



**“At one point, not far past the village of Adishi, the trail gets close to the impressive icefalls and seracs of the Adishi Glacier tumbling down from mountains thousands of meters above.”**



- ← Looking towards the glaciated spine of the Caucasus.
- An Ushguli tower.
- ↓ If taking the Lagem Pass route, there's a wonderful downhill stretch into Ushguli with distant views of Shkhara Glacier behind.

The section of the trail through Svaneti offers some of the finest hiking in the Caucasus. While the four-day stage east of Mestia is slowly becoming more popular with international hikers, the first half, from Chuberi to Mestia, is very quiet and almost unknown. In total, this hike climbs five major passes, including the high Guli Pass at 2,974 m (9,757 ft), but the terrain is never difficult—it follows straightforward tracks in a stunning high-mountain environment through the foothills of much bigger peaks to the north. The hike begins in Chuberi a little way up the valley from the village of Khaishi. The first stage, over the Utviri Pass (2,711 m [8,894 ft]), is unfrequented even by Georgian standards, and you'll almost certainly have the trail to yourself as you climb up through rhododendrons to a col between 3,000 m (9,843 ft) peaks. This stage ends in the village of Nakra.

The second stage, from Nakra to Etseri, is longer and although it doesn't climb anywhere near as high, there's a greater number of lower cols to cross as the trail climbs in and out of several valleys coming down from the peaks Tsalgmil and Ladevali. You'll pass in and out of forest that has expanded considerably in recent decades, and there are several abandoned villages and hamlets that are being reclaimed by nature. The views of distant mountains are exceptional.

From Mestia, which is reached after a challenging day over the Guli Pass, you find yourself on what has become the most popular multi-day trek in Georgia—though it's still quiet compared to hikes in the Alps. One benefit of this increased popularity is that the trail tends to be better maintained than west of Mestia. It's a scenic delight, climbing several high passes in and out of dense forest with views of the mountains. At one point, not far past the village of Adishi, the trail gets close to the impressive icefalls and seracs of the Adishi Glacier tumbling down from mountains thousands of meters above. The Chkhunderi Pass (2,655 m [8,711 ft]) shortly after this point offers some of the best views on the entire trek.

The end of the trail comes at Ushguli, with its mysterious stone defensive towers and amazing view further up the valley to Shkhara, the highest mountain in Georgia at 5,193 m (17,037 ft). Ushguli (2,100 m [6,890 ft]) is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Svaneti, and reportedly Europe's highest permanently inhabited settlement.

In future years, more sections of the Transcaucasian Trail will open to hikers, but for now, this section through Georgia is one of the very best ways to enjoy the country on foot. If you've ever felt curious about what a long-distance trail looks like before it's complete, this is an excellent opportunity.

