PACK LIGHTLY

THE CAUCASUS, ON A BACKPACKER BUDGET

Georgia

Tbilisi and the mountains behind it, the oldest wine on earth, and a table that will not let you leave hungry.



p. 23 The route picker: find your trip in one look

p. 30 What a day really costs, printed as a till receipt

p. 19 Georgian food, dish by dish, with prices

45 PAGES · USD PRICES · VISA-FREE 1 YEAR · EDITION 2026.07

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of a Georgia trip, what it costs, what to sort first



Georgia is small, cheap and packed. In a country the size of Ireland you get a warren-like capital, a wall of Caucasus peaks two hours north, wine valleys to the east, and tower villages and a Black Sea coast to the west. Nearly every passport enters free for a full year, so there is no visa to plan around and no rush to leave. This guide sets up a simple loop from Tbilisi, tells you which corners are worth the extra days, and shows you how to do it all on marshrutka minibuses for the price of a European weekend.

The shape of a trip

Base in Tbilisi, ride north to Kazbegi for the mountains and east to Kakheti for the wine, then loop west to Svaneti's towers and Batumi's coast. It joins up on the ground; no flights needed.

What a day costs

Backpacking runs about 25 USD a day, mid-range around 55, captured for this edition. The full receipt, bed to nightcap, is itemised on page 30.

Sort before you fly

Almost everyone enters visa-free for 365 days, so there is little to file. Add travel insurance, an eSIM, and book only your first nights. Page 32 lists the order.





HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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Your trip on one page

10-14 days · 25 to 120 USD/day · best May-Jun and Sep-Oct

If you read nothing else, this page is the trip. Base in Tbilisi, ride north to the high Caucasus at Kazbegi, east to the Kakheti vineyards, then west by train to Svaneti's towers and the Black Sea at Batumi. It is one overland loop on minibuses and trains, no domestic flights. Book from the bars below, not from resort rates, and only lock your first couple of nights.

THE ROUTE

Tbilisi day 1-3 — 3h marshrutka — **Kazbegi** day 4-5 — via Kakheti — **Svaneti** day 8-10 — 4h drive — **Batumi** day 11-14

BUDGET PER DAY

Backpacker	25 USD
Standard	55 USD
Comfort	120 USD

BOOK FIRST

01	International flights, 6 to 8 weeks out	Aviasales
02	First two nights in Tbilisi	Booking.com
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
cold, high passes closed	cold, high passes closed	shoulder: hot lowlands or cool mountains	shoulder: hot lowlands or cool mountains	best: mild, green, the harvest	best: mild, green, the harvest	shoulder: hot lowlands or cool mountains	shoulder: hot lowlands or cool mountains	best: mild, green, the harvest	best: mild, green, the harvest	shoulder: hot lowlands or cool mountains	cold, high passes closed

Cards work in the cities, but marshrutka minibuses, mountain guesthouses and village wine are cash. Keep small lari on you.

The high mountains open late. Svaneti and Tusheti roads are only reliable June to October; outside that, lean on the wine and the coast.

Georgia at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Friendliness	95
Nature	85
Food and drink	85
Budget friendly	85
Culture	80
Active vacation	80

Budget travel	25 USD/day
Mid-range	55 USD/day
Luxury	120 USD/day

MOUNTAINS · WINE · HIKING · BUDGET · HOSPITALITY

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-07

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP













01

The country

What Georgia is, why an old Christian wine culture wedged into the high Caucasus feels like nowhere else, and the regions to know before you pick dates.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What Georgia is 07

A crossroads with a long memory 08

What Georgia is

3.7M people · its own alphabet · the birthplace of wine

A small mountain nation of 3.7 million on the far edge of Europe, wedged between the Greater Caucasus and the Black Sea. Georgia has its own language and its own curling alphabet, one of the world's oldest, and it adopted Christianity back in the fourth century, which shows in the stone churches on every ridge. It is famous as the birthplace of wine: people here have been fermenting grapes in buried clay qvevri for eight thousand years. Add a legendary culture of hospitality, low prices, and a landscape that runs from subtropical coast to glaciated peaks, and you have one of the most rewarding budget trips anywhere. It is also easy: a year of visa-free entry and a small, joined-up country.

CAPITAL
Tbilisi
and by far the largest city

POPULATION
3.7M
Orthodox Christian

CURRENCY
GEL
1 USD = ~2.7 lari

BEST MONTHS
May-Jun
and Sep-Oct harvest

THREE REGIONS, THREE CHARACTERS



Tbilisi and the eastern mountains

capital · Kazbegi · Kakheti wine

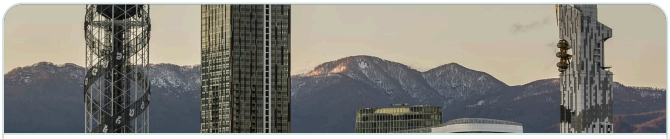
Where the trip lives. A warren of a capital, the high Caucasus at Kazbegi to the north, and the vineyards of Kakheti to the east.



Svaneti and the northwest

medieval towers · Ushguli · big treks

The remote high country: stone defensive towers under glaciers, Europe's highest villages, and the country's best multi-day hiking.



Imereti and the Black Sea

Kutaisi · canyons and caves · Batumi

The green west: Kutaisi with its canyons and cave monasteries, and the brash beach city of Batumi on the subtropical coast.

photos: Wikimedia Commons

A crossroads with a long memory

why it is so cheap, so welcoming, and so complicated

Georgia sits on the fault line between empires, and its history is a long list of invasions survived: Persian, Ottoman, Russian, Soviet. That last chapter still shapes the trip. The country broke from the USSR in 1991, turned hard toward Europe after the 2003 Rose Revolution, and fought a short war with Russia in 2008. Two regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, remain occupied and closed to travel from the rest of the country. None of this makes Georgia unsafe; it makes it proud, pointedly pro-Western, and sensitive about its neighbour. What you feel day to day is the upside: a young, cheap, fiercely hospitable country that treats a guest as, in the old saying, a gift from God.

CHRISTIAN SINCE	WINE HERITAGE	INDEPENDENCE	HIGHEST PEAK
337 AD	**8,000 yr**	**1991**	**5,193 m**
one of the oldest	the qvevri method	from the Soviet Union	Mount Shkhara

Abkhazia and South Ossetia cannot be entered from Georgia proper, and doing so via Russia bars you from returning. Everywhere in this guide is fully open.

First trip? Give Tbilisi, Kazbegi and Kakheti a full week; they join up easily and cover mountains, city and wine. Save Svaneti for a second week or a return.

GO DEEPER

The top picks in best places, the wild side in national parks, and the traditions in the culture page.

02

Where to go

The capital and the mountains behind it, the wine valleys of the east, the tower villages of the west, and the coast. What each is worth, and which can wait.

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Svaneti and the towers 14

Batumi and the coast 15

Tbilisi

the capital · 2-3 nights · your base for everything east



One of the most characterful capitals in the region, and where most trips begin and end. Tbilisi is a tumble of carved wooden balconies, crumbling courtyards, sulphur bathhouses and cutting-edge wine bars stacked up a river gorge under the Narikala fortress. Ride the cable car up to the fortress and the Mother of Georgia statue for the view, soak in the domed brick baths of Abanotubani, wander the old town and the flea market on the Dry Bridge, then drink your way through the natural-wine bars that have made the city a weekend-break name. Two or three days is plenty, and it is the launch pad for Kazbegi and Kakheti.

WORTH THE CITY DAYS

- [ ] **Narikala and the cable car.** Fortress, statue and the whole-city view.
- [ ] **Abanotubani.** The domed sulphur baths; book a private room.
- [ ] **Old town and Rustaveli.** Balconies, churches, the grand avenue.
- [ ] **Wine bars.** The natural-wine scene, remarkable for the price.

→

Use the Bolt app for taxis; it is cheap and metered. The metro is two clean lines and takes the plastic Metromoney card.

Base in the old town or Sololaki for the sights on foot, or Vera and Vake for the cafes and a quieter night.

MORE ON THE SITE

Neighbourhoods and sights in the Tbilisi guide, the fortress in Narikala, and the sulphur baths.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Kazbegi and the Military Highway

the postcard mountains · day trip or 1-2 nights



The single most photographed view in the country, and an easy strike north from Tbilisi. The Georgian Military Highway climbs the Aragvi valley past the medieval Ananuri fortress and the ski town of Gudauri to Stepantsminda, the mountain village most people just call Kazbegi. Above it, the fourteenth-century Gergeti Trinity Church stands alone on a green hill under the 5,047-metre cone of Mount Kazbek, an hour's walk or a short 4x4 ride up. It works as a long day trip, but an overnight lets you catch the church at dawn before the tour vans arrive and hike further into the valley.





Marshrutkas to Kazbegi leave Tbilisi's Didube station through the morning. Overnight and walk up to the church for sunrise light.

Gudauri is a serious, cheap ski resort December to April. In summer it is a paragliding and hiking base on the way up.

MORE ON THE SITE

The village in Stepantsminda, the church in Gergeti Trinity, and the fortress in Ananuri.

photos: Wikimedia Commons

Kakheti, the wine country

the eastern vineyards · day trip or 1-2 nights



East of Tbilisi, the Alazani valley is the heart of Georgian wine, and the easiest place to understand why this country calls itself the cradle of it. The hill town of Sighnaghi, ringed by intact eighteenth-century walls and looking out over vineyards to the Caucasus, is the obvious base. Around it sit family cellars and monastery wineries where the wine still ferments underground in qvevri, and where a tasting comes with bread, cheese and often lunch. The Bodbe convent and the ancient Alaverdi cathedral are nearby. It is a doable long day from Tbilisi, but a night in Sighnaghi and a slow lunch is the better trip.

Come at the September or October rtveli harvest and cellars pull you in to stomp grapes. It is the best time to be in Kakheti.

A hired driver for the day beats piecing together minibuses between cellars, and means you can actually taste. Split it with others.

MORE ON THE SITE

The hill town in Sighnaghi, the wine hub in Telavi, and a cellar day in Telavi wine tasting.

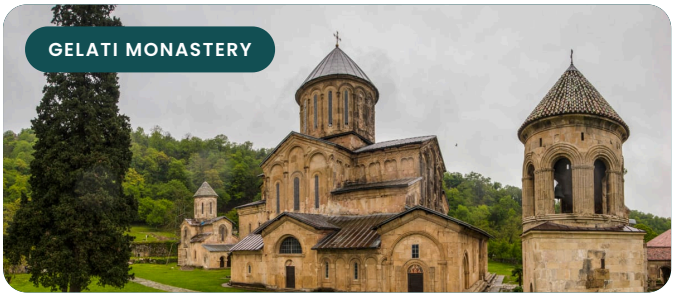
photo: Wikimedia Commons

Kutaisi and the canyons

the green west · 1-2 nights · caves, canyons, monasteries



Georgia's third city and the gateway to the lush region of Imereti, Kutaisi is where budget flights from Europe often land and where the west of the country opens up. The city itself is low-key, but the day trips around it are the draw: the emerald pools and rowboats of Martvili Canyon, the zip-lines and walkways of Okatse, and the deep chambers of Prometheus Cave. On the hill above town sits the eleventh-century Gelati monastery, a UNESCO site with some of the finest medieval mosaics in the Caucasus. Base here for a night or two to knock off the canyons before pushing on to Svaneti or the coast.





The canyons and cave sit outside town in different directions. A shared day tour or a driver ties Martvili, Okatse and Prometheus into one loop.

Kutaisi airport is the budget-flight hub. If you fly in here rather than Tbilisi, run the loop in reverse: coast and canyons first.

MORE ON THE SITE

The city in Kutaisi, the monastery in Gelati, and the gorge in Martvili Canyon.

Svaneti and the towers

the remote high country · 3-4 days · the trek



The most spectacular and most remote corner of Georgia, and for many the whole reason to come. High in the northwest Caucasus, the region of Svaneti kept its own language and its stone defensive towers, the koshki, that still spike above the villages. Mestia is the hub, reached by a long but paved road, with museums, guesthouses and trailheads. From there the classic four-day trek runs to Ushguli, one of the highest permanently inhabited settlements in Europe, huddled under the glaciers of Mount Shkhara. This is a take-your-time trip: give it three or four days, go between June and October, and treat it as its own journey rather than a side stop.

Marshrutkas run Zugdidi to Mestia in about three hours. The Mestia to Ushguli day is rough; a shared 4x4 is the common alternative to the trek.

Summer and early autumn only. The road can close with snow, and guesthouses in Ushguli wind down once the season ends.

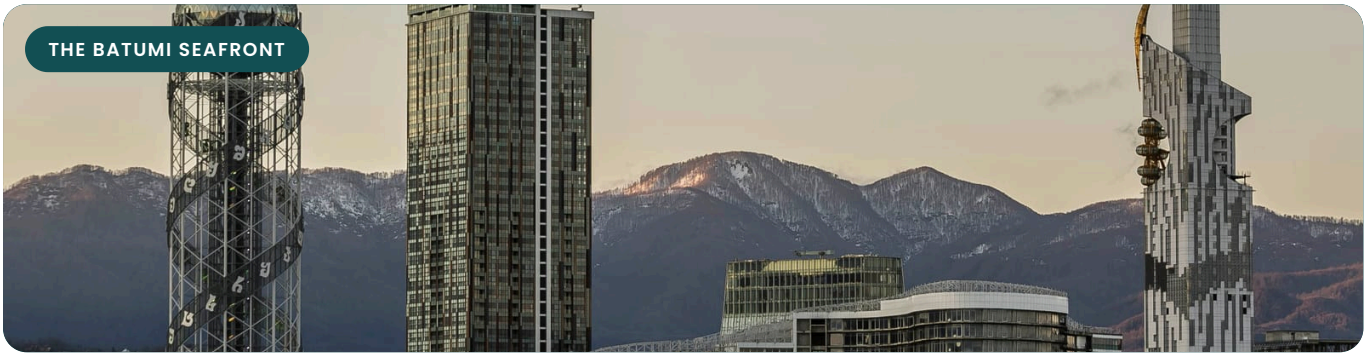
MORE ON THE SITE

The hub in Mestia, the trek in the Mestia to Ushguli hike, and the village in Ushguli.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Batumi and the coast

the Black Sea city · 1-2 nights · the trip's easy end



Georgia's summer playground and its most divisive city. Batumi, capital of the subtropical Adjara region, is a strip of casinos, glass towers and a long pebble beach that feels a world away from the mountain villages. It is brash and a little surreal, but the seaside boulevard is a genuinely pleasant walk, the botanical garden north of town is lovely, and the Adjaran hinterland hides waterfalls, arched stone bridges and its own butter-drenched khachapuri. It is the natural end of a west-coast loop, the place to swim and slow down before flying home from Batumi or Kutaisi. One or two nights covers it.

☆

The beach is pebble, not sand, and the sea warms up from June. Escape the strip to the botanical garden or the Adjaran mountain villages.

∩

Order Adjaruli khachapuri here, at its source: a boat of bread with cheese, butter and a raw egg you stir into the middle.

MORE ON THE SITE

The city in Batumi, the seafront in Batumi boulevard, and the shore in beaches.

03

What to do

The mountains that draw the hikers, the eight-thousand-year wine culture that runs under everything, what to eat, and where to sleep.

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Where to stay: Mestia, Batumi	21

The outdoors

the high Caucasus · hiking, riding, skiing


THE CAUCASUS ABOVE KAZBEGI

For a small country, Georgia is a giant for the outdoors, and hiking is the main event. The headline trek is the four-day Mestia to Ushguli traverse through Svaneti's tower villages, but there are easier wins everywhere: day walks to the Gergeti glacier above Kazbegi, the Truso and Juta valleys, and the wild, hard-to-reach highland of Tusheti for those with time. Winter turns Gudauri and Bakuriani into cheap, uncrowded ski resorts. Horse riding, paragliding at Gudauri and rafting on the mountain rivers round it out. Most of it needs no special skill: a guesthouse, a marshrutka and decent boots get you a long way.

PICK YOUR OUTDOORS

- [ ] **Multi-day trek.** Mestia to Ushguli, four days through Svaneti.
- [ ] **Day hikes.** Gergeti glacier, Juta and Truso valleys near Kazbegi.
- [ ] **Skiing.** Gudauri and Bakuriani, December to April, cheap.
- [ ] **Off the map.** Tusheti's Omalo, one of the wildest roads in Europe.

High-mountain weather turns fast. Carry a warm layer and a rain shell even on a summer day hike above the villages.

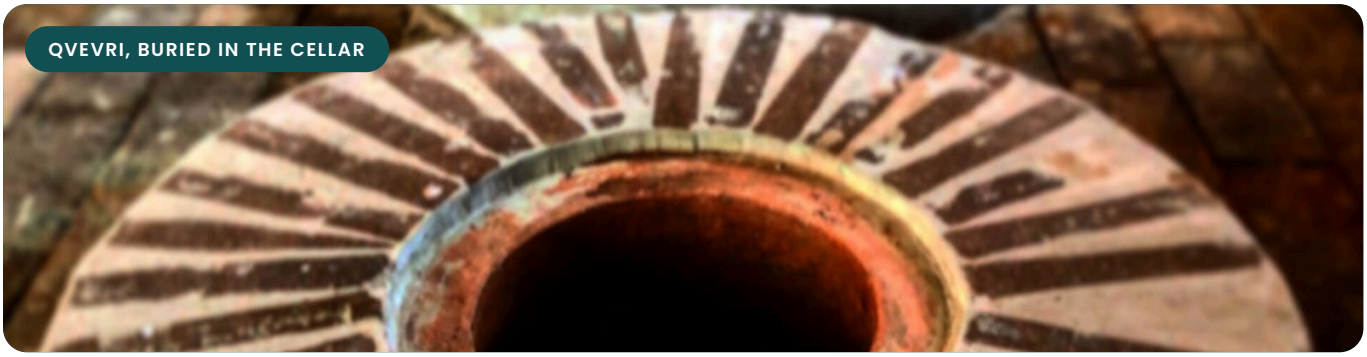
The Tusheti road over the Abano pass is 4x4-only and open roughly June to early October. Go with a driver who knows it.

GO DEEPER

The ranges in mountains and the protected areas in national parks.

Wine and the supra

8,000 years of qvevri · the feast that runs the culture


QVEVRI, BURIED IN THE CELLAR

Wine is not a sideline here, it is the culture, and Georgia has a fair claim to inventing it: winemaking in buried clay qvevri goes back eight thousand years and holds a UNESCO listing. The style is unlike anything in Western Europe. Amber wines, made by fermenting white grapes on their skins in the qvevri, come out orange, tannic and alive. You meet all of this at the supra, the Georgian feast, where a tamada, or toastmaster, leads long, formal toasts to peace, ancestors and guests, and no one drinks out of turn. Sit at one, even briefly, and you understand the country. Chase the wine with chacha, the fierce grape spirit, at your own risk.


THE SUPRA


THE ALAZANI VALLEY

A family cellar tasting in Kakheti beats any bar for meeting the real thing. Most come with a home-cooked lunch for a few lari.

At a supra, wait for the tamada. Toasting out of turn or with beer instead of wine reads as rude; a soft drink is fine to abstain.

GO DEEPER

Traditions and the table in the culture page and a cellar day in Telavi wine tasting.

Food spotlight

cheese, bread and walnuts, and what it costs

Georgian food punches far above the country's size, and it is a highlight in its own right: bread, cheese, walnuts and herbs, grilled meat, and vegetables done a dozen clever ways. Khachapuri, the cheese-filled bread, comes in regional shapes; the Adjaran boat with butter and egg is the famous one. Khinkali are fat soup dumplings you grab by the top-knot. Below is what you will actually order, with typical restaurant prices.

DISH	WHAT IT IS	PRICE
Adjaruli khachapuri	Boat of bread with cheese, butter and egg	USD 5-11
Imeruli khachapuri	The round, cheese-filled everyday version	USD 4-8
Khinkali	Twisted soup dumplings, priced per piece	USD 3-8
Mtsvadi	Charcoal-grilled pork or veal skewers	USD 9-22
Lobio	Spiced bean stew in a clay pot	USD 4-9
Badrijani	Fried eggplant rolls with walnut paste	USD 3-6

prices from the local-food-and-drinks dataset, captured 2026-06



KHINKALI, EATEN BY HAND



CHURCHKHELA AT THE MARKET

See the full dish list with photos, regional variants and prices in the free food tool on pack-lightly.com.

Open What to Eat and Drink

Where to stay: Tbilisi and Kazbegi

prices per night, double room · the eastern base

Your first and most-used bases. In Tbilisi, sleep in the old town or Sololaki to walk the sights, or Vera for cafes and quiet. In Kazbegi, the village of Stepantsminda has guesthouses at every price, and a room with a view of the church is worth the small premium. Book Tbilisi ahead in summer; Kazbegi guesthouses you can often sort a day out.

Tbilisi (old town)

hostel 9 USD mid 35 USD comfort 95 USD

Central in the old town puts the baths, the cable car and the wine bars on your doorstep. Check what a central room costs, or the hostel scene through Hostelworld.

Kazbegi (Stepantsminda)

guesthouse 12 USD mid 45 USD comfort 130 USD

Village guesthouses look straight at the church and Mount Kazbek. See what a room with the view costs, or budget beds on Hostelworld.

Day trips to Kazbegi and Kakheti wine cellars fill up in summer; book the popular ones a day or two ahead.

See guided tours from Tbilisi

Where to stay: Mestia and Batumi

prices per night, double room · the mountains and the coast

Two very different ends of the country. Mestia is a mountain town of family guesthouses where half board, a big dinner and breakfast included, is the norm and the best value in Georgia. Batumi is a beach city with everything from party hostels to sea-view towers. Book Mestia guesthouses ahead in July and August, and Batumi well ahead for any summer weekend.

Mestia (Svaneti)

guesthouse 15 USD mid 40 USD comfort 90 USD

Family guesthouses with half board are the pick, and the trailheads start at the door. Check Mestia rooms, or hostels on Hostelworld.

Batumi

hostel 10 USD mid 40 USD comfort 120 USD

Base near the boulevard for the beach and the old town both. See what the seafront is charging; budget beds on Hostelworld.

Mid-range and up across the country, with free cancellation while your plans are still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com

04

Routes and itineraries

Eight ready-made trips by who you are and how long you have, a two-week loop from Tbilisi, and the real map of how it joins up.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The route picker	23
Two weeks, days 1–7	24
Two weeks, days 8–14	25
The route on a map	26

The route picker

find the closest trip to yours, then adjust

Eight trips by traveler, length and budget. Totals are per person unless noted, on-the-ground costs excluding international flights, using this edition's prices.

SOLO · 7D · BACKPACKER

Tbilisi, wine and the mountains

USD 320 · hostels + marshrutka

- Tbilisi 3
- Kazbegi overnight
- Kakheti day + Sighnaghi

SOLO · 10D · MID

The eastern loop plus Svaneti

USD 750 · adds the towers

- Tbilisi + Kazbegi 5
- Train and 4x4 west
- Mestia + Ushguli 4

COUPLE · 10D · MID

The classic loop

USD 1,600 for 2 · guesthouses + a driver

- Tbilisi 3 · wine day
- Kazbegi overnight
- Kutaisi + Batumi 4

WINE · 8D · MID

Kakheti at a slow pace

USD 950 · cellars + Sighnaghi

- Tbilisi 3
- Sighnaghi 2 · tastings
- Telavi + Alaverdi

HIKER · 14D · MID

Trek Svaneti and Kazbegi

USD 1,300 · the mountain trip

- Kazbegi valleys 3
- Mestia to Ushguli 4d trek
- Kutaisi canyons 2

FAMILY · 10D · MID

City, coast and canyons

USD 2,600 · family of 4

- Tbilisi 3: cable car, baths
- Kutaisi canyons 2
- Batumi beach 3

GRAND TOUR · 21D · MID

The full circle

USD 2,000 · the big loop

- Tbilisi, Kazbegi, Kakheti
- Svaneti trek
- Kutaisi + Batumi to finish

WINTER · 8D · COMFORT

Ski and the city

USD 1,100 · Gudauri base

- Tbilisi 3
- Gudauri ski 4
- Baths and wine bars

Two weeks around Georgia

days 1-7 · the capital, the mountains, the wine

The first week is the east, run from Tbilisi. Ride to Kazbegi for the high Caucasus, then out to Kakheti for the wine, keeping a rest day in the city between the long minibus days. Book Kazbegi and a Kakheti cellar day through a local operator or driver.

1	**Arrive Tbilisi** TBS · day zero	Land, eSIM and cash, taxi to the old town. Evening walk under Narikala, first khinkali and a glass of amber wine.
2	**Tbilisi** baths + old town	Cable car to Narikala and Mother of Georgia, the sulphur baths, the Dry Bridge market. Book the mountain trips.
3	**Kakheti wine day** Sighnaghi + cellars	Driver east to Sighnaghi and the Bodbe convent, two cellar tastings with lunch, back to Tbilisi for the night.
4	**To Kazbegi** Military Highway	North up the Aragvi valley, stop at Ananuri fortress and the Gudauri viewpoint, arrive Stepantsminda by afternoon.
5	**Gergeti and the valleys** the postcard day	Dawn walk up to Gergeti Trinity Church, then hike toward the glacier or the Juta valley. Second night in the village.
6	**Back to Tbilisi** half day + rest	Marshrutka back down the highway in the morning, an easy afternoon and the wine bars back in the capital.
7	**Train west to Kutaisi** the pivot	The comfortable day train to Kutaisi. Evening in the low-key city, Gelati monastery lit on the hill above.

Two weeks around Georgia

days 8-14 · the canyons, the towers, the coast

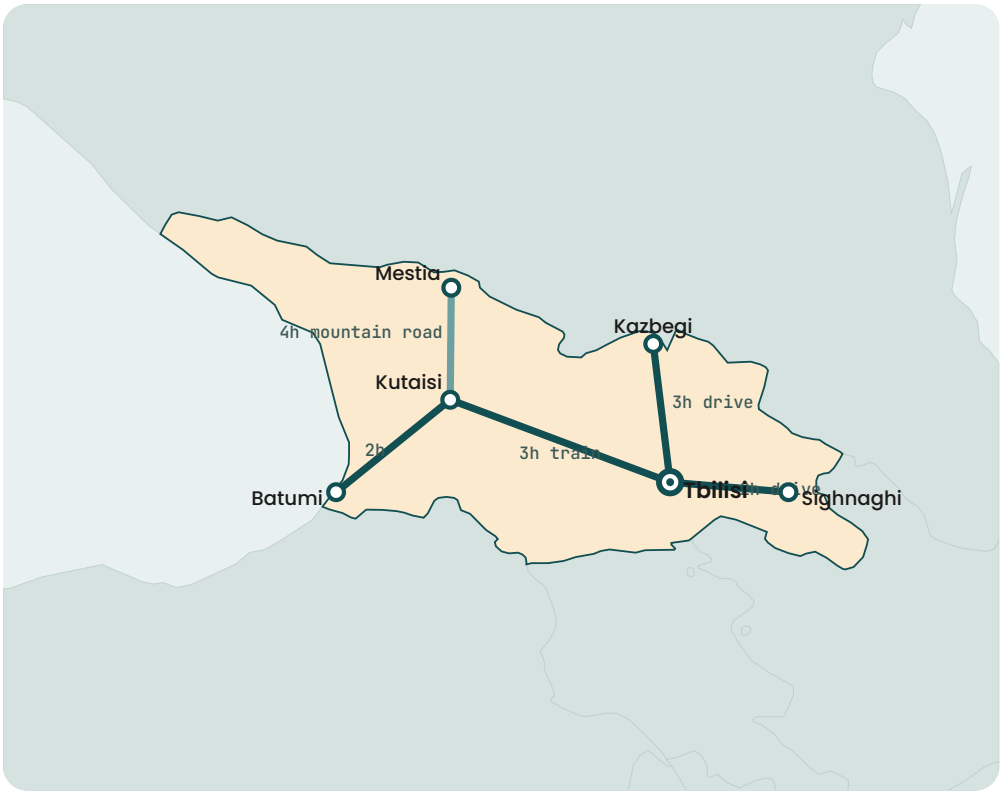
The second week is the west: canyons around Kutaisi, then up into Svaneti for the towers and the traverse, and down to Batumi to swim before flying home. Short on time or off-season, skip Svaneti and give the coast and canyons the extra days instead.

8	**Kutaisi canyons** Martvili + Prometheus	A day loop to the Martvili boats, Okatse walkway and Prometheus Cave, with Gelati monastery on the way back.
9	**To Mestia** via Zugdidi	Marshrutka to Zugdidi, then the long mountain road up into Svaneti. Arrive Mestia for dinner at the guesthouse.
10	**Mestia and the towers** acclimatise + hike	The Svan tower houses and museum, then a day hike to the Chalaadi glacier or the Koruldi lakes above town.
11	**Ushguli** the high village	Shared 4x4 or the trek to Ushguli under Mount Shkhara, one of Europe's highest villages. Overnight up top.
12	**Down to Batumi** mountains to sea	The long descent out of Svaneti and along the coast to Batumi. Late swim and a seafront dinner.
13	**Batumi** beach + botanicals	The seaside boulevard, the botanical garden north of town, and the Adjaran khachapuri at its source.
14	**Depart** Batumi or Kutaisi	A slow morning, last coffee, fly out of Batumi or Kutaisi, or the night train back to Tbilisi.

The route on a map

one overland loop from Tbilisi, no flights needed

Georgia is small enough to join up on the ground. The loop runs from Tbilisi north to the mountains, east to the wine, then west by train and minibus to the towers of Svaneti and the coast at Batumi. The map shows the real shape: a tight country where a day's drive covers a lot.



05

When to go

The windows worth targeting in a country of hot lowlands and snowbound passes, the festivals and the harvest to time, and what a day really costs.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, crowds, price 28

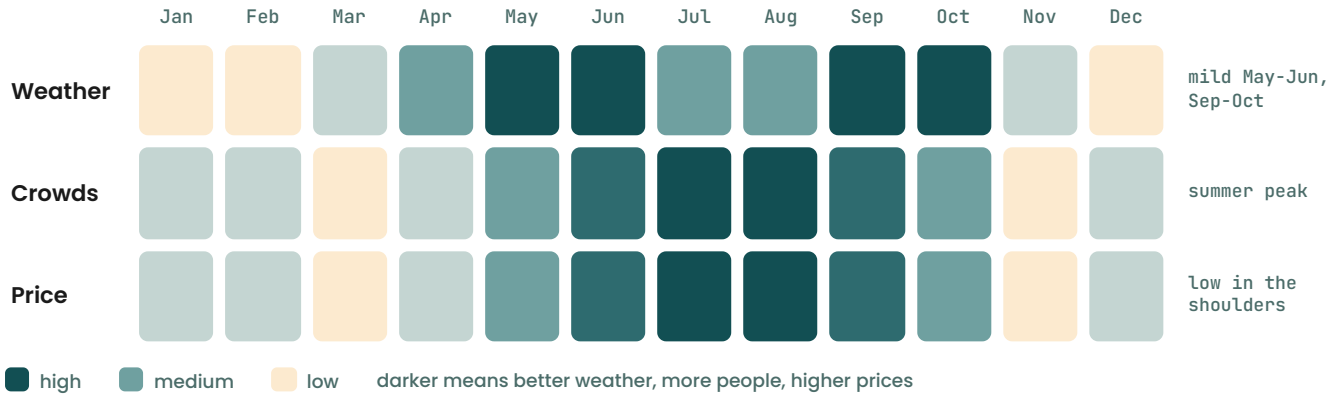
Festivals worth timing 29

What a day costs 30

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · two climates in one country

Georgia runs two clocks. The lowlands, Tbilisi and the Kakheti valleys, are hot and dry in high summer and mild in the shoulders. The high mountains, Kazbegi, Svaneti and Tusheti, are only reliably open June to early October, and snowbound the rest of the year. The sweet spots are late spring, May and June, when the peaks green up and the wildflowers come out, and September into October, when the heat breaks and the wine harvest, rtveli, fills the cellars. Winter is for the ski resorts and the city.



source: best-travel-time dataset and country-comparison, captured 2026-06

The lowlands and the peaks run different seasons. July bakes Tbilisi but is prime time for the Svaneti trek and the high valleys.

September and October are the sweet spot: warm days, thinner crowds, and the rtveli grape harvest across Kakheti.

Festivals worth timing

the dates that change what you see



Most of the year is fine to visit, but a few dates fill the hotels or transform a place. The autumn harvest is the one to plan around; the Orthodox calendar and the city days bring parades, closures and full guesthouses worth knowing about.

THE CALENDAR

- [ ] **Rtveli, Sep to Oct.** The grape harvest across Kakheti: cellars open, grape-stomping, and the best time for the wine country.
- [ ] **Tbilisoba, late October.** The capital's birthday, with food, wine and music across the old town.
- [ ] **Orthodox Easter, spring.** The biggest religious holiday; churches full, many places closed on the day.
- [ ] **Alaverdoba, autumn.** An ancient Kakheti harvest festival at the Alaverdi cathedral.
- [ ] **Georgian Christmas, 7 January.** The Alilo procession in Tbilisi, deep winter, ski season in full swing.

GO DEEPER

Dates and closures in the public holidays page and the month-by-month picture in best travel time.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

What a day costs

three travel styles · printed the way the day spends it

Daily budgets hide in averages, so here is the day itemized instead: a bed, meals, getting around, one thing worth doing, and the glass of wine at the end. Three real versions of the same day in Georgia, one of the best-value trips in the region. Guided treks and cellar days sit on top of these.

A DAY IN GEORGIA

* backpacker *

hostel bed	9.00
bakery breakfast	2.00
khinkali lunch	4.00
guesthouse dinner	5.00
marshrutka + metro	2.00
entry or tasting	2.00
a jug of house wine	1.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~25 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

A DAY IN GEORGIA

* standard *

guesthouse double, half	18.00
cafe breakfast	4.00
restaurant lunch	7.00
dinner with wine	11.00
Bolt rides	4.00
tour or tasting, split	8.00
coffee and extras	3.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~55 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

A DAY IN GEORGIA

* comfort *

boutique double	60.00
hotel breakfast	incl.
restaurant lunch	12.00
dinner, good table	20.00
private driver, half day	18.00
guide or tasting	7.00
wine and extras	3.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~120 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

Run the same numbers for your own dates, group size and currency in the free budget calculator on pack-lightly.com.

Open the Budget Calculator

06

Practical

Entry, money, transport, eSIM, health, packing. The boring parts you only read once. Done right, you never think about them again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 32

Money and transport 33

Bed, bag, signal 34

Health basics 35

Book in this order

a few things before you fly · the rest on the ground

Georgia is one of the easiest countries to organise, and very little rewards planning ahead. Guesthouses, drivers, marshrutkas and tours are simple to sort once you arrive, and there is no visa to file for most travelers. The short list below is really just the flights, your first nights, and the admin that is cheaper done at home.

8 wk before

International flights

Most routes connect through Istanbul, the Gulf, Warsaw or Vienna into Tbilisi or Kutaisi, with budget carriers flying into Kutaisi from Europe. Fares soften six to eight weeks out.

Compare fares on Aviasales

4 wk before

Insurance + entry check

Buy travel insurance with medical evacuation, useful for the treks and remote valleys. Then confirm entry: almost every nationality enters visa-free for a full year. Keep your passport valid six months out.

Check entry rules per passport

2 wk before

First nights + summer beds

Book only your first two nights in Tbilisi, plus Mestia and Batumi if you travel in July or August, when the popular guesthouses fill. Everything else can wait.

Book stays on Booking.com

1 wk before

eSIM

Install before departure, activate on arrival. 10 to 15 GB covers two weeks of maps, Bolt and uploads, though a local SIM is dirt cheap for longer stays.

Set up a Saily eSIM

Svaneti and Tusheti in peak summer are the two places worth booking a guesthouse ahead. The rest of the country you can wing.

Cards cover the cities, but carry lari for marshrutkas, village guesthouses and cellar wine, which are cash only.

Money and transport

cheap and cash-friendly · marshrutkas, trains, Bolt

Georgia is cheap and mostly cash-friendly. Cards and contactless work in city restaurants and hotels, but marshrutka minibuses, village guesthouses and cellar wine want lari, so keep small notes on you. ATMs are everywhere in towns. Getting around is the marshrutka: cramped, frequent, and a couple of dollars between cities, leaving from chaotic hub stations like Tbilisi's Didube. Comfortable day trains link Tbilisi with Batumi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi, and Bolt is the honest taxi app in every city.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Bed, hostel to boutique	USD 9	USD 40	USD 120
Meal out	USD 4	USD 10	USD 22
Bolt across town	USD 2	USD 3	USD 6
Marshrutka between cities	USD 3	USD 5	USD 8
Day tour or driver, split	USD 15	USD 30	USD 70

verified 2026-06 · per-category detail in the budget guide

GETTING AROUND: WHAT BEATS WHAT

Marshrutkas are the backbone: cheap, frequent, and reaching almost every town, if you accept the squeeze and the lack of a schedule. Trains are the comfortable upgrade on the main lines, especially the fast Tbilisi to Batumi day train, and worth booking online in summer. For the mountains, a hired driver or a shared 4x4 beats waiting on a minibus that leaves when full, and it is the only sensible way into Tusheti. In the cities, Bolt replaced the taxi haggle. Compare intercity options through 12Go.

THE FULL PICTURE

Cash and card detail in the currency rundown, the full cost model in budget saving, and driving notes in traffic.

Bed, bag, signal

hotels · packing · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

For mid-range and up, Booking.com has the deepest inventory and free-cancellation options across the cities and towns. For hostels and social stays in Tbilisi and Batumi, Hostelworld has the better review pool. In the mountains, a family guesthouse in Kazbegi or Mestia, with half board, beats any hotel for value and food.

BAG: THE LAYERED LIST

- [ ] Real layers: hot valleys, cold mountain nights
- [ ] A warm jacket even in summer for the high passes
- [ ] Sturdy walking shoes or light boots for the trails
- [ ] Sun hat, sunglasses, SPF 50; the mountain light is strong
- [ ] Rain shell for fast-changing Caucasus weather
- [ ] Modest layer: a scarf and covered knees for churches
- [ ] Refillable water bottle; tap water is safe in the cities
- [ ] Type C/F plug adapter, 220V
- [ ] A power bank for long marshrutka and train days
- [ ] Some cash in small lari for rural stops

Signal. Install an eSIM before you fly and activate on arrival. A 10 to 15 GB plan covers two weeks. Local Magti or Silknet SIMs are very cheap for longer stays; bring your passport to register.

Set up a Saily eSIM

06

GO DEEPER The full season-by-season list in the packing list, what to wear in clothes, and plans compared in the eSIM write-up.

Health basics

six weeks out · most of this list is reassurance

Georgia is a low-drama health destination. There is no malaria, pharmacies are common in the towns, and the main risks come from the outdoors: altitude on the treks, sun and heat in summer, and cold at height. Tap water is safe in the cities and delicious from mountain springs. The list below is everything that actually needs doing, in order.

THE SHORT LIST

- [ ] **Six weeks before:** travel-clinic visit. Confirm routine vaccines (MMR, DPT, flu) are current.
- [ ] **Recommended:** Hepatitis A and typhoid for a food-and-travel trip. Hep A is a two-shot series; start early.
- [ ] **Rabies:** stray dogs are common; consider the pre-exposure course if you plan long rural hikes.
- [ ] **Altitude:** the Svaneti and Kazbegi trails climb high; go up gradually and drink plenty of water.
- [ ] **Water:** city tap water and mountain springs are safe; carry a bottle to refill.
- [ ] **Insurance:** medical cover with evacuation, essential for the remote treks and mountain roads.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Tbilisi has the best private clinics, with good English-speaking doctors; Batumi and Kutaisi cover the basics and serious cases are moved to the capital. Pharmacies (aptiaki) handle stomach upsets, minor infections and altitude headaches over the counter. Dial 112 for the unified emergency line, which covers ambulance, police and fire; hotel reception is the fastest route to a doctor who speaks English.

06

READ ON The shot-by-shot schedule in the vaccinations breakdown, clinics in the hospitals page, and cover compared in the travel insurance rundown.

07

Safe and smart

Why Georgia is one of the safest trips in the region, the few things worth watching, the etiquette of the table and the church, and the language minimum.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Staying smart 37

Etiquette: do and do not 38

Language and emergencies 39

Staying smart

a very safe country, and the few things to watch

Georgia is one of the safest countries you can travel, with low crime and a culture that goes out of its way to look after guests. Entry is a formality: get your stamp, stay up to a year, no registration to file. The things actually worth attention are ordinary and mostly about the roads, the dogs, and one political line you do not cross.

WATCH 01

The taxi without a meter

Flagging a car on the street or taking an airport tout usually means a tourist price several times the going rate.

The fix: use the Bolt app for a fixed, honest fare. It works in Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi and at the airports.

WATCH 02

Mountain roads and driving

The real risk here is the road: fast, fatalistic driving, blind mountain bends, and rough surfaces on passes like Tusheti.

The fix: use marshrutkas and experienced local drivers for the mountain legs, and avoid driving the hard passes yourself.

WATCH 03

The occupied regions

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are closed from Georgia proper, and entering via Russia is illegal under Georgian law.

The fix: stay on the routes in this guide, keep clear of the administrative boundary lines, and do not attempt a crossing.

BONUS

Stray dogs

Tagged street dogs in the cities are vaccinated and friendly; rural packs near villages can be territorial.

The fix: do not run from or feed rural dogs, carry a stick on remote trails, and know where the nearest clinic is.

07

MORE ON THE SITE

The full safety and entry picture in the safety breakdown and the rules in the visa page.

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing · the rest smooth the day

Eight things that matter. The first four cause real offense if you ignore them; the rest simply make you a welcome guest. Georgian hospitality is intense and generous, built on the idea that a guest is a gift from God.

DO

Respect the tamada at a supra

The toastmaster leads. Wait your turn, and do not start drinking mid-toast.

DO NOT

Toast with beer

Beer toasts are for enemies in the old code. Use wine, or a soft drink if you are not drinking.

DO

Cover up in churches

Shoulders and knees covered; women wear a skirt and a headscarf. Wraps are usually at the door.

DO NOT

Praise Russia or joke about the war

The 2008 war and the occupied regions are raw. Listen; do not offer opinions on the neighbour.

DO

Accept the hospitality

A refused invitation to eat or drink can read as cold. Take a little, even when you are full.

DO NOT

Try to out-drink your host

The wine and chacha keep coming. Pace yourself; nobody is impressed by a guest under the table.

DO

Learn gamarjoba and madloba

Hello and thank you in Georgian land warmly. Russian is widely understood too.

DO NOT

Photograph people without asking

Especially elders and inside churches. A gesture and a smile usually gets a warm yes.

If a family invites you to eat, a small gift of chocolates or something from home is a warm gesture, never expected.

A raised voice loses the room. Patience and a smile solve most snags; Georgians warm fast to a polite guest.

MORE ON THE SITE

Customs and hospitality in the culture page and what to wear in clothes.

Language and emergencies

a handful of words · the number to keep

Georgian is the state language, written in its own alphabet, and it is unrelated to anything nearby. Russian is widely understood by older people, and English is common among the young and in tourism. A few words of Georgian, even badly pronounced, open doors here.

THE EIGHT WORDS THAT HELP

ENGLISH	GEORGIAN	SAY IT
Hello	gamarjoba	gah-mar-JO-ba
Thank you	madloba	MAD-lo-ba
Yes / No	ki / ara	kee / AH-ra
How much?	ra ghirs?	ra GHEERS
Water	tsqali	TSKA-li
Delicious	gemrielia	gem-ri-EL-ia
Cheers	gaumarjos	gau-MAR-jos
Sorry	bodishi	bo-DEE-shi

UNIFIED	AMBULANCE	POLICE	FIRE
112	112	112	112

07

GO DEEPER

More phrases and the alphabet in the culture page.

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 41

Print cards: cut, fold, take 42

Sources and methodology 43

A note on the links 45

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Georgia data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Georgia: 25 USD/day backpacker, 120 USD/day comfort.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Country Map

Tbilisi, the Caucasus, wine country and the coast, mapped.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/



Best Time to Travel

Best: May-June and September-October. Month by month.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



What to Eat and Drink

Khachapuri, khinkali and more, with prices.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/local-food-and-drinks/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

GEORGIAN · ESSENTIALS

Hello	gamarjoba
Thank you	madloba
Yes / No	ki / ara
How much?	ra ghirs?
Water	tsqali
Cheers	gaumarjos
Delicious	gemrielia
Sorry	bodishi

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EMERGENCY · GEORGIA

Unified	112
Ambulance	112
Police	112
Fire	112
Currency	GEL (lari)

My hotel: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Georgia hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition.

pack-lightly.com/georgia/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is at the hotel.

Save the Bolt app and an offline map of Tbilisi too. Between them they cover taxis and getting un-lost in the old town.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Twenty-plus countries on the ground, data-led travel writing with a performance-marketing background. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hotel and hostel pricing: Booking and Hostelworld snapshot 2026-06, Tbilisi, Kazbegi, Mestia and Batumi centers.
2. Currency rates: ECB and open reference rates, 2026-06.
3. Visa policy: Georgia government guidance (geoconsul.gov.ge), retrieved 2026-05-15.
4. Daily-cost model: Pack Lightly country-comparison dataset, captured 2026-06.
5. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last checked 2026-06.
6. Climate and seasons: best-travel-time dataset and 10-year averages, captured 2026-06.
7. Pack Lightly Georgia cluster pages, retrieved 2026-07: visa · budget · safety · best travel time · eSIM

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored on a regular cycle. Budget figures come from the country-comparison and budget-calculator datasets, climate verdicts from the best-travel-time dataset, both stamped with their capture date where they appear.

What changed in edition 2026.07: first release of the Georgia guide on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: January 2027. Not covered in depth here: winter ski logistics at Gudauri and Bakuriani, the remote Tusheti and Khevsureti highlands, and deep Svaneti trekking, which are specialist trips of their own.

Photo credits. Every photograph is sourced from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons or public-domain license. The full per-image list, with each photographer and license, is on the next page. The cover shows Gergeti Trinity Church below Mount Kazbek.

Image credits

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1. **Adjarian khachapuri, boat-shaped cheese bread**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0.
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3. **Batumi skyline and seafront**. U.S. 6th Fleet / Wikimedia Commons, Public domain.
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9. **Gergeti Trinity Church and Mount Kazbek**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0.
10. **Gudauri mountain valley panorama, Georgian Military**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0.
11. **Martvili Canyon, emerald water**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.
12. **Plate of Georgian khinkali soup dumplings**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0.
13. **Prometheus Cave near Kutaisi, lit stalactite**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
14. **Qvevri clay wine vessels buried in**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
15. **Sighnaghi hill town**. Wikimedia Commons, Public domain.
16. **Tbilisi old town rooftops**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.
17. **Ushguli village**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.
18. **Vineyard rows in Kakheti**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a transport leg, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

A hotel area or a transport platform is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. An overrated sight is still called overrated, and a cheaper option that beats the famous one keeps the slot. The commission funds the guide; it does not choose what goes in it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales** · **Booking.com** · **12Go** · **Saily** · **Hostelworld** · **Stay22** · **GetYourGuide** · via **Travelpayouts**

Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/georgia.

This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands January 2027 and replaces this file at the same download.