

# FROM MESTIA TO USHGULI

Duration: 2-4 days

A good walker with a tent could comfortably finish this trek in three days, but if you want to sleep in guesthouses, you probably need to split it into four days. Unless you are a really fit and fast - in this case, you can do the whole trek even in two days (with sleepover in Adishi).

Difficulty: Moderate

The first and last day are quite easy, but on both days between you will have to overcome considerable elevation.

When to go:

Best time to go is July-August. For people looking for a shoulder season - Atsulta pass usually becomes passable in the second half of June and shepherds leave the area with their herds in the first half of October.

Accommodation:

The tent is not necessary; you can sleep in guesthouses. Also, they serve breakfasts and dinners and can also prepare a lunchbox.

People often ask me if it's necessary to book accommodation in advance. The answer is - if you are trekking in July or August and have no camping gear, you should. The locals will probably find you some place to sleep even when they are full, but it may not be the most comfortable option. The easiest way to book is to ask guesthouse owner in your first village (usually Mestia) to make the booking for you, they have the necessary contacts.

When to go:

The season for this trek is from the beginning of June till late October. Each period has its pros and cons. In June, one can enjoy green scenery with blooming flowers, but there is a reason why everything is green and it has something to do with rain. In October, you can admire colorful autumn foliage, but days are already much shorter and colder. Also, in the second half of the month, one can expect first severe snowfalls.

The best time to visit is during July and August, but that's when most people visit. Therefore, I personally prefer middle of September - weather is still nice and as a bonus, the trail is free of crowds.

## Which way to hike:

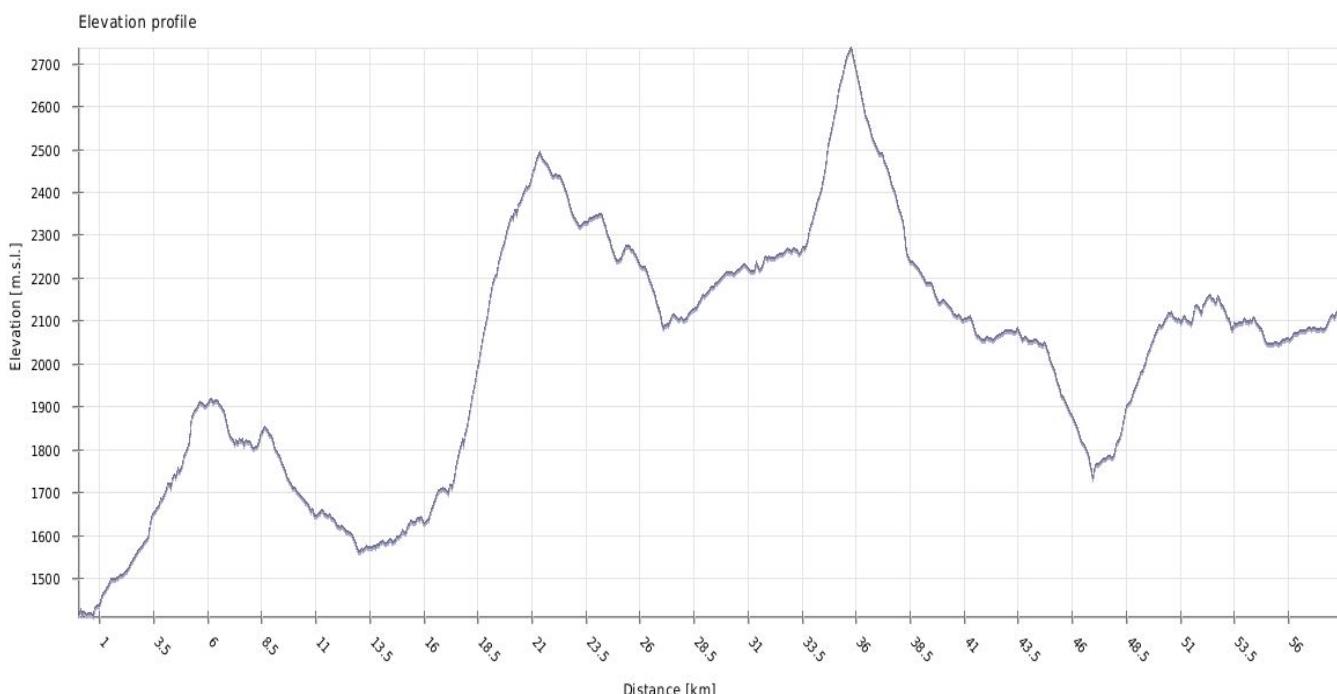
People usually start from Mestia because Ushguli is a great place to finish the trek - and it's infinitely more fun to journey somewhere where you haven't been yet than drive from Mestia to Ushguli and then return on foot. Also, it's easier to cross the dangerous stream beyond Adishi which should be done in the morning, when the water level is lower.

However, with the growing popularity of the trek, also the opposite direction starts making more and more sense, especially if you don't like crowded trails. If you hike in the opposite direction than most, you will meet almost all other hikers in a span of one or two hours and for the rest of the day will have the trail for yourself.

## How to leave Ushguli:

If you need to return to Mestia, your best bet used to be minivans making day trips from Mestia to Ushguli. They usually had a few empty seats on the return trip which occurred around 3 pm. . However, in the past years, drivers became reluctant to bring hikers back since the Ushguli drivers try to claim all hikers that reached village on foot and other drivers don't want to have problems with locals. So don't rely on these buses too much. So what to do? You can either take a taxi from locals (costs as much as 40 GEL per person) or walk on the road towards Iprali and once the village is out of sight, try to stop some minivan with daytrippers, that should be a bit cheaper.

If you want to prolong your trek, you can cross into Lower Svaneti on foot [via Latpari pass](#) or [Zagar pass](#).



How to get to Mestia:

### From Zugdidi to Mestia:

Marshrutkas to Mestia leave from Zugdidi train station every day. The first one departs around 6:30 a.m, after the arrival of the night train from Tbilisi, but there should be several others before noon. The last one usually departs at 14:30. The trip takes about 3-4 hours (1-hour break included) and the price is 20 GEL per person.

### From Tbilisi to Mestia:

In my opinion, **the best option is the night train to Zugdidi** and marshrutka from there. Train departs from Tbilisi at 21:45 and reaches Zugdidi at 6:05 am. Price of the ticket is 21 GEL, tickets for sleeper berths can be bought in advance at [matarebeli.ge](http://matarebeli.ge) website (the official web is [railway.ge](http://railway.ge), but that never worked for me). Just one important thing - tickets are released for the online sale only some 20 days in advance. So don't freak out if you can't buy your ticket online because of the "no tickets available" error :)

There is also a **day train option** for those who don't like sleepers. This train departs from Tbilisi at 8:10 and makes it to Zugdidi at 13:45, just in time to catch some of the last marshrutkas to Svaneti. The price of the ride is 16 GEL.

If you want to save time, **you could also consider a flight** - there are 4 flights a week from Natakhtari airport near Tbilisi, operated by VanillaSky company . You would see Caucasus from a completely different perspective and for 90 GEL it's quite a bargain. On the downside, they occasionally get canceled because of the weather and during the summer, you should book at least month in advance since they get booked up pretty fast. For more info, pls check this [excellent post about the flight](#) (covers also flight from Kutaisi).

The last option is the direct marshrutka - two minibuses depart at 7:00 from the area in front of Main Railway Station, come at least 30 minutes earlier to catch a spot. Another one departs at 8:00 from Samgori railway station. The price is 30 GEL, so it's quite cheap, but I can't recommend it since this uncomfortable journey takes grueling 9-10 hours - basically, it's just slower, marginally cheaper and less comfortable alternative for the day train.

If you want to take bus, it much better to take comfortable long-distance buses operated by the [Turkish company Metro bus](#). The downside is that they will get you only as far as to Zugdidi. There, you will have to switch to marshrutka to get to Mestia.

### From Kutaisi to Mestia:

This depends on whether you want to get to Mestia from the city or from the Kutaisi airport.

In the first case, your best options are **the direct minibuses (the price is 25 GEL) departing from the station behind McDonalds**. The first one leaves at 9:00 but if you want to secure your spot, **get there between 8:00 - 8:30 am.** since it's quite popular among tourists. The next marshrutka then departs at 10:00 or even earlier if full. If you miss both and there is none other direct bus available, look for a marshrutka to Zugdidi (price 7 GEL) - it's the same way and you can find there transport to Mestia more easily (especially if you notify your driver in Kutaisi that you need to continue to Mestia).

**If you are travelling directly from the airport**, the most reliable way to get to Mestia is to use the service of Georgian bus (they have a stand at the airport) - the price is 40 GEL per person. You can also ask some taxi drivers loitering at the arrivals hall, they may be willing to give you even a better price.

### **From Batumi to Mestia:**

Marshrutka is the only option, it departs from the main bus station. Since you will have to switch the bus in Zugdidi (you may have to wait for several hours there), this ride takes a better part of the day. The first bus departs at 8:00 am, then there should be another one at 9:30 am.

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### **How busy is this trek?**

Trek from Mestia to Ushguli is certainly not the one to choose if you are looking for a silence or solitude. But that shouldn't put you off - the number of hikers is still far, far from crowds you can encounter on some popular European trails. To provide some numbers - during the shoulder season (Jun, Sep), several dozens trekkers tend to depart each day from Mestia (or more or less, depending on the weather). This number greatly grows during the summer season - the busiest month is August when the number of trekkers on some days can reach 150 people (on each day section). That's a lot, but people tend to spread during the day so it's not like you are going to walk in a queue.

### **Is the trek safe?**

Trek is as safe as it can get in Georgia. During the season, there are dozens of people each day so if something happens, help is not far away. Most of the time, you will have cell coverage. The trail is well-trodden and not that difficult. You won't see any bears, wolves, vipers or aggressive shepherd dogs. Also people are mostly nice :)

Still, if there is one group I would like to warn, it would be solo women. If you take care, you will be fine - it's not that there are some aggressors lurking in bushes. Still, I will rather scare hundreds of people if it helps prevent one unpleasant encounter. And heard about some isolated incidents of harassment. So it's always better to mitigate the risk. Sleep only at official guesthouses with other hikers around. Do not accept invitation from strangers and don't drink alcohol with them in private, especially if you are the only woman around. And if you want to feel safer on the trail, stick to other people. So, nothing special, just a common sense - simply do not put yourself in a position where you would be vulnerable.

### **What do I need for Mestia-Ushguli trek?**

Just the stuff you need for dayhikes. Guesthouse can provide blankets, bedding as well as all food so you will have to carry mostly clothes you won't wear during the usual hiking day. That means rain jacket or raincoat, some warmer clothes for chilly evenings, extra socks, underwear, T-shirt and sleeping clothes. You will also have to carry a few liters of water, some snacks, sunscreen and so on. All of this should comfortably fit into 25-30 liters large backpack.

## Day 1: Mestia - Zhabeshi

distance 16.1km, 763m up and 523m down

The trek starts on Mestia's main square. Leaving it through the gate by the new Queen Tamar's statue and turn right. Follow the street to the river, cross it and turn left - this is where the marked route starts. The trail here turns into a dirt track. It climbs slowly passing the Hotel Tetnuldi and later a row of wooden chalets to leave Mestia behind. Then you will pass a huge construction site on your right (supposedly a new hydrocentral).

**After a while, you will see ruined buildings ahead. Before you reach them, turn right**

**uphill.** After gaining some 50 elevation meters, the dirt track becomes more pleasant again - it goes through the light forest and over pastures from which you will have a nice view of Mt. Ushba.

Eventually, you will reach a meadow with the another pointer. **It will divert you from the dirt road onto a short, but very steep trail through the forest.** You should reconnect the road in less than 10 minutes. Here, turn right and walk another 300 meters until you see a huge meadow on your left - a perfect place for a break.

Ten minutes after leaving the meadow, you will reach **a viewpoint with a beautiful view of Svaneti valley** dominated by Mt. Tetnuldi peak. You are at the highest point of today's walk.

From here, the track goes down into the valley. Ten minutes later, you will reach a spot where a small trail branches off to the left, little uphill and into some bushes, while a large track keeps going down. **Here, you need make a decision - there are two ways to enter the valley.**

The trail often seen as "the classic one" follows the large track downhill. Soon, it sharply turns to the right and descends into Zardlashi village. Here, it turns east again and follows the large track through Murshkeli villahe to Zhamushi, where is reconnects the upper trail.

→ **The upper trail to Zhamushi:**

This trail is more interesting, but also a bit harder to follow. Follow the small trail to the left through young forest and past a small construction site. Soon, you will reach a transmitter - this is where now already obvious track turns south and rejoin the classic trail. To stay on the upper trail, look for a faint trail to the left and walk through the meadow straight towards the Lakhiri village. The detour was worth it - **Lakhiri is one of the most charming villages in Svaneti** and yet almost untouched by tourism. Here you will finally turn right and descend to Zhamushi to rejoin the classic trail.

### Trail parameters

|                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| Distance        | 56,9 km    |
| Trail type:     | A → B trip |
| Max. elevation: | 2737m      |
| Min. elevation: | 1411m      |
| Total climb:    | 3106m ↑    |
| Total descent:  | 2102m ↓    |

From Zhamushi, the trail continues further east to Cholashi village - this village is not too interesting, but one can find here a moderately popular beer bar.

After Cholashi, the trail bends south towards the Mulkhura river. Once, there was a small trail following it's northern bank to the bridge further to the east so hikers approached Zhabeshi village from the north. But **since it was heavily damaged during last year's floods, it's recommended just to cross the bridge south of Cholashi** and head straight for the villages. The first one is Chvabiani, further lies Zhabeshi and both have many decent guesthouses.

## Day 2: Zhabeshi - Adishi distance 10.6km, 909m and 527m

Walk uphill (south) along the stream flowing through the village until you cross it next to the last house and tower of the village. Follow the path which passes the house and tower in western direction, cross the belt of trees and reach a junction. Here, you will find a pointer - **the trail to Adishi is to the left.**

The trail turns south-east and climbs over a series of pastures and through a light forest. Cow trails might sometimes create confusion, but **the main route is marked, well-trodden and should be easy to follow.** Behind you, views of the valley open up.

After around two hours of climbing through dense, low forest you will reach the cable car line belonging to Tetnuldi skiing resort (but you are already quite far above the bottom station). Follow the road and skiing track uphill. After some 20 minutes, roughly at 2500m altitude, a marked trail (Hadiish) branches off to the south-east. The path crosses open areas with nice views and wildflowers and then slowly descends into the forest. At some point, before crossing a stream, there is **a small bar where you can buy some refreshments.** Less than an hour later, you reach Adishi. The village is hidden below the slope and you will see it at the last possible moment.

### → Upper trail do Adishi:

If you want to enjoy even better views and escape crowds for a while, this trail might a good alternative. Compared to the classic trail, it starts further uphill, some 200 elevation meters higher, close to the exit station of the lowest cable car line, the only one which works in summer. Because of this, it may be a good idea to buy a ticket (should cost some 10 GEL). The entry station lies some 800 meters downhill from the place where the trail from Zhabeshi enters the ski resort so you will have either to backtrack or choose a different trail from Zhabeshi, which climbs straight to the entry station (starts at a waypoint named "Turn left" in the gpx log). This upper trail **traverses the base of Tetnuldi mountain through open grasslands.** Finally, it turns south and then comes a steep descent to Adishi. Overall, I think it is a pretty good way to prolong this, otherwise quite easy, hiking day. The only disadvantages are that the final descent could be pretty hard on your knees and there is no bar on this route.

## Day 3: Adishi - Iprali distance 18.7km, 860m and 1069m

Another day and another tricky part in the morning - fording of the Adishi river. During the main season, when many hikers leave Adishi to Iprali, you can expect people with horses waiting at the crossing to shuttle you across the river. The usual price is 20 GEL per person. Outside the high season or if there are few hikers, it is good to ask around in the village about the water level and hire a horse if necessary - several locals offer this service.

Leave the village by a path heading by the river to the east, to the foot of Adishi glacier. After one hour the path ends in a river - you will have to ford it. During the season, there are usually several locals from Adishi with horses which offer transport, However, **they charge 20 GEL per person which is, considering the duration of the ride, a total ripoff**. They are conveniently waiting at a spot where the current is the strongest - before you pay, I recommend to walk some 50 meters upstream where the river branches out into several not so deep streams and check if you can cross on your own. The water is freezing so you won't be able to spend too much time in the river. Wear hiking sandals and use hiking sticks. But don't take any unnecessary risk and use a horse if you don't feel confident.

Behind the river, the path appears again. After 2 hours of climbing through the fields of rhododendrons, you should **make it to the Chkhunderi pass** (2655m) - it offers great views of surrounding mountains and the Adishi glacier.

→ **Scenic detour:** If the weather is nice, you can leave your backpack at the pass and walk along the ridge north-east towards the glacier - there is a small hill with the altitude of 2800m which offers even better views of the glacier. The whole detour takes less than half an hour.

From the Chkhunderi pass, the trail heads straight down into the opposite valley. Down in the valley, you will find **a couple of huts which can provide shelter** in case of rain. Turn right, the trail to Iprali which follows the Khaldechala river is mostly downhill and quite obvious. To Iprali, it should take another 2 hours of walking.

About halfway lies an almost abandoned Khalde village. Only one family lives there, running a guesthouse which is a decent place for an afternoon beer. Or even for [the spending of the night](#) if you want to try the new, more scenic route to Ushguli - [crossing Lagem \(also known as Southern Karetta\) pass](#). Just one advice - if you want to try this route, after the descent from Chkhunderi pass check its initial section - walk about 100m to the northeast, deeper into the valley, then leave the road and head to the river. There is a marshy meadow and an old bridge which must be crossed - **confirm that both are passable** so you won't risk the major backtracking on day 4.

## Day 4: Iprali - Ushguli distance 12.4km, 677m and 436m

Nowadays, most of the people trying to get to Ushguli hire a car or walk on the main road. It's a pity because that road is quite busy and lined by electricity poles.

Luckily, **there is an alternative, much more interesting route**. How to find it? Leave Iprali village, cross Khaldechala river and instead of crossing of the bridge onto the main road, turn left onto the small road which will lead you to the Davberi village (as an alternative, you can descent onto the main road and follow it until you see small stone bridge beneath cool-looking tower fortress. If you cross it, the path will leave you to Davberi - there is also a hiking pointer). Once you pass the church, turn left onto the steeply climbing trail. There is a signpost showing you the way to Ushguli so you shouldn't get lost. On your way, you will encounter a fence but don't be afraid to pass the gate.

Once you reach the altitude of 2100m, the trail becomes more pleasant - from now on, it essentially traverses the hillside. The marking is sparse, but most of the time you can see barely visible remains of the sledge track so you shouldn't get lost. There is **only one junction in the forest where the trail forks - take the left branch**, the right one soon disappears.

Two kilometers before the Ushguli village, the trail merges with the main road. However, it's quite dusty because of passing jeeps so I prefer to **spend on it as little time as possible**. The better way to reach the village is to turn after 500 meters right, **onto a trail heading to Murkmeli**, one of four communities forming Ushguli. Pass the village (least affected by tourism, with many houses in derelict state), cross the bridge and follow the trail on the other bank of Enguri till you make it to the center of Ushguli.

You should arrive at Ushguli in time to catch shared taxis which take daytrippers back to Mestia (and manage a short walk around the village). However, if you have an extra day, **it's much better to spend a night** there as the best views of Shkhara are in usually in the morning (as on the photo below). You can use the extra time to climb to the tower above the village or for the walk to the Shkhara glacier. But, in my opinion, even better views offers the Chubedishi viewpoint to the northeast of the village.

