooing, joking, making fun, and none of that is wrong.  
But though we like to hear such work performed in voices clear and strong,  
He still could not be called a poet who cannot recite for long.

The first English translation in 1912 by Marjory Scott Wardrop used the 1888 Georgian edition as the basis for her work, and presented the work as prose. The 1968 Venera Urushadze's translation was presented as an unrhymed poem. Other translations in 1977 by Katherine Vivien and R.H. Stevenson were also in prose. This 2015 translation by Lyn Coffin uses the 1966 Georgian edition and is a contemporary format in keeping with the the original poem.

So, as Shota Rustaveli says in Verse 9:

An ancient Persian tale I took, and in the Georgian tongue retold.  
Until that time, it was an unset pearl; from hand to hand it rolled.  
But I transformed it for the one who is so beautiful and bold.  
To the one who ravished my reason, I have brought poetic gold.





## shota rustaveli avenue - coffee









## the museum of modern art







## the opera house & ballet theatre









## side street # 1





## rustaveli avenue - workers



## rustaveli avenue - balcony





## side street # 2



## national art gallery

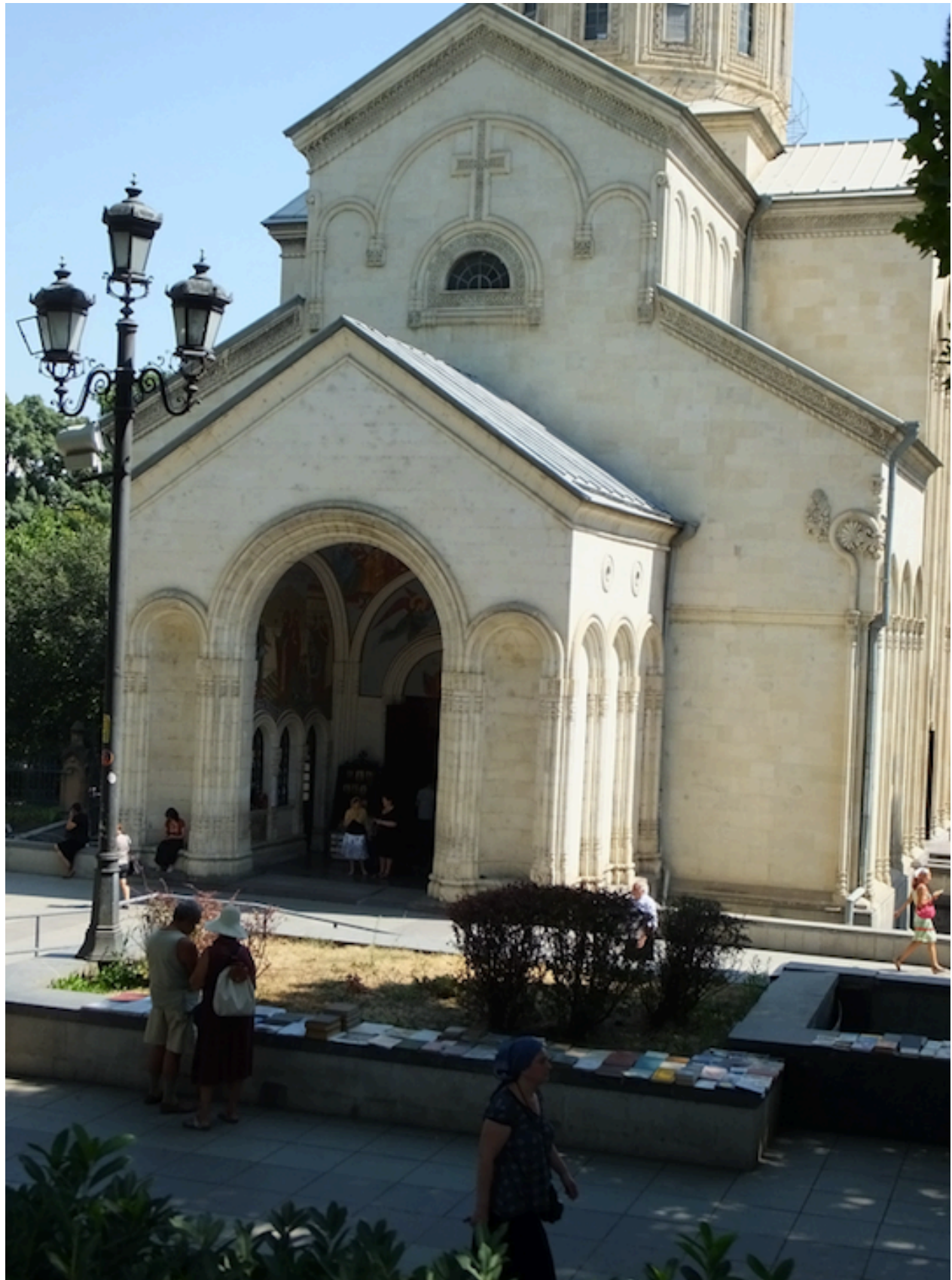




## kachueti church







## museum of fine arts





## rustaveli avenue - cinema





## side street # 3





## public school # 1









## side street # 4



## old parliament house







national theatre







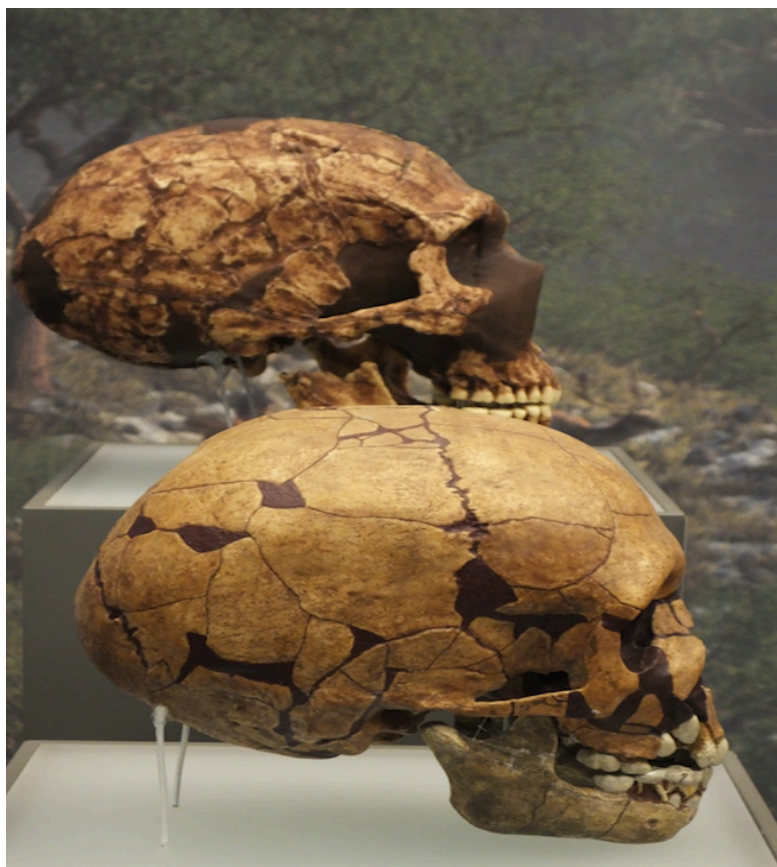




## national museum







## vorontsov's (children's) palace





## garden of the first republic of Georgia









## galleria mall



## freedom square











## the author: Martina Nicolls

I am an author and humanitarian aid consultant with over 30 years' experience in the management, implementation, and evaluation of international aid development projects, particularly in post-conflict environments and countries with transitional governments, such as Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Darfur, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Pakistan, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Georgia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka, and also Mauritius, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia – and others. I provide technical advice on areas such as peace-building and conflict mitigation, education, poverty reduction, human rights, child labour, data quality and financing models.

But mostly I am a wanderer. Wherever I am and wherever I go, I take photographs and I write. My books include:

Similar but Different in the Animal Kingdom (2017)  
A Mongolian Lament (2015)  
The Komodo Verses (2012)

Liberia's Deadeast Ends (2012)  
Bardot's Comet (2011)  
Kashmir on a Knife-Edge (2010)  
The Sudan Curse (2009)

### MARTINA NICOLLS

[martina@iimetro.com.au](mailto:martina@iimetro.com.au)

<http://www.martinanicolls.net>

<http://martinasblogs.blogspot.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/Martina-Nicolls-მარტინა-ნიკოლსი-1450496988529988/timeline/>



