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## Tbilisi | Georgia

Natalia, a Kakheti winemaker, and chef-restaurateur Giorgi unveiled Georgia's extraordinary food and wine culture to Jordan Kestle (SHL).



**Natalia Khanjaliashvili** grows wine in the Kakheti region, about two hours east of Tbilisi, on land her family has farmed for generations. **Giorgi Kharazishvili** owns two restaurants in the capital, Chokhi and Chokhi Megruli, and is building a third project in the countryside near Gori: cabins, open land, a slower kind of hospitality.

**Georgia** is one of those places that takes a little time to read. Tbilisi is visually striking with carved wooden balconies over narrow streets, sulphur baths steaming in quiet neighbourhoods, Soviet-era architecture sitting alongside wine bars and boutique hotels – but the city’s real character comes through in smaller moments. A long meal. A glass of amber wine. A conversation that doesn’t rush toward a conclusion.

### Where to Go

Georgia’s two essential dishes are khinkali, large meat-filled dumplings eaten by hand, with the twisted top left on the plate as a counter, and khachapuri, a cheese-filled bread that varies by region. For the best version in the city, head to Puri Guliani.

For a wide variety of excellent Georgian cuisine, Restaurant RIGI is a reliable choice. Giorgi’s restaurants, Chokhi and Chokhi Megruli, are equally worth seeking out, both deeply rooted in Georgian culinary tradition. For an exceptional dining experience with wine at its centre, Craft Wine Restaurant stands out. For a meal with a view, the Funicular Restaurant sits above the city and offers a sweeping panorama across Tbilisi.

For wine specifically, 8000 Vintages is one of the best places in Tbilisi to explore Georgian varieties, with a selection that spans regions and styles. Staff are knowledgeable and happy to guide you through the amber wines if it’s new territory.

**Stamba Hotel** has become something of an institution in the city – originally a Soviet-era printing house, it’s now one of Tbilisi’s most characterful places to stay, and worth visiting even if you’re not a guest.

## SHL IN GEORGIA

In collaboration with Swisscontact, SHL provides consulting services in the development of a hospitality training centre in Georgia, strengthening local capacity while respecting Georgian identity, tradition and helping translate Georgia’s deeply rooted hospitality culture into sustainable professional opportunities.

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## **The Wine**

Georgia is widely considered the birthplace of wine. Archaeological evidence traces winemaking here back to 8,000 years ago, and what makes it distinctive today is less its age than its continuity. The traditional method involves fermenting both red and white grapes in clay vessels called qvevri, buried underground and sealed for months. Fermenting with the skins gives white wines their characteristic amber colour, structure and tannin. It's a method that has remained unchanged for millennia.

Natalia is pragmatic about all of this. She doesn't present it as a lifestyle statement. For her, it's about honouring something ancient – hands in the same soil, wine sealed in the same clay, a continuity that stretches back further than most countries have existed.

Georgia has preserved more than 500 indigenous grape varieties – more than anywhere else in the world – yet genuine qvevri wine accounts for only around 16 million bottles a year globally. Among those varieties, names like Rkatsiteli, Saperavi and Mtsvane remain largely unknown outside the country, which is part of what makes discovering them here feel like genuine new territory. It remains a small, human-scale tradition, even as Georgian wine grows in international recognition. «You can drink Georgian wine anywhere,» Natalia said, «but to understand it, you really need to come here.»

Kakheti is the centre of production, but wine is present throughout the country. Tbilisi alone offers access to hundreds of styles across its wine bars and restaurants – from structured amber wines to lighter, more European-style varieties for those easing into Georgian wines.

## **The Food**

Giorgi grew up eating Georgian food at home, not in restaurants. This background shapes how he thinks about what he does now. His restaurants aren't designed around spectacle. They're warm, unhurried spaces where the food – khinkali, megruli dishes, seasonal produce from local suppliers – is what matters most. Giorgi says: «Cooking is not just a technical skill; it is a way to express emotion, memory, and identity.»

He's also building something outside the city: a slower project, set in open countryside, designed around experience rather than efficiency. It fits a pattern visible across Georgia – a hospitality culture built around the home, the personal, the relational, rather than the transactional.