

The U.S. Citizen Guide to Georgia

A deep-dive companion — 29 sections, 29 QR codes, straight to the source

This extended edition summarizes 29 sections of the full 786-page, 56-chapter guide across history, culture, geography, current affairs, economy & society, and practical travel. Every section below has its own discussion question and its own QR code — scan it to jump straight to that topic's full page on kartuli.xyz, not a generic landing page.

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History & Identity



NEW TO GEORGIA?

Not a State. Not a Satellite. A Civilization.

Georgia sits at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia in the Caucasus Mountains, bordered by Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Black Sea. Americans often confuse it with the U.S. state, and 70 years of Soviet absorption (1921–1991) obscured its distinct identity — but Georgia is an ancient civilization with over 3,000 years of recorded history.

DISCUSS — Georgia has been occupied by Persia, the Ottomans, Russia, and the USSR, yet kept its own alphabet and language. What does that suggest about the relationship between political sovereignty and cultural survival?

kartuli.xyz/start-here.html



HISTORY OVERVIEW

The Story of Georgia

The full guide frames Georgian history as a three-thousand-year saga of “Sakartvelo,” distinct from the Soviet-era lens through which the West often views it — spanning the mythic Kingdom of Colchis, Christianization, a Golden Age, fragmentation under Mongol and Persian rule, absorption by Russia, the Soviet period, and independence.

DISCUSS — How does Georgia’s position at the “crossroads of civilizations” shape its identity—blessing, curse, or both?

kartuli.xyz/the-story-of-georgia.html



1184–1213

The Golden Age: Queen Tamar's Reign

Queen Tamar ruled Georgia during its medieval Golden Age, a period of territorial expansion and cultural flourishing that produced Shota Rustaveli’s national epic “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin.” Tamar was titled “King,” not “Queen,” to denote full sovereign power — a Golden Age that ended with the Mongol invasions.

DISCUSS — Rustaveli’s “Knight in the Panther’s Skin” remains central to Georgian identity 800 years later. What explains the enduring power of national epics?

kartuli.xyz/golden-age.html



70 YEARS OF OCCUPATION

The Soviet Period (1921–1991)

The Red Army invaded the three-year-old Democratic Republic of Georgia on February 25, 1921, ending its first modern statehood, with final resistance crushed at Kojori Heights that March. The ensuing 70 years were a paradox in which Soviet rule suppressed yet showcased Georgian culture, producing both Stalin and the 1989 independence protest movement that helped dissolve the USSR.

DISCUSS — The 1978 language protests succeeded where similar movements failed elsewhere in the USSR. What factors enabled this rare Soviet concession?

kartuli.xyz/soviet-period.html



12 MIN READ

The Flashpoint: 1991–Present

Georgia declared independence in 1991 and immediately fell into civil war and territorial loss in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, followed by the 2003 Rose Revolution, the 2008 Russo–Georgian War, and a Georgian Dream era that has since passed a “foreign influence” law and disputed the 2024 elections. By 2026 the country has two rival claimants to the presidency and suspended EU accession talks.

DISCUSS — When a government commands strong public support for one geopolitical direction but pursues the opposite path through electoral and legal mechanisms, what recourse remains legitimate for citizens and international actors, and where is the line between backsliding and outright authoritarian capture?

kartuli.xyz/the-flashpoint.html

PART

Culture & Heritage



13 MIN READ

Georgian Culture & Heritage

Georgia developed a unique alphabet independent of Cyrillic, Latin, Greek, or Arabic, with three distinct forms still in use today — Asomtavruli (5th century), Nuskhuri (9th century, ecclesiastical), and Mkhedruli (10th–11th centuries, the modern secular script). In 2016 UNESCO inscribed the “Living culture of three writing systems of the Georgian alphabet” as Intangible Cultural Heritage.

DISCUSS — Georgian polyphonic singing was selected for the Voyager Golden Record. What does this selection say about how we define “universal” human culture?

kartuli.xyz/culture.html



THE GEORGIAN LANGUAGE · 23 MIN READ

A Linguistic Isolate

Georgian belongs to the Kartvelian language family, unrelated to any other language on Earth, and uses one of only 14 unique alphabets still in active use. In 1978, mass protests forced a rare Soviet concession to preserve Georgian as the republic’s official language.

DISCUSS — Georgian is a linguistic isolate with no proven relatives. How does linguistic isolation shape cultural identity and the preservation of heritage?

kartuli.xyz/language.html



GEORGIAN WINE · 16 MIN READ

8,000 Years of Winemaking

Archaeological evidence places the origin of wine production in Georgia at 8,000 BCE — the oldest in the world. The traditional qvevri method, aging wine in buried clay vessels, is recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage and remains in active use today.

DISCUSS — How does the qvevri winemaking tradition reflect broader Georgian cultural values around continuity, craftsmanship, and identity?

kartuli.xyz/wine.html



3 MIN READ

Georgian Cuisine

Georgian cuisine is distinguished by its reliance on walnuts rather than dairy fats for richness, featured in dishes like Satsivi, Bazhe, and Badrijani Nigvzit. Its national dish, khachapuri (cheese-filled bread), has regional variants including the boat-shaped Adjara version. Food culture centers on the Supra, a multi-hour communal feast led by a Tamada (toastmaster).

DISCUSS — The supra (feast) is described as a “social contract” rather than mere entertainment. How does food function as a social institution beyond nutrition?

kartuli.xyz/cuisine.html



14 MIN READ

Georgian Orthodox Christianity

Georgia adopted Christianity as its state religion in 337 CE under King Mirian III, following the missionary work of St. Nino — one of the earliest Christian nations, ahead of the Roman Empire (380 CE). The Church became autocephalous (self-governing) starting with the Council of Dvin in 467 CE and today polls above 90% public approval, having survived 70 years of Soviet atheism.

DISCUSS — The Georgian Orthodox Church survived 70 years of Soviet atheism and emerged with 90%+ approval ratings. What explains institutional resilience under persecution?

kartuli.xyz/religion.html



16 MIN READ

Georgian Music & Dance

NASA's 1977 Voyager Golden Record included Chakrulo, a Georgian polyphonic war song from Kakheti; UNESCO inscribed Georgian Polyphonic Singing as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2001. Georgian polyphony uses three or more independent vocal lines with dissonant intervals, varying regionally between Kakhetian, Gurian, Svan, and Megrelian/Imeretian styles.

DISCUSS — How does the split between “stage Georgian music” (polished, state-sponsored) and “village Georgian music” (raw, orally transmitted) shape what counts as authentic cultural heritage, and who gets to decide?

kartuli.xyz/music-and-dance.html



11 MIN READ

Georgian Architecture

Svan towers (koshki), built between the 9th and 13th centuries and UNESCO-listed as part of Upper Svaneti in 1996, defended against both blood feuds and avalanches. Georgia's Golden Age produced UNESCO-listed religious sites like Gelati Monastery and Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, while the Soviet era imposed mass housing and brutalist structures such as the 1975 Ministry of Highways building.

DISCUSS — Soviet brutalist buildings are now called “architectural treasures” by some while others see them as symbols of occupation — how should a society decide whether to preserve, adapt, or demolish architecture tied to a painful past?

kartuli.xyz/architecture.html

Geography & Regions



14 MIN READ

Geography & Topography

Georgia packs extraordinary geographic diversity — from Black Sea coastline to Caucasus peaks above 5,000 meters — into a country smaller than South Carolina. This compressed range of climate zones and terrain has long shaped distinct regional identities within a single small nation.

DISCUSS — Georgia contains 12 climate zones in a country smaller than South Carolina. How does this geographic diversity shape regional identities and national unity?

kartuli.xyz/geography.html



16 MIN READ

Svaneti: The Mountain Fortress

Svaneti occupies the high valleys of the Greater Caucasus at elevations between 1,500 and 2,500 meters, accessible by road only 6–7 months a year. This isolation preserved the Svan language (spoken by 15,000–30,000 people) and produced the region's UNESCO-listed defensive towers, built primarily between the 9th and 13th centuries.

DISCUSS — Now that roads, electricity, and tourism have reduced Svaneti's isolation, what tools (other than geography) can a culture use to preserve itself?

kartuli.xyz/svaneti.html



16 MIN READ

Kakheti: The Wine Heartland

Kakheti produces roughly 70% of Georgian wine, centered on the 351-kilometer Alazani Valley, whose soils and climate create ideal terroir for grapes like Saperavi and Rkatsiteli. The region is the heartland of the qvevri method, tied to the Supra feast and the role of the Tamada toastmaster.

DISCUSS — Kakheti's wine identity rests on both an 8,000-year-old traditional method and 19th-century European techniques. When a region's signature product has multiple competing “authentic” traditions, how should it decide what to preserve versus modernize?

kartuli.xyz/kakheti.html



15 MIN READ

Adjara: The Autonomous Coast

Adjara is Georgia's only autonomous republic, on the subtropical Black Sea coast, shaped by 300 years of Ottoman rule (1578–1878) during which many residents converted to Islam while remaining ethnically and linguistically Georgian. Its capital, Batumi, is Georgia's second-largest port and a tourism hub.

DISCUSS — Adjara's Muslim Georgians speak Georgian and identify as Georgian despite differing in religion from the Orthodox majority. What does this suggest about the difference between national identity and religious identity?

kartuli.xyz/adjara.html

Current Affairs & Geopolitics



ABKHAZIA & SOUTH OSSETIA · 15 MIN READ

Occupied Territories

Roughly 20% of internationally recognized Georgian territory — Abkhazia and South Ossetia — has been under Russian-backed occupation since the 2008 war, a frozen conflict with no resolution in sight and real consequences for the civilians who live there.

DISCUSS — How do frozen conflicts differ from active wars in their long-term effects on civilian populations and national development?

kartuli.xyz/occupied-territories.html



5-DAY WAR

The 2008 War: What Actually Happened

The Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 erupted after months of provocation and a NATO summit that promised Georgia eventual membership without a concrete timeline, culminating in a Russian invasion through the Roki Tunnel. A Sarkozy-brokered ceasefire ended the fighting, but Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent and never withdrew.

DISCUSS — When a promise of future alliance membership is made without a firm timeline or security guarantee, does that ambiguity deter aggression or invite it?

kartuli.xyz/2008-war.html



16 MIN READ

Shida Kartli: The Heartland Under Occupation

Shida Kartli is the etymological and historical core of Georgian identity — “Kartli” is the root of “Sakartvelo” — and home to King Vakhtang Gorgasali’s 5th-century unification. Since 2008, 1,393 km² of the region’s northern territory has been under Russian occupation, with “borderization” fences advancing the boundary and dividing villages like Khurvaleti.

DISCUSS — Why might gradual territorial encroachment be harder for the international community to respond to than an outright invasion, and what does that reveal about the limits of diplomatic protest?

kartuli.xyz/shida-kartli.html



DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Georgia's Authoritarian Pivot

A Georgian Dream-led transformation has centered on the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence (2024) and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (2025), tools the guide characterizes as state capture against civil society and independent media. It links this to the disputed October 2024 elections, a “dual presidency” legitimacy crisis, and suspended EU accession talks.

DISCUSS — What factors distinguish democratic backsliding from temporary political turbulence? How can observers identify the difference in real time?

kartuli.xyz/authoritarian-pivot-georgia-democracy.html



SUSPENDED UNTIL 2028

EU Accession Status Update

Georgia received EU candidate status in December 2023, but the government announced in November 2024 that accession negotiations would be suspended until 2028, following the foreign agent law the EU deemed incompatible with membership. Schengen visa-free travel continues unaffected for ordinary citizens.

DISCUSS — When a government suspends its own path toward an alliance that over 80% of its citizens support, whose interests is that government actually representing?

kartuli.xyz/eu-accession-status-update.html



ARTICLE 5 DILEMMA

The NATO Question

Georgia was promised eventual NATO membership at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, but Germany and France blocked a Membership Action Plan out of fear of provoking Russia — and Russia invaded four months later. The unresolved occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia now creates a de facto veto over Georgian accession, even as public support for NATO remains around 65–75%.

DISCUSS — Does offering a country a symbolic promise of future membership without a security guarantee protect it or make it more vulnerable?

kartuli.xyz/nato-membership.html

PART

Economy & Society



42 MIN READ

Education in Georgia

King David IV “the Builder” founded the Gelati Academy near Kutaisi in 1106, operating for over 700 years. Tbilisi State University, founded 1918, was the first modern university in the Caucasus to teach in the local language rather than Russian. Under Soviet rule, Georgian literacy rose from about 50% in 1920 to over 99% by the 1980s.

DISCUSS — The Rose Revolution reforms prioritized anti-corruption over pedagogical innovation. Was this the right sequencing? What are the tradeoffs of institutional integrity before educational quality?

kartuli.xyz/education.html



12 MIN READ

The Georgian Diaspora

Estimates suggest hundreds of thousands to over a million Georgians live outside Georgia’s borders. Russia hosts the largest community (200,000–500,000), built up through Soviet-era migration, while the United States hosts a growing diaspora of an estimated 50,000–100,000, concentrated in New York/New Jersey and Los Angeles.

DISCUSS — Remittances form a significant portion of Georgia’s GDP. How does economic dependence on diaspora affect national development and policy?

kartuli.xyz/diaspora.html



11 MIN READ

Notable Figures

The guide profiles Georgians across eras and fields, from medieval rulers like Queen Tamar and David the Builder to Soviet-era figures such as Lavrentiy Beria, and contemporary figures including footballer Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. It also names oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, sanctioned by the U.S. in December 2024 for “undermining the democratic and Euro-Atlantic future of Georgia.”

DISCUSS — When a nation’s history includes figures who both built its identity and betrayed it from within, how should a “notable figures” narrative handle moral complexity without erasing wrongdoing or reducing everyone to hero or villain?

kartuli.xyz/notable-figures.html



ADVANCED

The Stalin Question

Roughly 57% of Georgians positively rate Stalin’s historical role as of 2023, even though his Great Purge and related repression killed or imprisoned over 100,000 Georgians. The Stalin Museum in Gori remains Georgia’s most-visited museum, with a 2015 survey finding 73% of Georgians learned either nothing or only positive information about Stalin in school.

DISCUSS — How should a nation teach the history of a native son who became one of history’s most brutal dictators, and can pride in his global rise ever be separated from accountability for what he did to his own people?

kartuli.xyz/stalin-question.html



INTERMEDIATE

Georgian Women in History and Today

The guide traces a lineage of powerful Georgian women, from Saint Nino, who converted the king and queen to Christianity in the 4th century, to King Tamar (titled “King,” not “Queen,” to denote full sovereign power), to modern figures like President Salome Zourabichvili and chess Grandmaster Nona Gaprindashvili.

DISCUSS — How can a culture simultaneously venerate women as historical and spiritual pillars while maintaining traditional gender roles in everyday life?

kartuli.xyz/georgian-women.html

PART

Practical Guide for Americans



2026 EDITION

Travel to Georgia: Practical Guide

Georgia welcomed over 7 million international visitors in 2023 and grants U.S. citizens visa-free entry for up to 365 days, though as of January 1, 2026 all visitors must carry health/accident insurance covering at least 30,000 GEL. There are no direct flights from the U.S.; most Americans route through Istanbul, a roughly 21-hour journey.

DISCUSS — As Georgia’s tourism grows toward destinations like Svaneti and Mtskheta, what tradeoffs should the country make between welcoming more visitors and protecting the historic sites and communities those visitors come to see?

kartuli.xyz/travel-practical.html



GEORGIA & OTHER COUNTRIES

Dual Citizenship Rules

Georgia permits dual citizenship, but as of 2026 citizens naturalizing abroad must obtain prior consent from the state before taking a foreign oath. Male citizens aged 18–27 remain liable for military conscription regardless of dual-national status, with a deferment fee of 5,000 GEL per year.

DISCUSS — What does Georgia's shift from an informal, after-the-fact amnesty system to a strict prior-consent requirement suggest about how the state balances ties to its diaspora against control over who counts as a citizen?

kartuli.xyz/dual-citizenship-georgia.html



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