



FREE 8-DAY GUIDE FOR UK TRAVELLERS

Eight Days in Svaneti

WHY SVANETI

The Alps, a century ago, with better food

Svaneti sits in the far northwest of Georgia, pressed against the main Caucasus ridge. Its villages are guarded by medieval stone towers, its valleys run beneath peaks over 4,500 metres, and its people, the Svans, have lived here without interruption for thousands of years. UNESCO protects the upper villages; the cows protect the roads.

What makes Svaneti worth the journey is the combination: proper alpine walking straight from the guesthouse door, a living culture rather than a curated one, and suppers cooked by the family hosting you. It is not luxury travel. It is the kind of travel most people hoped the Alps would still be.

This guide gives you the route, the logistics and the local knowledge to plan the trip yourself. It is also, honestly, the exact route we run as our Warm Svaneti small-group tour, so if you would rather skip the organising, that door is open too.

The route at a glance

- 1 **Kutaisi** · arrive, easy evening
- 2 **Kutaisi to Mestia** · the mountain road up (~6 hrs)
- 3 **Etseri to Mazeri** · first full walking day
- 4 **Ushba Glacier & Shdugra Waterfalls** · the big mountain day, then a Svan bathhouse
- 5 **Ushguli** · medieval towers and high pasture beneath Shkhara
- 6 **Mestia** · museum, towers, recovery
- 7 **Mestia to Kutaisi** · down the mountain, farewell supra
- 8 **Kutaisi** · fly home

Nights: one in Kutaisi at each end, five in family guesthouses in and around Mestia, including the Mazeri valley under Ushba

THE ROUTE

Eight days, day by day

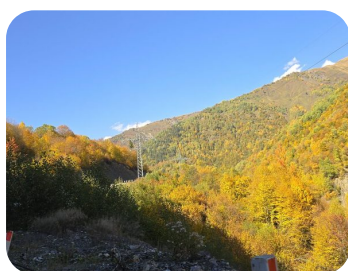
DAY 1 • ARRIVAL

Land in Kutaisi, sleep well

Fly into Kutaisi, Georgia's western gateway, typically arriving in the evening. Check in, have a first glass of Georgian wine, and sleep off the travel before the mountains begin.

Effort: none · **Driving:** 30 min · **Overnight:** Kutaisi

Doing it yourself: a taxi from the airport into town is straightforward; agree the price first or use a taxi app. Pick up a local SIM at the airport while you are there.



DAY 2 • INTO THE MOUNTAINS

The long, beautiful road to Mestia

The drive from Kutaisi to Svaneti takes around six hours, and it earns every one of them: the Enguri reservoir's improbable turquoise, river gorges, and the first stone towers appearing on the hillsides. By late afternoon you reach Mestia, the main town of Upper Svaneti at around 1,500 metres, and the base that anchors the week.

Effort: none · **Driving:** ~6 hrs with stops · **Overnight:** Mestia

Doing it yourself: shared minibuses (marshrutkas) leave Kutaisi for Mestia in the morning; private transfers cost more but stop where you ask. The road is paved and spectacular.

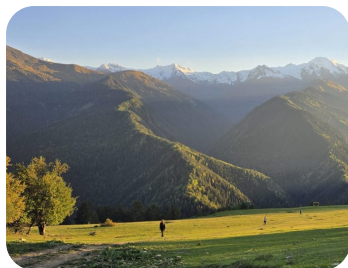


DAY 3 • FIRST WALK

Etseri to Mazeri, meadows and towers

Your first proper walk in Svaneti: forest paths under tall pines, glacial streams, working villages, and wide pasture that opens onto the twin summit of Mount Ushba, in view for much of the day. The night is spent in a family guesthouse under the mountains.

Walking: a gentler introductory day on mountain trails, at a sensible pace · **Overnight:** family guesthouse

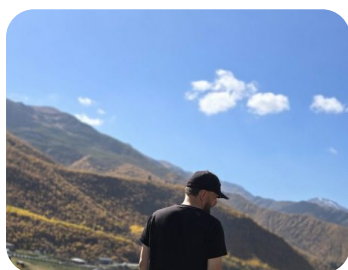


DAY 4 • THE BIG DAY

Ushba Glacier and the Shdugra Waterfalls

The longest mountain day of the week. From Mazeri the trail follows the river deeper into the range, through flower meadows and pine forest towards the Shdugra waterfalls, with the glacier spilling off Mount Ushba, just over 4,700 metres and often called the most beautiful peak in the Caucasus, on the skyline above. The day ends in a traditional Svan bathhouse. You will sleep very well tonight.

Walking: approx 14-16 km return · around 500-700 m of ascent · high point about 2,200 m · five to eight hours depending on pace (figures approximate) · **Overnight:** family guesthouse



DAY 5 • USHGULI

One of Europe's highest continuously inhabited settlements

Ushguli is a high-mountain community of historic villages within UNESCO-listed Upper Svaneti, sitting above 2,000 metres, where families still live through the winter among medieval stone towers. You walk the lanes between towers and grazing horses, then climb onto high pasture towards Shkhara, Georgia's highest mountain at roughly 5,200 metres, before returning to your guesthouse by evening.

Walking: approx 16-19 km return · around 600 m of ascent · high point about 2,400 m (figures approximate) · **Overnight:** family guesthouse

Doing it yourself: the last stretch of road to Ushguli is unpaved and slow; most people hire a local driver rather than take a rental car up it.



DAY 6 • MESTIA

Culture, coffee and a gentler pace

A deliberate half-day: the Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography, whose treasury genuinely surprises people, a wander among the old towers, and free time. Legs recover; cameras fill up.

Effort: easy · **Overnight:** Mestia



DAY 7 • DESCENT

Back to Kutaisi, one last supra

The morning transfer back down to Kutaisi, then a relaxed evening and a final dinner. Expect toasts. Georgian farewells are not brief, and you would not want them to be.

Effort: none · **Driving:** ~6 hrs · **Overnight:** Kutaisi

DAY 8 • DEPARTURE

Airport transfer and home

Transfer to Kutaisi airport for your flight back to the UK, already explaining to yourself why one week was not enough.

Effort: emotional

TIMING

When to go

September to early October

Our favourite, and when this route runs. Stable weather, warm days, cold clear nights, golden valleys, and the summer crowds gone. The high paths are open and the light is extraordinary.

Winter

Svaneti under snow is a different, quieter magic: towers in deep white, wood smoke, empty valleys. It is for a different kind of trip, less walking, more atmosphere, and we run it separately.

June to August

Green, flower-filled and busiest. Afternoon storms are common in the high valleys. Perfectly good, just less predictable and less ours.

The shoulder months: April, May and November

In-between seasons, and they vary a lot year to year. Valleys turn green in May but high paths may still hold snow; in November roads can close and many guesthouses shut. Possible, but check conditions carefully before committing.

SLEEPING

Where you stay, and what to honestly expect

In Svaneti you stay in family guesthouses: simple, clean, warm and personal. Beds are good. Bathrooms are private or shared depending on the house. Dinner is cooked by the family, usually far too much of it, and breakfast will make you rethink your relationship with bread.

What guesthouses are not: hotels. There is no reception desk, no room service, and occasionally the hot water asks for patience. In exchange you get something no hotel can sell you: an evening at a Svan family's table.

Booking tip: some of the most characterful family guesthouses have little online presence and fill early for September. Book well ahead, or go through someone who knows the families.

EATING

What to eat in Svaneti

Georgian food is a serious argument for the trip on its own, and Svaneti has its own dishes you will not find in Tbilisi restaurants at their best. Order these:

Kubdari

The Svan signature: bread stuffed with spiced chopped meat. The benchmark by which every guesthouse is quietly judged.

Tashmijabi

Mashed potato beaten with mountain cheese until it stretches. Comfort food with altitude.

Chvishtari

Cornbread with cheese baked inside, best straight from the pan.

Svan salt

The local blend of salt, garlic and mountain spices. Take a jar home; your roast potatoes will thank you.

Khachapuri

Georgia's famous cheese bread, everywhere and never the same twice.

Home wine

Georgia has been making wine for some eight thousand years. In many guesthouses it comes from the family's own cellar, with toasts.

LOGISTICS FROM THE UK

Getting there: easier than you think

The trick UK travellers miss: fly to **Kutaisi**, not Tbilisi. Kutaisi is the western gateway, hours closer to Svaneti, and reachable from London with one connection.

Flight planning notes

- From London, Kutaisi will usually involve **one connection in Europe**. Routes and carriers change each season, so check current options close to booking.
- **Before you book, check whether the connection is protected or two separate tickets:** on separate tickets you collect and recheck your own bags, so leave sensible time between flights.
- If you travel with us, we send current, tailored flight guidance before you book anything.
- UK passport holders currently do not need a visa for Georgia for stays up to one year; check the latest entry rules on gov.uk before you travel.

ON THE GROUND

Doing it yourself: the practical bits

Small things that make a big difference

- **Money:** cards work in Mestia's shops and cafes; villages run on cash. Take Georgian lari up the mountain with you, and do not rely on finding a working ATM outside Mestia.
- **Connectivity:** a local SIM from the airport is cheap and coverage is better than you would expect, but download offline maps of Svaneti before you leave wifi.
- **Driving:** the road to Mestia is paved and dramatic; the continuation to Ushguli is unpaved and slow. Mountain rules apply: slower than you think, and the cow always has right of way.
- **Language:** four words earn a lot of goodwill: *gamarjoba* (hello), *madloba* (thank you), *didi madloba* (thank you very much) and *gaumarjos*, the toast you will hear at every supra.
- **Insurance:** make sure your travel insurance covers hiking at the altitudes you plan to walk. Unglamorous, essential.

Your Svaneti planning checklist

Kutaisi → Mestia → Etseri → Mazeri → Ushguli → Mestia → Kutaisi

- ☐ Check whether your flight connection is protected or two separate tickets
- ☐ Book the first and final nights in Kutaisi
- ☐ Arrange the Kutaisi to Mestia transfer (or the morning marshrutka)
- ☐ Confirm a local driver for the Ushguli road
- ☐ Book guesthouses in Mestia and the Mazeri valley early for September
- ☐ Check walking distances, ascent and altitude against your fitness
- ☐ Confirm your insurance covers mountain walking
- ☐ Download offline maps of Svaneti before leaving wifi
- ☐ Carry Georgian lari for everywhere outside Mestia
- ☐ Check weather and road conditions a few days before you set off

Or hand the whole list to us: that is exactly what the Warm Svaneti tour is.

PREPARATION

Fitness and what to pack

How fit do you need to be? If you can enjoy a full day of hill walking at a steady, unhurried pace, you can enjoy this route. There is one genuinely demanding day (the glacier), two moderate ones, and plenty of recovery built in. The ground is natural and uneven rather than manicured, but this is a walking holiday, not a trek, and nobody is racing. Gentler or vehicle-based alternatives exist on most days, so a mixed-ability couple can both have a good week. If you travel with us, we send a detailed walking profile for each day before you book, so there are no surprises.

The short packing list that matters

- Worn-in walking boots with ankle support, not box-fresh ones
- Layers: warm days, genuinely cold mountain evenings; add a warm hat and gloves
- A proper waterproof jacket (and trousers), whatever the forecast says
- Sun cream and a hat: mountain sun at altitude is not London sun
- A small daypack, a refillable water bottle, and any personal medication
- Cash in Georgian lari for small purchases: cards work in Mestia, less so in villages

HONEST ANSWERS

What travellers most often get wrong about Svaneti

"It's a former Soviet country, so it must feel grey"

Georgia is one of the oldest wine cultures on Earth, with its own alphabet, its own church, and a hospitality tradition, the supra, that treats guests as sent from God. Grey is the last word you will reach for.

"Is it safe?"

Svaneti is a well-established walking destination. The practical risks are the honest ones: mountain roads, changing weather and hiking terrain. Good insurance, an experienced local driver and a look at current travel advice matter far more than vague worries.

"I'll just drive it myself"

You can. But the Svaneti road demands respect, parking in villages is guesswork, and the best guesthouses do not live on booking sites. A local who knows every family changes the trip entirely.

"One or two days in Svaneti will do"

It takes most of a day just to get up there. Svaneti punishes day-trippers and rewards people who stay: the walks, the light and the welcome all improve on day three.

"The food will be basic mountain fare"

Kubdari, khachapuri, fresh dairy, garden vegetables, wine from the family's own cellar. Guesthouse dinners often become one of the most memorable parts of the trip. Bring appetite.

Want this exact trip, without organising any of it

This route is our **Warm Svaneti** small-group tour: land-only, led throughout by local guides, staying in the family guesthouses we know personally. Jurijs, our founder, has been travelling these valleys for years, and it shows in the details.

23-30 Sept

2026 DEPARTURE

£990

PER PERSON, LAND ONLY

£150

DEPOSIT TO HOLD A PLACE

Max 8

TRAVELLERS

[View the full tour and check availability →](#)

Ready to commit? Reserve with a £150 deposit →

Full inclusions, current dates and booking terms are on the tour page. Prefer your own dates or a private version? [Create your tour](#) · Questions first? WhatsApp us on +44 7845 082084

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Updated July 2026. For current dates, prices and booking terms see justvia.com/warm-svaneti. International flights not included.