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DISCOVER TSALKA

A TOURIST GUIDEBOOK

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ემბრაცსალკა
EMBRACETsalka

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FOREWORD

Knowledge of tourist resources is one of the most important preconditions for the development of tourism in all regions and municipalities of Georgia. In this respect the situation is far from perfect, as qualified information about tourist facilities either is not available, or outdated and irrelevant.

The present publication provides information about distinguished tourism facilities of Tsalka municipality, covering both natural and cultural resources. The publication contains information about organic and inorganic nature, and material and non-material cultural heritage of Tsalka municipality.

The publication also contains information about tourist routes and tourist service providers available in Tsalka.

The present publication is a modest effort to help fill these gaps with the missing information about local tourist facilities.

The territory of Tsalka municipality is notable for its cultural heritage, natural monuments and archaeological sites. Cyclopean habitation sites, ruins of fortresses, caves, petroglyphs, monoliths, stone oil presses, churches of Late and Early Middle Ages, Medieval bridges, old settlements, burials, kurgans are scattered across its territory. Everyone, who lives or travels in this region has to be very careful to avoid accidental damage of treasures that have survived to our times.

ნალკის მუნიციპალიტეტის ტურისტული რუკა



პირობითი აღნიშვნები

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GENERAL OVERVIEW OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Tsalka municipality is located in Kvemo Kartli region. The area of the municipality is 1050.6 km². The town of Tsalka is an administrative center of the municipality. Till 1917 the territory of the present Tsalka municipality was a part of the Tbilisi district within the limits of Borchalo rayon. In 1965 the mentioned territory became a separate district and now it has a status of the municipality

The well-known Georgian scientists and public figure, Niko Ketskhoveli in his book: “They still will grow up...”, writes, that “currently the whole plateau is called Tsalka, while it was just a village in the past. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi – “The river flows from the north to Sabate, Ktsia. There is a domed church on the edge of Ktsia in Tsalka where the Trialeti Bishop resides”. The area from which the village Tsalka can be seen is Trialeti plateau”.

The municipality is bordered by Borjomi and Kaspi municipalities to the north, Akhalkalaki municipality to the west, Ninotsminda and Dmanisi municipalities to the south and Tetrtskaro municipality to the east.

The municipality is located in the transitional zone between moderately humid subtropical climate to dry highland climate. Across much of the territory of the municipality highland steppe climate with almost snowless winters and long, warm summers is prevalent.

Average annual precipitation reaches 600-740 mm. Maximum precipitation occurs in spring and minimum precipitation – in the beginning of summer.

Tsalka depression is a volcanic plateau the boundaries of which almost coincide with the boundaries of the municipality. Tsalka depression is located at 1500-1700 m above sea level and occupies 398.3 km². Highlands are used as pastures, while lowlands – for agricultural purposes. The central part of the depression is occupied by Tsalka water reservoir. Chochiani lava plateau, which is located mainly on the right side of the Khrami river and separates the south-eastern part of Tsalka depression from Dashbashu canyon is also within the administrative boundaries of Tsalka municipality.

Niko Ketskhoveli in his book “Under the Nine-Eyed Sun” describes the development of the terrain of Tsalka: “These plateaus were abundantly supplied with lava by the volcanos, such as currently dormant Tavkvetili and Godorebi, Abuli and Samsari, Shambiani and Emlikli. They filled up deep gullies, built large plateaus which were separated by the Abulsamsari and Kechuti (Javakheti) ranges. Later the rivers dissected these plateaus leading to the development of the Algeti, Ktsia, Chivchiva, Mashavera, Poladauri and other river gorges”.

The Ktsia (Khrami) river, followed by the Chochiana river is the largest river in Tsalka municipality. The Ktsia river takes its rise on the Javakheti range. Tsalka (Khrami) water reservoir, the largest water reservoir in Georgia is located on the territory of Tsalka municipality. There are also lakes: Baretj, Khadiki, Leliani, etc.

According to the census of 2014, population of Tsalka municipality is 18 849, making about 0,5% of population of Georgia. Men make up 53% of the local population, women – 47%. 84% of the population of the municipality lives in rural areas, 16% - on urban territories.

The municipality is ethnically diverse. Almost half of the population are ethnic Georgians, the rest of consists of Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Greeks. This aspect gives Tsalka municipality a distinctive cultural and social character.

One hospital is in operation in Tsalka. Ambulatories provide medical services in the villages Kushcha, Kokhta, Beshtasheni and Avranlo. Sports grounds, a library and a cultural center are available in the municipality.

Agriculture is the most developed sector in the municipality. The main agricultural activities include: potato growing and grain crop growing, as well as livestock breeding.

High quality mineral resources are found on the territory of the municipality. The deposits of perlite, obsidian and pumice are identified at the border between Tsalka and Ninotsminda municipalities, construction sand is found in the village Kizilkilisa.

The town of Tsalka is an administrative center of the municipality. It is located 90 km far from Tbilisi, within Tsalka depression at 1460 m above sea level. Tsalka is a recreational area mainly due to its



medium mountain climate. Its old name is Edzani, later the town was called Barmaksizi (till 1932). The historical Tsalka, which had been a religious-administrative center of Trialeti in X-XV centuries was inundated as a result of construction of Tsalka water reservoir. The cathedra and the esidency of the Manglisi and Tsalka Eparchy is accommodated in Tsalka.





TOURIST RESOURCES OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Natural attractions

Tsalka municipality is characterized by specific natural attractions due to its physical and geographical conditions. The relative monotony of the natural landscape of the municipality is broken by lakes, canyons, waterfalls and vaclusian springs. Currently, there is only one protected area in the municipality - the Dazbashi canyon natural monument. In Soviet times two natural attractions - Chikiani mount and Oliangi vaclusian spring located on the territory of the municipality were included into the Red Book. Bareti lake is among the planned protected areas.

DASHBASHI CANYON

N41 35.651 E44 07.458

The canyon is located in the environs of the village Dashbashi, at 1230-1550 m above sea level. It is a canyonlike gorge developed by the Ktsia river in volcanic lavas. Many water-abundant streams flow from its slopes and create small waterfalls. These waterfalls and local morphological features form a microclimate of Dashbashi canyon supporting the ecosystem that is quite different from the typical landscape of Tsalka municipality. Vakhushti Bagrationi describes the stream flowing in the Dashbashi canyon, which was rich in fish at that time: "Ktsia flows from the cliff below Edzani and above Akhalkalaki. The large Aku lake is underneath. Salmon and big fish cannot move upstream...".

Dashbashi canyon is protected as a natural monument and is a part of the Algeti National Park.

BARETI LAKE

N41 39.495 E44 10.427

Bareti lake is located in the eastern part of Tsalka depression at 1612 m above sea level. The area of the surface of the lake is 1,34 km², the area of its watershed – 9,3 km², maximum depth – 1,3 m, capacity – 1,1 million m³. The lake is fed by precipitation and groundwater. The banks are waterlogged. The lake is notable for its vegetation comprised of cattail, spikerush, rush, water crowfoot, water knotweed. Big white flowers and leaves of water lily are floating on the water surface.

OLIANGI (BERTA) VAUCLUSIAN SPRING

N41 36.748 E43 52.517



This natural monument is a water abundant clean spring flowing from volcanic layers, with a centuries old church and stone pool. The pool is inhabited by trout which are considered sacred by believers. Trout can easily leave the pool and move to the river through the spring, however they never do so. Currently the vauclusian spring and its surroundings are on the territory of the monastery which is one of the most attractive destinations for religious tourism in Kvemo Kartli region.



MOUNT CHIKIANI

41.482999, 43.889890



Mount Chikiani is a dormant volcano built of Neogene and liparite-dacitic lavas which are rich in obsidian. Its elevation is 2415 m above sea level. The mountain is located at the border between Tsalka and Ninotsminda municipalities on the Javakheti range. The name of the mount “Chikiani” is used by Vakhushti Bagrationi. “Chika” in old Georgian means glass. Obsidian articles made from local obsidian are found across Georgia and abroad (up to Absheron peninsula and the North Caucasus).

SAINT SOPHIA OAK

41.59015, 44.12394

About 500-600 years old oak growing in the village Dashbashi. Oriental oak tree is a distinguished natural monument in Tsalka municipality. This tree is considered to be sacred for locals. That is one of the reasons that made it possible for the tree to survive.

“This is an oriental oak tree, mountain oak. The elevation of the site is 1750 m above sea level, i.e., the habitat of this species. According to other characteristics, this area, like Zurtaketi and Javakheti, was covered by mountain forests, however time had taken its toll and only Tash-Bashi oak survived mainly because it is considered sacred. An icon is still rested at its bottom” (Niko Ketskhoveli “They still will grow up”).

Coniferous forest has been planted around the oak in Soviet times.



CANYON OF THE CHILCHILI RIVER

N41 39.018 E44 06.544



The canyon is located at 1575 m above sea level. At the village Samadlo the Chilchili river forms about 400 m long and 15-20 m deep canyon. There is also an artificial forest stand. The site at the entrance of the canyon, where natural spring is flowing, can be used for camping.

BESHTASHENI WATERFALL

41.64341, 44.11042

At the village Beshtasheni, at 1554 m above sea level, the Chilchili river forms a waterfall. The waterfall is not large, it is just few meters high, however, the surrounding environment, clear water and the sound of the mountain rivers make the area fascinating.

JAMUSHI LAKE

41.66046, 43.81414



Jamushi lake is located at 1756 m above sea level. The area of its surface is 1,47 km². The lake is fed by precipitation and groundwater. From December till March the lake is covered with ice. Coniferous forests grow around the lake. In summer the lake is the best camping and picnic site.

TSALKA (KHRAMI) WATER RESERVOIR

41.61585, 44.01884



Tsalka water reservoir, the largest water reservoir in Georgia by surface area (33,7 km²) is noteworthy. The area of its watershed is 1060 km², capacity 312 million m³, maximum depth 25 m, average depth 9,3 m. The banks of the reservoir for the most part are slightly sloping and low, only the south-eastern bank is steep and high. The reservoir is fed by waters of the Khrami river and other small rivers, as well as underground water, snowmelt and rain. The water reservoir was built in 1946 for energy purposes. In winter the coastal part of the surface of the water reservoir is covered with ice. The water reservoir serves the Khrami HPP I and Khrami HPP II. Tournaments in different types of fishing are often organized on the water reservoir.



CULTURAL HERITAGE OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Tsalka municipality is one of the distinguished administrative-territorial units of Georgia in terms of the abundance of monuments of cultural heritage and their importance. Material cultural heritage consists mainly of churches and megalithic structures. The municipality is rich in archeological sites as well. Important petroglyphic images have been found on the territory of the municipality. According to the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, more than 600 monuments of cultural heritage are registered in Tsalka municipality.

MEGALITHIC CONSTRUCTIONS AND HABITATION SITES

Megalithic constructions are found across the territory of Tsalka municipality. Megaliths are structures built of large stones using a dry masonry technique. They were used for protection, spiritual and household purposes. There are several remarkable megalithic structures dating back thousands of years in Tsalka. They are heavily damaged and in most cases only ruins remain. The presence of megalithic structures creates excellent opportunities for the development of scientific, educational and archeological tourism in Tsalka.



“CYCLOPEAN HABITATION SITE” AND AVRANLO (TEZI) CYCLOPEAN FORTRESS

41.66266, 43.88395

“Cyclopean habitation site” and Avranlo (Tezi) cyclopean fortress are located northwest of the village Avranlo, on the left bank of the Ktsia river at 1640 m above sea level. The fortress is comprised of a wall and systems of fortified yards and small terraces which are interconnected with narrow passages and gates. The wall is built of large, undressed basalt boulders, the remaining spaces between which are filled with stones. The width of the wall is 3-4 m. Remains of residential structures are found inside the fortress. There is a separate wall at the river bank, on the first terrace in the bottom of the cliff, where a church was constructed in the Middle Ages. There are rock-cut caves to the south and west of the complex, along the river. A large habitation site of the Kura–Araxes culture has been found on the plain to the north of the fortress, on the left side of the gully. Therefore, it can be assumed that the fortresses and adjacent areas had been actively used starting from the Kura–Araxes epoch till the end of the 2nd millennium B.C.





BARETI "CYCLOPEAN" FORTRESS AND HABITATION SITE

41.66748, 44.155

Baretí "cyclopean" fortress and the habitation site are located on the ridge of the gorge, that is stretched from the east to the west between the villages Baretí and Livadi, on its south facing slope and the adjacent plain. The monument consists of megalithic constructions of different epochs and types. The most impressive are the separate sites that are situated on the ridge and surrounded by the walls. The walls are built of large basalt boulders using a dry masonry technique. The walls are 3.0-2.2 m thick. Along with residential and support structures, cromlech and tumulus like stone circles and mounds are found within the habitation site. Artifacts uncovered on the territory of the habitation site as well as spacing of the structures indicates that the monument is multi-layered and had been inhabited from 14-13th centuries B.C. till the Middle Ages.

NARDEVANI CYCLOPEAN FORTRESS

41.5765, 43.89696

Nardevani cyclopean fortress is located in southeastern outskirts of the village Nardevani. The fortress is made of large boulders using a dry masonry technique (1st millennium B.C.). The base of the fortress is rectangular with 18x15 m inner dimensions. The walls are 3-4 m thick and 4,5-5 m high. The fortress is surrounded by yards and fortified spaces that are protected by the walls built using the same technique as the fortress itself. In the northern wall of the western yard there is a gate, in the north-western corner of the central part a door is cut. From the west the fortress is protected by the cliff, certain sections of which are reinforced by basalt stone masonry without using mortar. Remains of old settlements are found on the large areas to the east and south of the fortress.

Other megalithic constructions and habitation sites found on the territory of Tsalka municipality include: Ai-Ilia cyclopean fortress and habitation site, Sabechdavi “cyclopean” habitation site, Chochiani “cyclopean” habitation site, village Gumbati cyclopean fortress, village Santa cyclopean fortress, Kariali cyclopean fortress.



AI-ILIA CYCLOPEAN FORTRESS AND HABITATION SITE

41.64655, 44.06518

The antique (5th century B.C. – 3rd century A.D.) Ai-Ilia cyclopean fortress, the habitation site and artificial terraces are situated on the hill and its slopes northward of Tsalka water reservoir. The houses in this ancient settlement are built in the southernmost part of the ridge, where the gently inclined slopes of the mountain range start. The height of the remains of the walls is 1,2-1,5 m. The settlement consists of about 15 houses.



GUMBATI CYCLOPEAN FORTRESS

41.6621, 43.91631



Gumbati cyclopean fortress (2nd-1st millennia B.C.) is located northwest of the village Gumbati, on the right bank of the Gumbati river at 1650 m above sea level. The walls of the fortress are built of large boulders, in two rows using dry masonry technique. The inner space is filled with smaller stones. The base of the fortress is rectangular. The monument consists of the habitation site and the citadel. The settlement is located on the mountain slope, the citadel – on the ridge steeply descending to the river

GARUKLAPI OLD SETTLEMENT

41.61893, 44.0967



The old settlement is located in the south eastern part of Tsalka Reservoir. During the 20th century, a chapel for St. Constantine and Elene was built on the territory of the old settlement. This chapel is currently partially buried in the ground and contains relics of the old church. There are contemporaneous tombs of the old settlement around the church. To the west of the old settlement there is an underground building and to the north there is a cemetery.

MENHIRS /STONEMAN WHALES

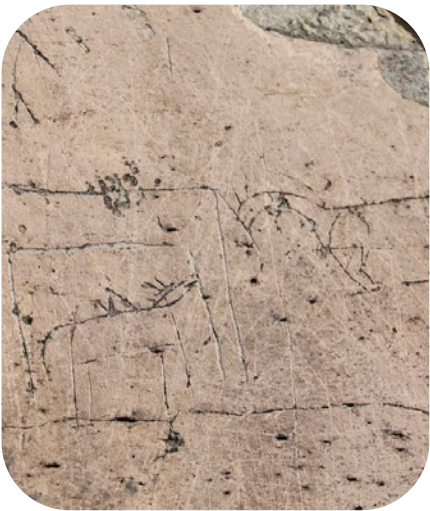


Along with fortresses and habitation sites, megalithic structures found on the territory of Tsalka municipality also include menhirs. Menhirs are large man-made upright stones which can be found solely, or as a part of parallel rows of similar stones. Some menhirs are decorated with engravings. Presumably they were used for religious ceremonies. Niko Ketskhoveli in his book “They still will grow up” calls the menhirs of Tsalka as “stoneman whales” and says that “whales” are often found in the areas that suffer from shortage of water or frequent droughts. As the whales are erected near lakes, springs and streams, it is believed that the whale could be a god of water.

The menhir situated inside of Saint Constantin church of the village Tejisi is one of the biggest megaliths in Tsalka (height – 3.80 m, perimeter of the base – 2.50 m). Later on the cross has been carved in the menhir. The building of the church is small and it would be impossible to move the stone into the church. Presumably, the church has been built around the menhir in the late Middle Ages. The church is surrounded by the wall which has two entrances from the south and from the north. The both entrances are covered by stone monoliths. Menhirs can be found also at Baret'i cyclopean fortress, at the road from the village Nardevani to Paravani, westward of the village Kizil-Kilisa, etc.

TRIALETI PETROGLYPHS

Petroglyphs are ancient images engraved on walls and ceilings of caves, cliffs or isolated stones. In this regard Tsalka municipality is one of the distinguished place on the territory of Georgia. **Trialeti petroglyphs** (41.58517, 43.97699) are found near the village Gantiadi (former Tikilisa) in the gorge of the river Avdriskhevi – the right tributary of the river Ktsia. Geometric, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic carvings have been discovered under mosses and lichens on unevenly smooth andesit-basalts sections of exposed rocks between the caves that are developed in the bottom of the lava layer. These carvings are small sized pictures illustrating mainly the representatives of local fauna: red deer, roe deer, horses, as well as lions, camels, imaginary and hybrid animals, serpents, birds, fish, etc. Geometric images include square nets, crosses and the shining sun. Anthropomorphic figures are presented by small-sized hunters with bows and arrows. The carvings are small-sized (within about 2,5 – 18-20 cm), mostly 1-2 wide and deep. The carvings are attributed to different periods - from the Mesolithic Era (12-9 thousands year ago) to Bronze-Iron Era .



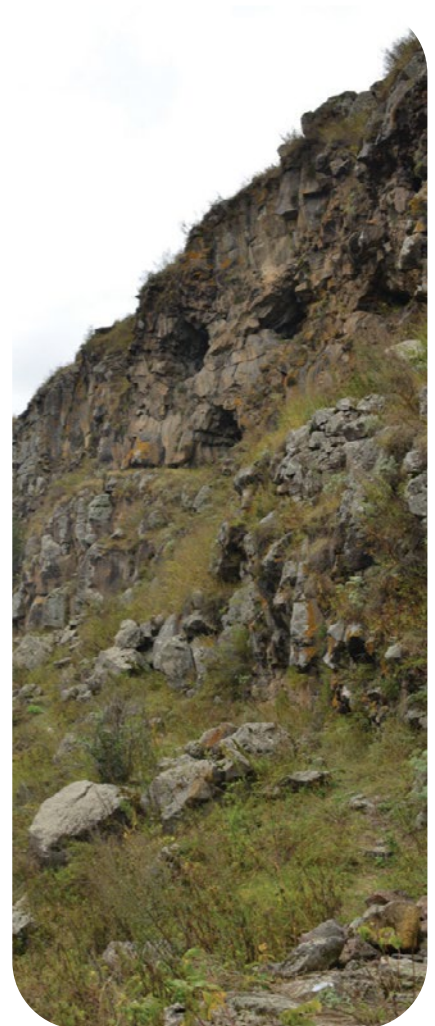
CAVES

There are many caves made by humans in different periods on the territory of Tsalka municipality. They are found mainly on the slopes of river gorges. In the past they have been used by the local population for self-defense and housing.

A complex of caves is found at the village Dashbashi, on the cliffy slope of the canyon. This is a two-storey complex. Remains of the gate are found on the first floor. The base of caves is circular. Each cave has one door. Large caves have also windows. Most of caves are hewn by humans, however some of them are natural cavities (lava caves).

Caves that are found at the village Gantiadi are remarkable from the archaeological point of view. Artefacts uncovered by archaeological expeditions indicate, that the in the Mesolithic-Bronze Era these caves were used for housing.

A series of caves are found westward of Avranlo cyclopean fortress. This complex of caves is known under the name of "Abibo Monastery".



MOUND BURIALS OF TSALKA



The territory of the present Tsalka municipality is one of the most important sites of the Trialeti culture, which is presented mainly by the Kurgan culture. Some kurgans are dated back to the Late Bronze Era, last centuries of the 3rd millennia B.C., the others – to the Middle Bronze Age, the first half of the 2nd millennia B.C. Rich and well-built kurgans belonged to tribal leaders and noble aristocracy, smaller and poorer kurgans – to common people.

The Kushcha kurgan is one of the most distinguished kurgans in Tsalka. The inner area of its burial hall was 175 m², its wooden columns were coated with gold leaf (fragments are found). Pottery and metal utensils, weaponry (copper, bronze, silver, obsidian, etc.), jewellery (gold, silver, stone, etc.), many of which are as good as the world's best arts and crafts.

The Trialeti culture has rich traditions which have been lost in the 2nd millennium B.C. Archaeologist and ethnographer Kuftin and later archaeologist Otar Japaridze uncovered valuable articles, tools, four-wheel araba carts in Tsalka burials.

ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS

Tsalka municipality is notable for diversity and abundance of architectural monuments, which consist mainly of churches. These churches are not distinguished by their size. They are mostly damaged and reconstructed. Churches of different periods can be found in almost all settlements of Tsalka municipality. From the tourist point of view the villages Avranlo, Beshtasheni, Dashbashi, Tejisi, Nardevani, Baretı, Aiazma, Gumbati, etc. are distinguished.

SAINT CONSTANTINE CHURCH

41.6919, 44.08852

This hall church located in the village Tejisi is built of dressed and squared stones. The base of the building is rectangular. There is an abse with two niches to the east. The entrance, which is architraval from the outside and arched from the inside is made from the south. Windows are cut in eastern and southern walls. Later the building was extended to the south, however only walls of this structure remain. The surrounding wall has two entrances – from the south and from the not. Both entrances are covered with monoliths.



SAINT DEMETRIOS CHURCH

41.6923, 44.09338



Like Saint Constantine church, this is a hall church located in the village Tejisi. The base of the building is rectangular. A semicircular abse with two niches is built in the east end. There is a stone refectory table in the altar. Inner walls are coated with whitewash. There is an arched entrance from the south. Rectangular windows are cut in east, south and west facing walls. The church is surrounded by the wall.

SAINT GEORGE CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE DASHBASHI

41.59053, 44.12894

The domed Saint George church is located on the brink of the deep gorge of the Khrami river. Its base is cross-shaped. Small fragments of wall painting are still observed in the altar. The church is dated back to the second half of the 10th century. The dome has been destroyed and the church has lost its original appearance.



SAINT MARY CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE DASHBASHI

41.58862, 44.12985



Saint Mary church located in the village Dashbashi is a domeless building. It was reconstructed in the 19th century when inscriptions were also damaged. Ekvtime Takaishvili managed to read an inscription on the stone found near the church: "In the name of God we, residents of Akhalkalaki...." (Takaishvili 1913). The fragments of inscription of the name of Rati Eristavt Eristavi are visible on the walls of the church (Rcheulishvili 1972; 73; Corpus of Georgian Inscriptions 1980: 246, 247);

SAINT MARY CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE GUMBATI

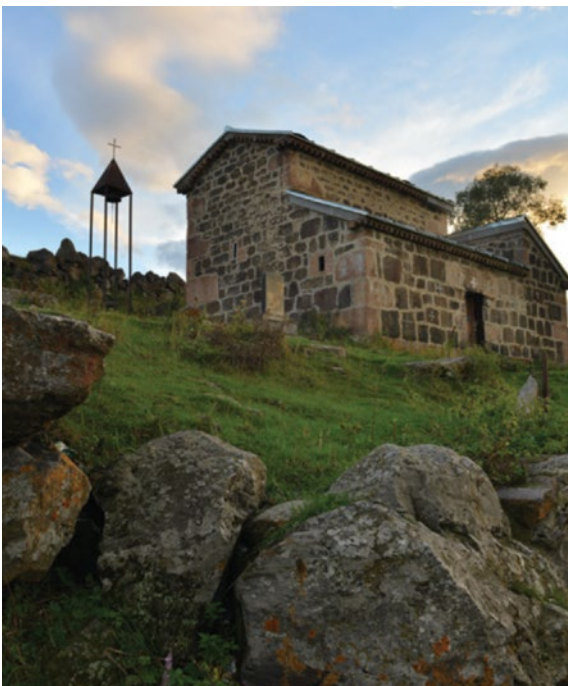
41.6621, 43.91631

Saint Mary church is called by local residents also as Saints Gospel church. This a three-nave basilica built on the ruins of the old Georgian temple. The church is built of dressed and squared stone using also the stones of the old church. There is a three-storey bell tower with open arcades at the entrance of the church. The church is surrounded with a stone wall.



SAINT MARY CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE AIAZMA

41.57613, 43.91013



Saint Mary church is located south-westward of the village Aiazma. It is built in the place of the old settlement which extends mostly to the south from the church. The church is surrounded by the wall built of large boulders using dry masonry technique. There are several interesting tombstones with the images of a horseman, donators with the layout of the building, multi point stars, a cross in the yard. One tombstone has an inscription.

SAINT PETER AND PAUL CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE OF OZNI

41.63173, 43.85868

This one-nave church is built of dressed stones of different colors. The stones are laid evenly. The base of the church is rectangular, with a semicircular apse to the east. There is a stone refectory table and a large stone built in the column in the altar. Small fragments of wall painting are still observed in the altar. Inner walls are coated with whitewash. The floor is made of concrete. An equal armed cross is carved on the architrave. A number of small crosses are carved on the upper border stone of the window. Inscriptions in Asomtavruli and carvings can be seen on the walls of the church.



SAINT SOPHIA CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE KIZIK-KILISA

41.64341, 43.86109

This is a one-nave church, dimensions 5x3 m. Later the building was extended to the south. The church is built of roughly dressed squared stones. The extension is built of larger stones. There is a large pool south of the church and a spring at the south-western edge of the wall, which is considered to have healing properties by the locals. Remains of the old settlement (the high Middle Ages) are found northward and eastward of the church.



BEDIANI NUNNERY

41.53993, 44.24689

The nunnery is located on the left bank of the Khrami river in the historical "Rose Grove". The nunnery consists of the three churches built of dressed and squared stones. Stone slabs and various architectural fragments are found in the yard. The territory is surrounded partially by the wall and partially by the metal fence. Different constructions are built at the old wall. The wall is mostly damaged and the constructions are destroyed.



SAINT GEORGE CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE BESHTASHENI

41.64045, 44.11241



Saint George church (around 10th-13th centuries) is a two-nave basilica built of dressed and squared stones. The base of the church is rectangular, with two semicircular apses to the east. A text in Asomtavruli is carved on the south façade of the church. A stone with engraved cross and a text in Asomtavruli (has not yet been read) is embedded in the wall south of the church. The church is surrounded with a limestone wall with two gates. Tombstones most of which are decorated are embedded in the wall.

SAINT NICHOLAS CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE BESHTASHENI

41.63866, 44.11618



The church is a three-nave basilica built of dressed stones. The stones of the old Georgian temple is used in masonry. The base of the church is rectangular. The roof is covered with ceramic tiles. The building has an entrance from the west. About 10 m westward from the church, there is a three-storey bell tower, the first floor of which is open from the west to the east, the upper two floors are open from all sides. The church has been built in 1849.

SAINT GEORGE CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE KUSHCHI

41.61441, 43.89876

This small, one-nave church dated back to 6th-7th centuries is located in the outskirts of the village Kushchi. The church is a typical one-nave chapel of the early Christianity period. A stoa with two open arches is built along the south façade of the nave.



SEVEN BROTHER'S CHURCH

41.59046, 43.92663

This is a hall church built of undressed stones. Dressed and squared stones are used in the corners of the building. In the upper part of the south-eastern corner three Bolnisi crosses are carved. The church is roofed with stone slabs. Tombstones, including two horse statues are found in the yard (the high Middle Ages).



SAINT MARY CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TSALKA

41.59848, 44.08834



This domed church is located in the center of the town of Tsalka. It is built of dressed and squared basalt stones. The church has two doors, one door from the south, and the second – through the bell tower that is built in its western wall. The building is covered with tin. In the northern part of the yard, a horse statue with the engraved image of an armed man and an axe is found. There are also three tombstones. 5 m northeast of the church there is an old Georgia church. Both churches are surrounded by the wall. Currently, it is a functioning monastery.

SAINT ILIA CHURCH

41.71065, 43.78435

This hall church is located near the village Khando, on the top of the small hill. The church is built of roughly dressed stones. The stones of the former building can be noticed in masonry. Inner walls are coated with whitewash. The building has an architraval entrance from the south. An arched window is cut in the east facing wall. The cross is carved above the window. A small cross is erected on the ridge of the pediment. The church is covered with ceramic tiles.



CARAVANSERAI

41.59079, 43.9259

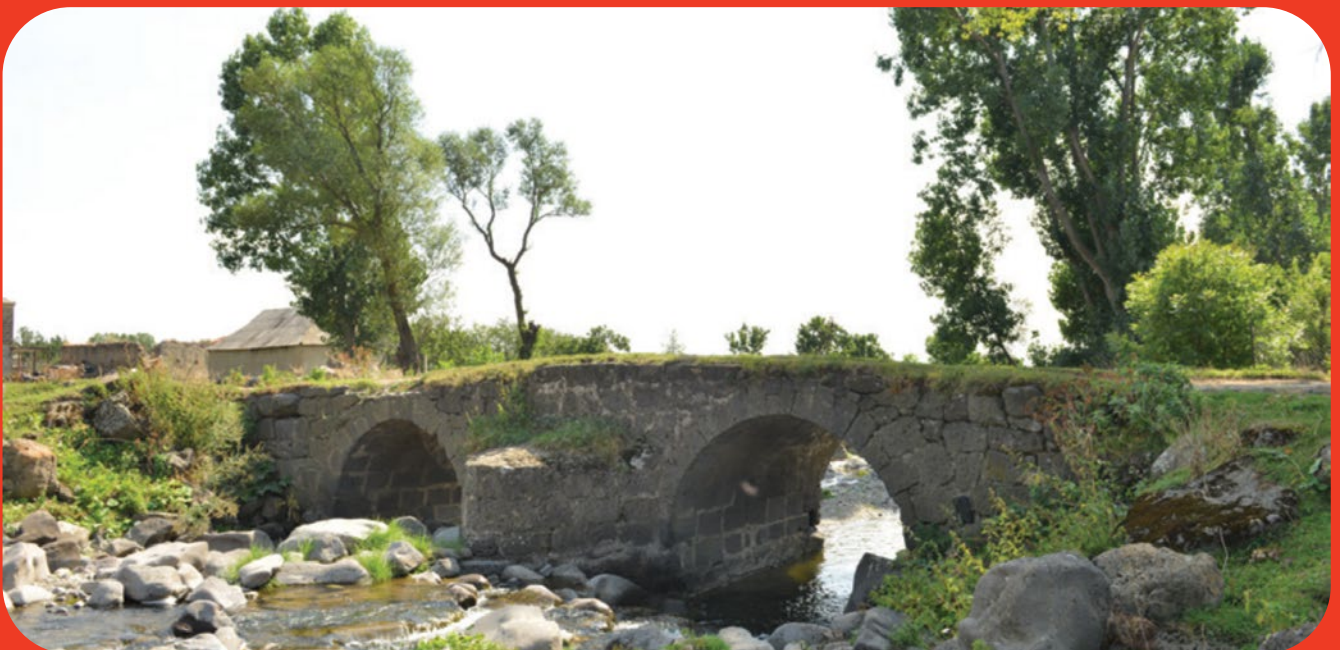


A historical caravanserai built of undressed stones is located in the center of the village Sakdrioni. Only fragments of walls remain. The base of the caravanserai is rectangular. It consists of two halls. The smaller hall with a large fireplace is located westward.

DOUBLE-SPAN BRIDGE

41.53993, 44.24689

A double-span bridge built of undressed stones in the 19th century is located in the village Akhalsheni. The arches of semicircular spans are made of dressed and squared stones. A low massif pier in the middle of the bridge supports the contraction. The roadway of the bridge is paved.



FOUR-SPAM BRIDGE OF KUSHCHI

41.61533, 43.89973

The bridge over the Ktsia river is built of undressed stones. The arches of semicircular and equal sized spans are made of dressed stones. They are supported by the three massif piers that are built downstream of the bridge. The traces of several periods of construction can be distinguished on this cone-shaped bridge.



KLDEKARI FORTRESS

41.74264, 44.20725

Kldekari fortress is one of the most distinguished places in Tsalka municipality and the region. The fortress, located at the boundary of the three municipalities (Tsalka, Kaspi, Tetrtskaro) ideally harmonizes with the surrounding natural landscape, making it special. In good weather, beautiful views of Shida and Kvemo Kartli can be observed from the fortress. The hiking trail connecting Tsalka and Rkoni gorge passes through the Kldekari fortress.



URBAN SETTLEMENT TRIALETI

41.54326, 44.10657

German culture, which can be found in Trialeti (former Alexandershilf) is an important constituent of the cultural heritage of Tsalka. German colonists came to this settlement located on Chochiana plateau in the first half of the 19th century and lived there till the fifties of the 20th century. Houses and the Lutheran church built by German colonists are still found in the settlement. These houses, along with German traditional high garrets and deep cellars are also characterized by an organic mix of local architectural traditions. Unfortunately, most of these structures are damaged and altered.



INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Intangible cultural heritage of Tsalka municipality is an important tourist resource along with its material cultural monuments. Multi-ethnic population of Tsalka municipality with traditional cuisine, folklore and traditions determines the diversity of local non-material culture. Georgian ethnic group consists mainly of Svanetians and Adjarians, therefore visitors of Tsalka municipality can get acquainted also with the cultures of Svaneti and Adjara. Especially considering the fact that most of the traditions having a status of Monuments of Georgian Intangible Cultural Heritage are an integral part of the everyday life of Svanetians (Table).

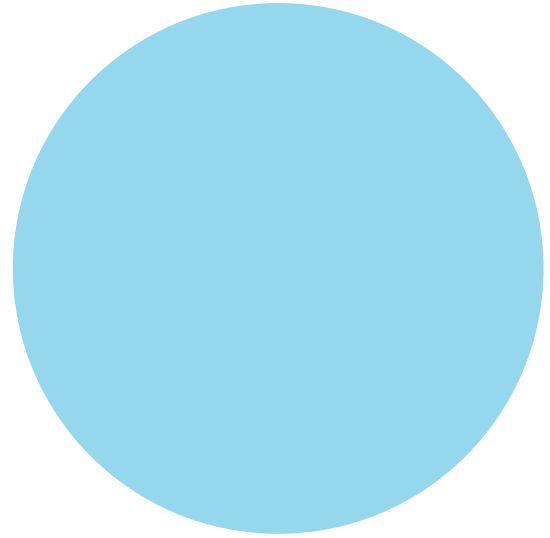
Perkhuli Dance	Traditional method of making Tashmijabi
Traditional method of making “Chuniri”	Traditional method of making Svanetian salt
Technology of making Svanetian hats	Traditional method of making “Changi”
Traditional method of cooking Khachapuri with millet	Wood carving tradition
Traditional method of cooking Kubdari	Svanetian Zari funeral ritual

Table 2. Svanetian traditions having a status of Monuments of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

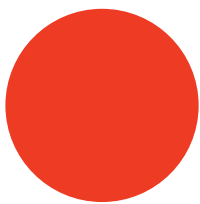
The Adjarian population is rich in monuments of non-material culture, including folk dances and songs, cuisine, traditional crafts.

Adjarian folklore with ancient Georgian songs ranks high in Georgian traditional culture. Adjarian songs and dances are mainly of martial and drinking nature. Adjarian dances are distinguished by their origin, plastique and character. Adjarian traditional costumes are distinguished for their exceptional style. Traditional Adjarian crafts, especially weaving and embroidery can be considered monuments of non-material culture. Adjarian cuisine being influenced by the traditional lifestyle of highlanders, especially the dishes made up from dairy products: cheese, Kaimagi and borano, is noteworthy.

Ethnic minorities of Tsalka municipality are formed mainly by Armenian, Azerbaijani and Greek population. These people know legends and tales about different places. At the same time, their traditional cuisine and ethnographic features give the opportunity to create an attractive and diverse tourist product.



LEGENDS AND FOLKTALES

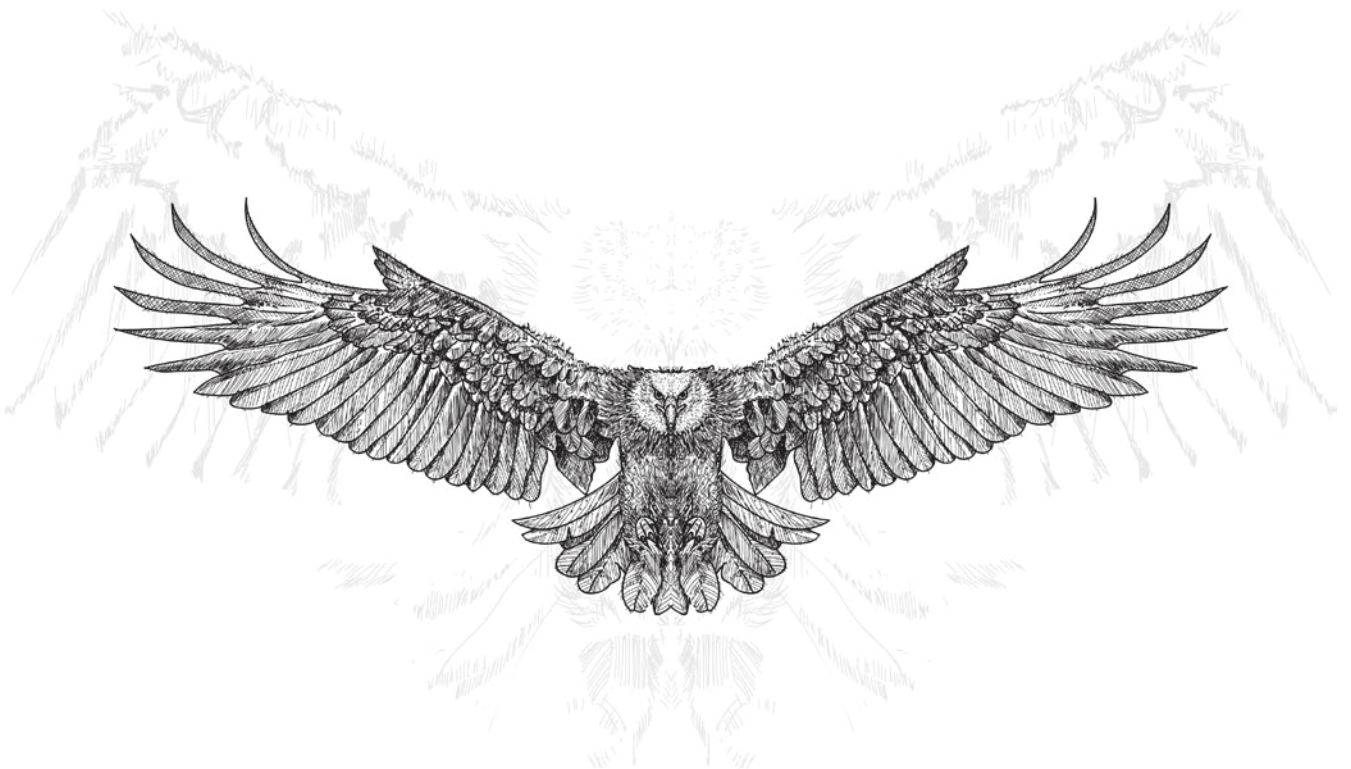


TRAGIC PAST OF AVRANLO

Once the Ottomans invaded the village Avranlo. The villagers were brought to the church and all those who did not reject Christianity were put to death. A pit with the remnants of 500-600 people has been found in the yard of the church. There is a tombstone at the pit indicating the burial place of unknown people.

ARTSIVANI – HOME OF EAGLES

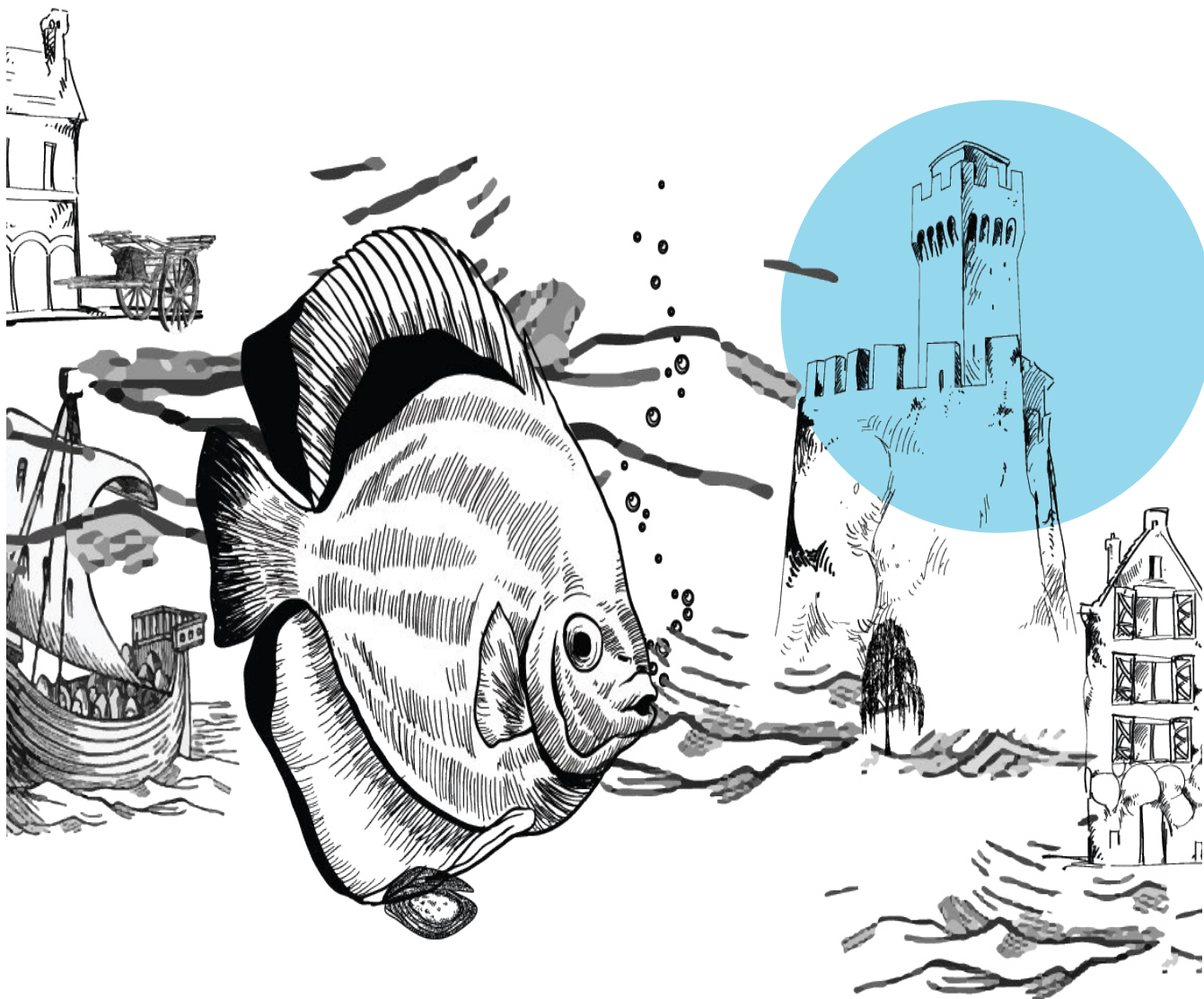
The old name of the village “Artsivani” presumably originates from the word Artsivi (an eagle in Georgian). Eagle nest still can be found in this village. As for the Greek name, the Greeks that had settled in this area in 1830-1833, named the village as Jinisi. According to local elderly people, the village having the same name exists on the territory of modern Turkey, in Aanatolia. Some say that, the name Jinisi comes from the old Greek language and means clean water, according to others – it is a Persian word translated as paradise. Artsivani is rich in water, that’s why the Greeks liked this place. The river called Korsu flows nearby. Korsu in Turkish dialect means “blind water”, as floods often occur on this river.



VILLAGE REKHA – THE LAND FULL OF LEGENDS:

The village Rekha located in the northwest part of Tsalka municipality is one of the richest areas in terms of legends and folktales. Most of them are associated with the local small chapel that has been built in the place of the old temple. The discovery of the old temple is attributed to the local resident Toma Sabadze. According to the legend, the Virgin Mary appeared to him and showed the place of the old temple. Miracles, including healing of believers from illnesses, are connected with this sacred place. Even blind people have been healed with so-called spring of incorruptible water.





DROWNED VILLAGE - A MYTH OR A TRUTH:

A small church emerges in Tsalka water reservoir when the water level in the reservoir drops down. Several villages were inundated for the purpose of construction of the water reservoir. According to the legend, when construction of the reservoir began, part of the villagers and the priest refused to leave the village and stayed there forever. When water in the reservoir is clean, the contours of different structures are visible on its bottom.

TOURIST ROUTES AVAILABLE IN TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Tourist routes available in Tsalka municipality are so-called combined routes consisting of equestrian, cycle and hiking trails. Moreover, the routes cover not only the territory of Tsalka municipality, but also the areas of neighboring municipalities.



Kldekari-Manglisi

Type of the route: hiking, motor trial

Length of the route: 19,9 km

Duration of the route: 7 hours

Sightseeings: Manglisi Sioni Cathedral, Kldekari fortress

Description of the route: The route starts from Manglisi Sioni Cathedral – one of the distinguished monuments of Georgian architecture and goes to the village Arkhoti, passes the center of the village, pastures and enters into a broadleaf forest, where the motor road is replaced by a pathway that runs mainly along the river gorge and crosses the river at several locations. After leaving the forests, the route merges with an unpaved motor road, runs through pastures and the center of the village Choliani and goes to Kldekari fortress and the natural gate that is developed in the rocks.

Kldekari-Rkoni-Didi Ikvi-Patara Ikvi-Chkopiani

Type of the route: hiking, motor trial

Length of the route: 26,8 km

Duration of the route (days and nights): 2 days

Sightseeings: Kldekari fortress, Rkoni fortress, Rkoni bridge, Rkoni monastery, Ikvi St.George Church, Drisi fortress.

Description of the route: The hiking trail starts at the last settlement of Tsalka municipality (village Choliani) and goes to the natural gate that is developed in the rocks and the fortress. Currently only the ruins of this fortress remain. Beautiful scenery of the environs of Tsalka and Manglisi can be seen southward, while the valleys of the rivers Tani and Tedzami – northward from this site.

From Kldekari the route goes to the Tedzami river gorge, where the motor road is substituted by a pathway that crosses the river at several location, enters the forests and ascends to the village Rkoni.

Rkoni fortress is located at the confluence of the rivers Samachalos Tskali and Tedzami. After viewing the fortress, we go down to the river gorge to visit another point of interest of this route. After crossing so-called “Tamar Bridge” dated back to 12th-13th centuries, the trail goes up to Rkoni monastery. After leaving the monastery the trail crosses the center of the village and goes to Ikvi church. From Ikvi monastery, the route goes to the village Chkopiani, crosses the village and ascends to Drisi fortress.

Tsalka-Nardevani-Berta-Avranlo

Type of the route: off-road tour/cycling trail

Length of the route: 32 km

Duration of the route (hours): 1 hour 30 minutes

Sightseeings: the town of Tsalka, Nardevani cyclopean fortress and Virgin Mary church, Berta monastery, Avranlo fortress and churches

Description of the route: The route starts from the center of the town of Tsalka and goes westward, to the village Nardevani. The initial section of the route runs along the asphalted main motor road connecting Tsalka and Akhalkalaki. At the village Nardevani the route sharply turns to the north and reaches the Nardevani cyclopean fortress that is located on the territory of this village. From the village Nargevani the route goes northward to the village Berta (former Oliangi). At this section the route runs along the unpaved village road, which turns to the west at the village Berta and reaches Berta monastery. The main church of the monastery is built on a natural vauculian spring. Trout living in the pool filled with spring water are considered sacred. From Berta monastery the route goes to the village Avranlo, where several monuments of cultural heritage, including Avranlo cyclopean fortress, which is one of the best preserved and impressive monuments of this type and can be viewed. There are several churches and caves on the territory of this fortress. The final destination of the route is the village Avranlo and its attractions.

town of Tsalka-village Nardevani-urban settlement Trialeti

Type of the route: cycling trail/hiking

Length of the route: 13.1 km

Duration of the route (day and night): 1 day

Sightseeings: the town of Tsalka, Dashbashi canyon, Dashbashi St. George and Virgin Mary churches, Trialeti Lutheran church, urban settlement Trialeti.

Description of the route: The route starts from the center of the urban settlement Tsalka and goes to the southeast, to the village Dashbashi. The initial section of the route runs along the asphalted motor road, which makes a sharp turn to the right (to the south) and goes to Dashbashi canyon – the first destination point of the trail. To reach the canyon you will need to descend through a serpentine path on the slope of the Khrami river gorge. The path ends at the riverbed, where many small waterfalls originating from cliffy slopes create a fascinating scenery. To continue the route, you will need to leave the gorge and go to the village Dashbashi. Several monuments of cultural heritage, including Saint George domed church and Saint Mary church can be viewed in the historical settlement (historical name Akhalkalaki) located on Chochiana plateau. From the village Dashbashi the route goes to the urban settlement Trialeti. Houses and the Lutheran church in the style of old German architecture which are still found in the settlement, make Trialeti remarkable and distinctive from other settlements of Tsalka municipality.

town of Tsalka-Bareti lake-village Tejisi-Kldekari

Type of the route: off-road tour/cycling trail

Length of the route: 35,8 km

Duration of the route (hours): 2 hours

Sightseeings: the town of Tsalka, Bareti lake, Tejisi Saint Constantine church and menhir, Arjaven-Sarvani Saint Mary church, Kldekati fortress

Description of the route: The route starts from the center of the urban settlement Tsalka and goes to the north-east, to the village Bareti, where in relevant seasons you can view migratory birds, if you are lucky. From Bareti lake the trail goes to the village Tejisi through the villages Bareti and Sabechisi.

On the top of the hill westward of the village Tejisi there is a church with a menhir inside which has been built in the center of the megalithic construction. This menhir is one of the most distinguished megaliths in the country. From Tejisi the route goes to Kldekari fortress. In Arjevan-Sarvani horse rentals are available. The final destination point of the route is Kldekari fortress which can be reached after crossing the village Choliani.

Some cultural routes of Georgia which have developed after Georgia had joined Cultural Routes Program of the Council of Europe cross the territory of Tsalka municipality. Within the framework of this program several cultural routes certified by the Council of Europe are available in Georgia including two routes covering the territory of Tsalka municipality:

- German Settlements route, which in Tsalka municipality covers the former German settlement Alexandershilf-Trialeti;
- European route of Prehistoric rock art, which in Tsalka municipality covers Trialeti petroglyphs – gorge of the Avdriskhevi river.

TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES AVAILABLE IN TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Tsalka municipality is connected with the capital of Georgia via two highways of national importance:

- Tbilisi – Pantiani – Manglisi – Tsalka;
- Koda – Partskhisi - Manglisi – Tsalka – Ninotsminda.

A 32 km long highway of national importance Imera-Bareti-Tejisi-Chivtkilisa-Khachkoi-Gumbati-Avranelo is located only on the territory of Tsalka municipality.

Accommodation and catering facilities

Tourist services in Tsalka municipality include mainly accommodation and catering facilities. They are accumulated in the town of Tsalka, some of them are found also in the village Dashbashi. Accommodation is provided mainly by guesthouses, as well as hotels and hostels. Catering services are offered by canteens, cafes and fast food restaurants.

Other infrastructure

Other tourist infrastructure available in Tsalka municipality include picnic sites near Dashbashi with roofed arbors and rest rooms, as well as a public garden in the town of Tsalka.

ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES

Hotel Tsalka

Location – the village Tbeti

68 rooms

Price: 40 -45 -65 -85 GEL

Internet, TV, pool, restaurant

Individual bathrooms

Meals are not included in the price

Guest House Sonichka

Location – the town of Tsalka

8 rooms

Price: 35 GEL

Internet, TV

Individual bathrooms

Meals are not included in the price

Hotel Anri

Location – the town of Tsalka

12 rooms

Price: 30 -40 - 50 GEL

Internet, TV, bar and poolhall on the first floor

Individual bathrooms

Meals are not included in the price

Hotel in the town of Tsalka

Location – the town of Tsalka

11 rooms

Price: 50 GEL

Internet, TV

Individual bathrooms

Meals are not included in the price

Hotel Tetri Sakhli

Location – the town of Tsalka

11 rooms

Price: 70 GEL

Internet, TV

Individual bathrooms

Two meals included in the price

Guest House Maia

Location – the village Dashbashi

Internet, TV

Individual bathrooms

CATERING FACILITIES

Restaurant Daisi

Location – the town of Tsalka
Internet, TV
Interest free service

Restaurant Riho

Location – the town of Tsalka
Internet, TV
Interest free service

Restaurant Pontia

Location – the town of Tsalka
Internet, TV
Interest free service
Operates only in summer
Outdoor bar-restaurant
Internet

Restaurant Chveni Ezo

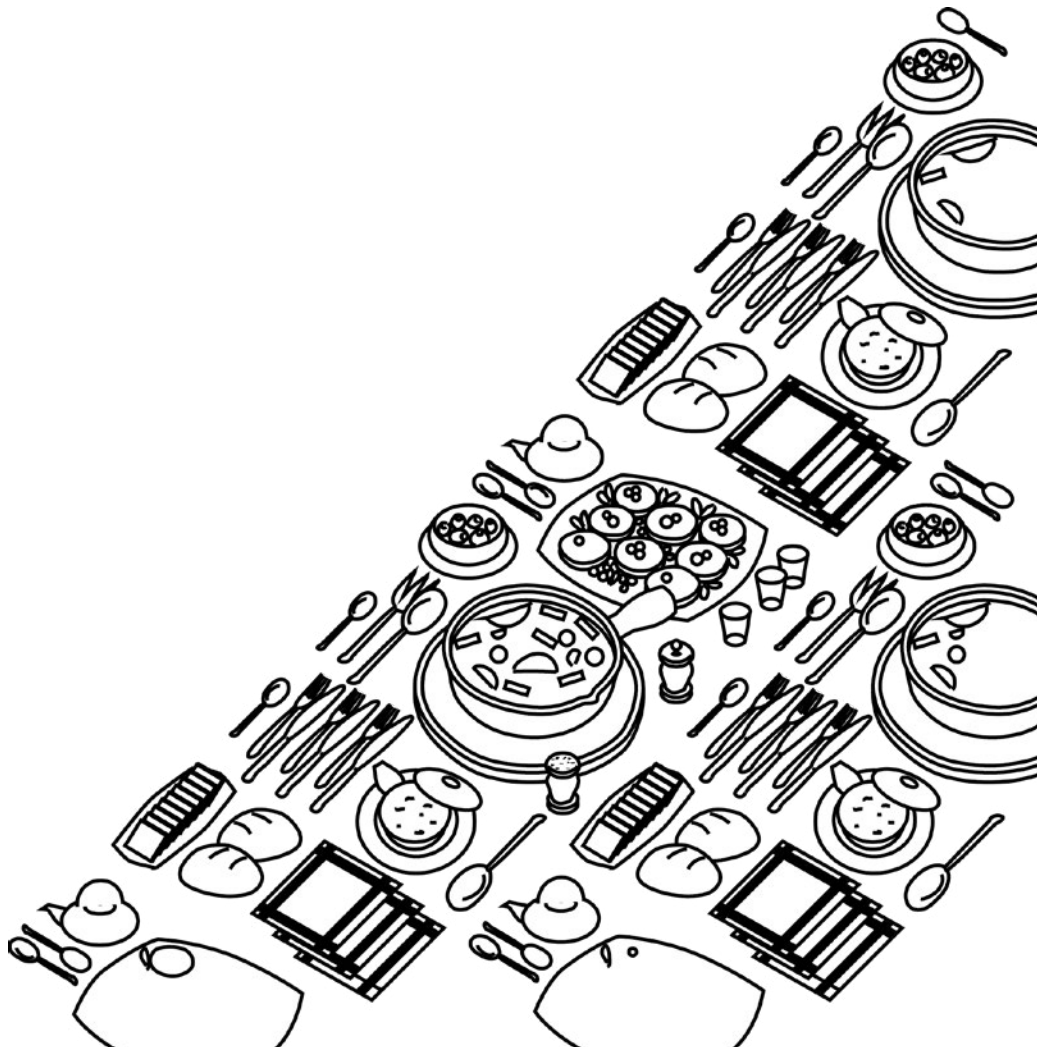
Location – the town of Tsalka
Interest free service

Restaurant Khikhani

Location – the town of Tsalka
Internet, TV
Interest free service

Café Edis Dacha

Location – the village Dashbashi
Outdoor and indoor café with traditional design



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