

[Destinations in Georgia](#) › Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti

Region 5 h 30 min by car from Tbilisi 2 h by car from Kutaisi 2 h 15 min by car from Batumi Population

Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti is a region — a region of Georgia, about 5 h 30 min by car from Tbilisi, 2 Batumi. Home to about 330,761 people.

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Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti

Guide last checked by the GTour desk on 17 October 2026. Latest news for this region is listed below automatically.

Why go

Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti is one administrative region built from two different climates and cultures. The low subtropical, flat, and green, with tea gardens, wetlands, and a Black Sea coastline. Above them, the Enguri gorge of stone defensive towers, glaciers, and villages that stayed isolated for centuries. Few regions in Georgia offer a Byzantine-era fortress and a 5,000-metre peak within a few hours of each other.

The region suits travellers who want both culture and landscape, and who are willing to spend a day on the road.

When to go

- **May–June:** lowlands are lush, Svaneti's high passes and the Koruldi lakes trail are opening up but can still be tricky.
- **July–September:** the best window for Svaneti trekking, the Mestia–Ushguli route, and the Chalaadi glacier's strongest.
- **December–March:** Tetnuldi and Hatsvali ski lifts operate near Mestia; Zugdidi and the coast are mild but can be cold.
- **October–November:** quiet season everywhere, good for the Dadiani palace and Martvili canyon, but more snowfall — check [road status](#) before travelling.

Getting there

- **Train:** an overnight or day service runs from Tbilisi to Zugdidi, the practical gateway to both the lowland and highland areas.

- **Air:** Kutaisi International Airport is roughly 1.5 hours from Zugdidi by road, making it the most common. Mestia also has its own airstrip, served seasonally by Vanilla Sky from Tbilisi and Kutaisi.
- **Road:** Zugdidi to Mestia takes about 3 hours by marshrutka, shared taxi, or private car, climbing steadily. Planning details are in [how to get to Svaneti, Mestia, and Ushguli](#).

For a structured first visit, GTour's [organised tours](#) cover both halves of the region with a driver who knows c

What to see

The Mingrelian lowlands

- **Zugdidi:** the Dadiani Palace and its surrounding park, former seat of the Mingrelian princely family; see [Zugdidi](#).
- **Martvili Canyon:** short boat rides through a narrow, green-walled gorge; covered in [the Martvili guide](#).
- **Nokalakevi:** the hilltop fortress of ancient Archaeopolis, with excavated walls and a river gorge setting.
- **Poti and Kolkheti National Park:** a working Black Sea port alongside protected wetlands, reed marshes,
- **Anaklia:** a quieter beach town near the Abkhazian boundary line, good for a half-day by the sea.
- **Khobi, Senaki, Tsalenjikha:** smaller towns with monasteries and frescoes, useful stops for travellers with

Upper Svaneti

- **Mestia:** the regional hub, built around clusters of UNESCO-listed defensive towers; full detail in the [Svaneti](#).
- **Ushguli:** among the highest permanently inhabited settlements in Europe, a cluster of tower villages bene
- **Chalaadi Glacier:** a half-day walk from Mestia through forest to the glacier face.
- **Koruldi Lakes:** a demanding day hike or jeep trip above Mestia with views over the main Caucasus ridge
- **Tetnuldi and Hatsvali:** ski areas with lifts, used in winter for skiing and in summer for alpine views.
- **Enguri Dam:** one of the tallest arch dams in the world, visible from the main Zugdidi–Mestia road near K
- **Mestia–Ushguli trek:** a multi-day route through several tower villages, the classic way to see rural Svane

A three-day plan

- **Day 1 — Zugdidi and the lowlands:** morning at the Dadiani Palace and park, then drive to Martvili Canyon (from Zugdidi), and on to Nokalakevi fortress if time allows. Overnight in Zugdidi.
- **Day 2 — Zugdidi to Mestia:** set out early for the 3-hour drive along the Enguri reservoir, stopping at the lake by early afternoon, walk through the old town's tower clusters, and settle in before evening.
- **Day 3 — Mestia and Ushguli:** a full-day round trip to Ushguli (roughly 2.5–3 hours each way on a rough road), a half-day walk to Chalaadi Glacier followed by an afternoon at the Hatsvali lift. Check current conditions of the Ushguli drive, as the route can be affected by weather.

Travellers with more time can add a coastal day at Poti or Anaklia before heading to Zugdidi, or extend into the Abkhazian region instead of a round-trip drive.

Where to stay

- **Zugdidi:** small hotels and guesthouses, useful as a base for the lowlands and as a staging point before the
- **Mestia:** the main concentration of guesthouses and small hotels in Svaneti, many run by local families in
- **Ushguli:** basic guesthouses for those who want to overnight at altitude rather than return to Mestia the same day
- **Anaklia and Poti:** seasonal guesthouses and hotels geared toward the coast and the national park.

GTour's verified register lists checked hotels and guesthouses for the region below, with details on facilities and prices.

Eat and drink

Mingrelian cuisine, built around maize, walnuts, and sharp spice, differs from the rest of Georgia:

- **Elarji:** a stretchy cornmeal and cheese dish, the regional staple.
- **Gebzhalia:** rolled fresh cheese in a mint-infused matsoni sauce.
- **Kharcho:** a spiced beef and walnut soup, richer here than elsewhere in Georgia.
- **Ajika:** the fiery red pepper paste used throughout Mingrelian cooking.

In Svaneti, look for **kubdari**, a meat-filled bread flavoured with local herbs, and **Svan salt**, a spice blend whose production is limited at altitude, but lowland Samegrelo produces its own regional varieties, usually served at the table.

Practical notes

- **Money:** carry cash in Svaneti and smaller lowland towns; card acceptance is limited outside Mestia and Zugdidi.
- **Connectivity:** mobile coverage is reliable in Zugdidi, Mestia, and Ushguli, but patchy on mountain roads.
- **Roads:** the Zugdidi–Mestia road is paved but narrow and winding; the Mestia–Ushguli road is largely unpaved and snowy. Always check the [road status page](#) in advance.
- **Safety:** Svaneti's weather changes quickly at altitude; carry layers even in summer. Anaklia and the lowland administrative boundary line — stay on marked roads and avoid unofficial crossing attempts.
- **Further reading:** see the full [guides section](#) for related destinations and trekking notes.

Quick answers

How long does it take to get from Zugdidi to Mestia? About 3 hours by road, depending on traffic and weather.

Is Kutaisi or Tbilisi the better airport for this region? Kutaisi is closer, roughly 1.5 hours from Zugdidi; Tbilisi has more frequent seasonal flights to Mestia.

Can Martvili Canyon be visited as a day trip from Zugdidi? Yes, it is about 45 minutes away and common

Is the Mestia–Ushguli road open year-round? No, it can close after heavy snow or rain; check conditions b

What is the best season for the Mestia–Ushguli trek? July through September, when high passes are clear

Is Anaklia worth visiting alongside Svaneti? It works best as an add-on to a lowlands day, as it sits well off

Latest news for Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti



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Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti stretches from the lowland plains of Mingrelia, with their spicy cooking Zugdidi, up to Upper Svaneti — the highest inhabited valleys in Europe, where medieval stone towers stand beneath four-thousand-metre peaks.

Mestia, the Svan capital, is the gateway: a town of towers, museums and mountain guesthouses with views. From there the road continues to Ushguli, a UNESCO World Heritage village at 2,100 metres in the shadow of the highest mountain. The multi-day trek from Mestia to Ushguli is one of the great walks of the Caucasus.

Down in Samegrelo, the canyons of Martvili and Okatse, the Kolkheti wetlands and the sea at Abkhazeti. Svaneti's season is June to October for walking and December to April for skiing; the Mingrelian coast is open year-round.

PLACES TO VISIT IN SAMEGRELO-ZEMO SVANETI · 15

VILLAGE

Adishi

RESORT

Anaklia-Ganmukhuri

TOWN

Chkhorotsku

VILLAGE Khaishi	RESORT Lebarde	TOWN Mestia
RESORT Skuri	DESTINATION Svaneti	RESORT Tetnuldi Ski Resort
TOWN Tsalenjikha	VILLAGE Ushguli	TOWN Zugdidi

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