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Region 1 h 10 min by car from Tbilisi 4 h 30 min by car from Kutaisi 6 h 30 min by car from Batumi Pop

Kvemo Kartli is a region — a region of Georgia, about 1 h 10 min by car from Tbilisi, 4 h 30 min from Batumi. Home to about 423,986 people.

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Kvemo Kartli

By [Mariam Lomidze](#), GTour desk · Fact-checked against the sources listed · Last checked 17 October 2026

Overview

Kvemo Kartli is the region immediately south of Tbilisi, stretching toward the borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan. It features an industrial plain around Rustavi, the region's largest city, through dry, folded hills and deep river gorges to the frontier. The population of around 423,986 is one of the most ethnically mixed in Georgia, with large Azerbaijani alongside Georgians, and traces of nineteenth-century German and Greek settlement still visible in village names.

The region matters disproportionately to its modest size of 6,528 square kilometres. At Dmanisi, excavations of early hominins, the oldest known outside Africa, rewriting assumptions about the first human migration. It preserves the oldest precisely dated church standing in Georgia, carrying some of the earliest surviving inscriptions. It features cave monasteries of David Gareji on the edge of the Azerbaijani steppe, the canyon fortress of Birtvisi, and the town of Tsalka, and Kvemo Kartli offers a concentrated set of day trips from the capital, covered in GTour's [private tours](#).

History

The deepest history of Kvemo Kartli predates Georgia itself. At Dmanisi, Georgian and international archaeologists have found remains to roughly 1.8 million years ago, identified as *Homo erectus georgicus*, the oldest hominin remains found outside Africa since the 1980s under the Georgian National Museum. In antiquity the territory formed part of the kingdom of Colchis. In the early fourth century it became a centre of early church building. Bolnisi Sioni, constructed between the fifth and sixth centuries by Vakhtang Gorgasali, is regarded as the oldest surviving church in Georgia with a securely dated construction; it contains known inscriptions in the Georgian Asomtavruli script.

In the sixth century, according to tradition, David Garejeli, one of the Thirteen Assyrian (Syrian) Fathers who lived here, founded a hermitage in the arid hills on the present-day border with Azerbaijan; the complex grew over centuries and is now known as David Gareji. The region was repeatedly fought over during Mongol, Persian and Ottoman incursions, leaving fortresses such as Birtvisi, used as a refuge in times of invasion. In 1818, German colonists founded Katharinenfeld, later renamed Bolnisi in the Soviet period; their wine cellars, church buildings and town plan of the twentieth century brought industrialization, above all the founding of Rustavi as a Soviet steel-manufacturing hub. Today, Azerbaijani and Armenian communities that still define the region's demography coexist.

What to see

Dmanisi Museum-Reserve

The site where the 1.8-million-year-old hominin remains were found is now an open-air museum and active archaeological site of the National Museum. Visitors can see the medieval ruins of Dmanisi town layered above the Paleolithic finds, and the site displays casts and explanatory material. The site lies roughly ninety minutes from Tbilisi.

Bolnisi Sioni Cathedral

Built in the late fifth century, this basilica is the oldest precisely dated church standing in Georgia and carries the earliest examples of written Georgian. The surrounding town of Bolnisi retains streets and cellars from its Georgian past. A separate free-standing bell tower was added centuries after the original construction.

David Gareji Monastery Complex

A cluster of cave monasteries carved into semi-desert cliffs straddling the Georgia-Azerbaijan border, founded during the medieval period with frescoed chapels and refectories. Udabno monastery's cave paintings are among the earliest examples of medieval Georgian monastic art. The site is included on UNESCO's Tentative List for Georgia.

Birtvisi Fortress

A medieval fortress built into a narrow limestone canyon, used historically as a place of refuge during invasions. Little remains beyond fragments of walls and towers, but the approach through the gorge is itself the main attraction. The canyon floor is a natural amphitheatre.

Dashbashi Canyon

Near the town of Tsalka, the Khrami river has cut a deep basalt canyon lined with waterfalls, accessible via a cable car. The canyon and its highland surroundings, settled historically by Greek communities, offer walking routes and views of the Caucasus mountains.

elsewhere in the region.

Getting there

From Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli is about one hour ten minutes by car, with Rustavi and Bolnisi reached on paved roads and David Gareji require roughly ninety minutes to two hours on secondary roads, the final stretch to David Gareji from Bolnisi and Marneuli run regularly from Tbilisi's Samgori and Ortachala stations; reaching David Gareji by public transport visitors join an organized tour or arrange private transfer. From Kutaisi the drive is about four hours thirty minutes. There is no passenger rail service into the region's interior. Check current conditions on the [GTour's private tours](#) page, and see GTour's [private tours](#) for guided day trips with an English-speaking driver-guide.

When to go

Spring and autumn are best, when the steppe around David Gareji is green or golden and temperatures are comfortable. In summer intense heat and little shade on the semi-desert trails. Tsalka and Dashbashi sit at higher elevation and can be snowed out of season possible from late autumn into early spring. Bolnisi and the lowland sites are accessible year-round, though w

Where to stay and eat

Kvemo Kartli's wine tradition is concentrated around Bolnisi and the surrounding villages, where several small wineries operate alongside traditional meals. Options include [Winery Awino](#), [Bolnisi Old Cellar](#), [Kobuladze wine cellar](#), [Lukas winery](#) and [Japharidze winery](#). For an overnight stay, [Bolnisi Prime House](#) offers guest accommodation close to the city. For more wineries, guest houses and eateries across the region; see the [best of](#) guide and the regional [guides](#) for c

Practical notes

David Gareji straddles the Georgia-Azerbaijan border and visitors should carry identification; the Georgian side of the border areas near the frontier may have restricted access depending on current conditions, so travelling with a guide is recommended. Dmanisi, Birtvisi and David Gareji is exposed and dry, with little shade and limited water sources, so sturdy footwear is essential. Mobile signal is unreliable in the semi-desert and canyon areas. At active monasteries such as David Gareji, including covered shoulders and knees.

Questions travellers ask

How far is Dmanisi from Tbilisi?

Dmanisi is roughly ninety minutes by car from Tbilisi, on paved roads for most of the route. There is no direct bus service, so you must arrive by private car or organized tour.

Can David Gareji be visited in one day from Tbilisi?

Yes, David Gareji is a standard full-day trip from Tbilisi, combining the drive of around two hours each way with the visit to the monastery caves. Early starts are recommended in summer because of heat and limited shade.

Is a permit needed to visit David Gareji because of the border?

No special permit is required for Georgian citizens or foreign visitors on the Georgian side, though travellers near the border can change, so checking current status before visiting or travelling with a guide is sensible.

What makes Bolnisi Sioni historically important?

Bolnisi Sioni, built in the late fifth century, is considered the oldest surviving church in Georgia with a secure facade carries an early Georgian-language inscription, making it significant for the study of the Georgian alphabet.

What was found at Dmanisi and why does it matter?

Excavations at Dmanisi uncovered hominin skulls and stone tools dated to about 1.8 million years ago, the oldest in Europe. The discovery reshaped understanding of when and how early humans first migrated out of the African continent.

Is Kvemo Kartli a wine region?

Yes, particularly around Bolnisi, where small family cellars produce wine from local and traditional grape varieties. Many visitors come for tastings and meals.

What remains of the German colonial heritage in Bolnisi?

Bolnisi was founded in 1818 as the German colony of Katharinenfeld; streets, stone houses and wine cellars remain from that era, alongside the much older Sioni cathedral.

Is the Dashbashi glass bridge suitable for families?

The observation bridge over Dashbashi canyon near Tsalka is a short, accessible walk suitable for most visitors below. Surrounding trails into the canyon are steeper and better suited to those with reasonable fitness.

How do I reach Birtvisi fortress?

Birtvisi is reached by a drive from Tbilisi followed by a walk along a narrow canyon floor, as no road leads directly. It takes roughly thirty to forty-five minutes depending on pace and requires sturdy footwear.

Sources

- Dmanisi
- Bolnisi Sioni
- David Gareja monastery complex
- [Georgian National Tourism Administration — Kvemo Kartli region](#)

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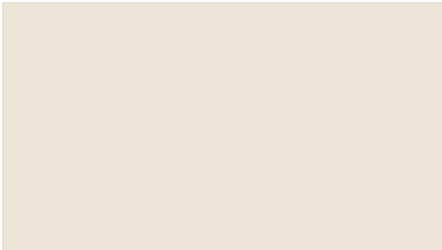
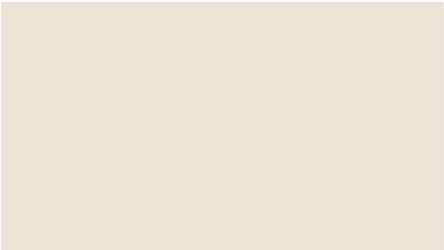
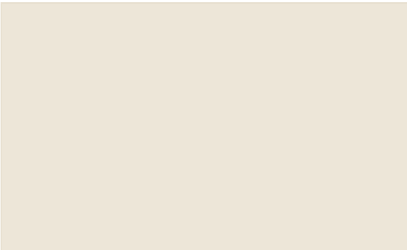
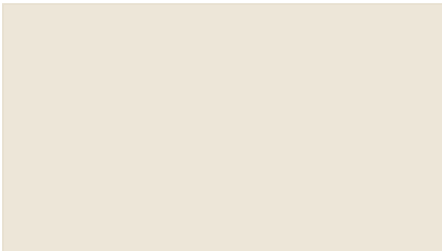
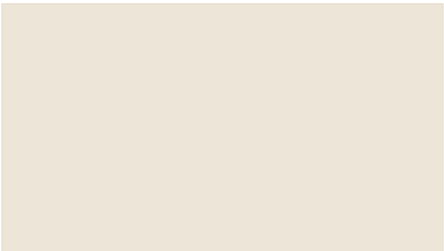
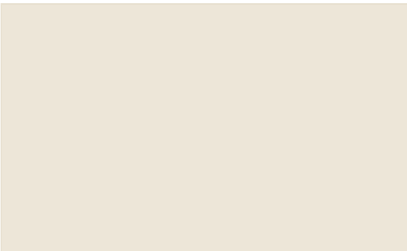
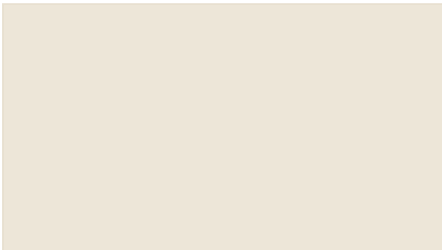
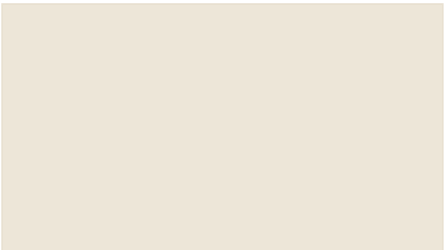
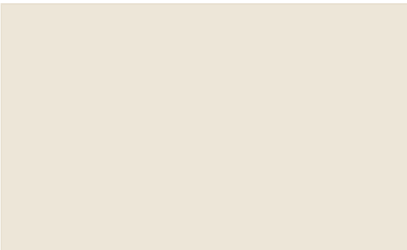
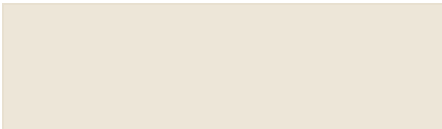
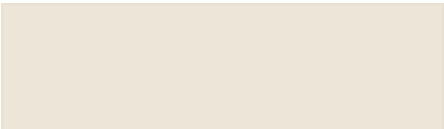
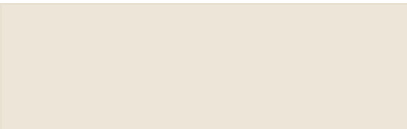
Kvemo Kartli lies south of Tbilisi towards the Armenian and Azerbaijani borders — a region of deep history of the oldest human history on the continent. At Dmanisi, archaeologists found the 1.8-million-year-old remains of Homo ergaster.

known outside Africa; the site and its museum are an hour and a half from the capital.

Bolnisi holds Georgia's oldest surviving church, its fifth-century inscriptions among the earliest e the German colonists' town of Katharinenfeld is remembered in its streets and wine cellars. The B monastery caves of David Gareji on the semi-desert border, and the Dashbashi canyon with its wa are the natural and historic highlights.

Kvemo Kartli is a region of day trips: David Gareji, Dashbashi and Bolnisi each make a full and s best in spring and autumn when the steppe is green or golden.

PLACES TO VISIT IN KVEMO KARTLI · 31

 ATTRACTION 9th of April Park	 ATTRACTION Aerial Tramway	 ATTRACTION Art Gallery Vake
 TOWN Bolnisi	 ATTRACTION Dedaena Park	 TOWN Dmanisi
 ATTRACTION Giorgi Leonidze Garden	 ATTRACTION Gldani Park	 VILLAGE Gomareti
		

ATTRACTION Hot Air Balloon in Tbilisi	VILLAGE Kiketi	VILLAGE Kojori
ATTRACTION Leghvtakhevi	RESORT Manglisi	TOWN Marneuli
ATTRACTION Mushtaidi Garden	ATTRACTION Mziuri park	ATTRACTION Orbeliani Square
CITY Rustavi	ATTRACTION Tbilisi Old Hippodrome	ATTRACTION Tbilisi Sea Club
TOWN Tetritskaro	ATTRACTION The Animated Puppet Museum	ATTRACTION The Funicular

VERIFIED PLACES IN KVEMO KARTLI

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WINE

VILLA KELASURI

WINE

Mukhiguli 1770

TRAVEL AGENCY

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WINE

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MARANI**

WINE

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