

mintPremium | LOUNGE

# A hearty 'supra' in Georgia is all about cheese, 'chacha' and community

Shuvajit Payne | 5 min read | 26 Jul 2025, 10:30 AM IST



The 'supra' spread. (Kunal Bhatia)

### SUMMARY

Food and ritual intertwine in Samegrelo, where the traditional feast celebrates the abundance of the land and its delicious produce, with love for the community at the heart of the local culture

"You must meet Marika at her farmhouse then – her energy is infectious," grinned Guro, our driver. We had just confessed our desire to taste a slice of Georgia, not just see it. In a country that's globally famed for its historic traditions of wine and cheese, every region fiercely claims its flavour is the best. But if you ask around, most will point west, to Samegrelo, for the boldest bites. Home to the Mingrelian people, who speak their own Kartvelian language, the food is generous with not only spices, herbs and cheese, but also love for the community.

Swiftly, we headed towards Chkhorja, a village just 20 minutes northwards from the town of Zugdidi, building an appetite for a sumptuous lunch. All we knew was that we were visiting Sisa Tura Ethno Village – a creation of local entrepreneur Marika Todua. So, when our car halted at a creaking, desolate gate by open grasslands, we had no idea we were about to step into a soul-stirring experience.

"*Gamarjoba!*" greeted Marika, ushering us in with a radiant smile into what immediately felt like a time capsule. Spanning three hectares, this is a living museum with restored log houses and farm sheds. The name, Sisa Tura, is a shout to shoo away jackals – marking the pastoral origins of Mingrelian life. Marika chatted with an endearing sense of humour, putting us instantly at ease. We walked by rustic clay pits (*okhvameri*) once used for storing wine. Georgia's winemaking tradition is one of the oldest in the world, dating back over 8,000 years. Marika's eyes sparkled as she described how her grandparents would lower wine pitchers into the earth to keep them cool during the long, hot summers.



### Popular Premium

**Asian Paints Q1 preview: The market leader faces heat from new competition**  
3 min read • 05:41 PM IST

**Let the countdown begin: NISAR is a splendid example of space collaboration**  
4 min read • 04:00 PM IST

**Govt seeks auto industry data to figure out poor response to vehicle scrapping**  
3 min read • 03:34 PM IST

**Polycab's cable wars may not mirror disruption seen by Asian Paints**  
5 min read • 03:10 PM IST



Marika serving chacha shots. (Kunal Bhatia)

At the far end of the field stood an expansive house, the one Marika was born and raised in. As she walked us across its rooms, she narrated tales behind artefacts and stories of winters spent here as a child. A *chichilaki*, the traditional Georgian Christmas tree made from hazelnut branches, stood on the floor. Marika reminisced how families craft these by hand each winter, burning the old *chichilaki* to ring in good fortune each new year. She moved through her childhood home, resting her hands on familiar objects, pulling open wooden drawers, as though reliving her memories with us. We could imagine what it was like to grow up here long before life was boxed into concrete walls.

Next, we were led into the heart of Sisatura, the kitchen, but not before a shot of *chacha*. This grape pomace brandy, fondly dubbed "Georgian vodka," can clock in anywhere from a mild 40% alcohol in store versions to a face-flushing 85% in homemade ones! Marika elaborated on how food and ritual intertwine in Samegrelo. We had to welcome the moment with a smoky, palate-awakening sip, cheering "*Gaumarjos!*" – a toast to victory!

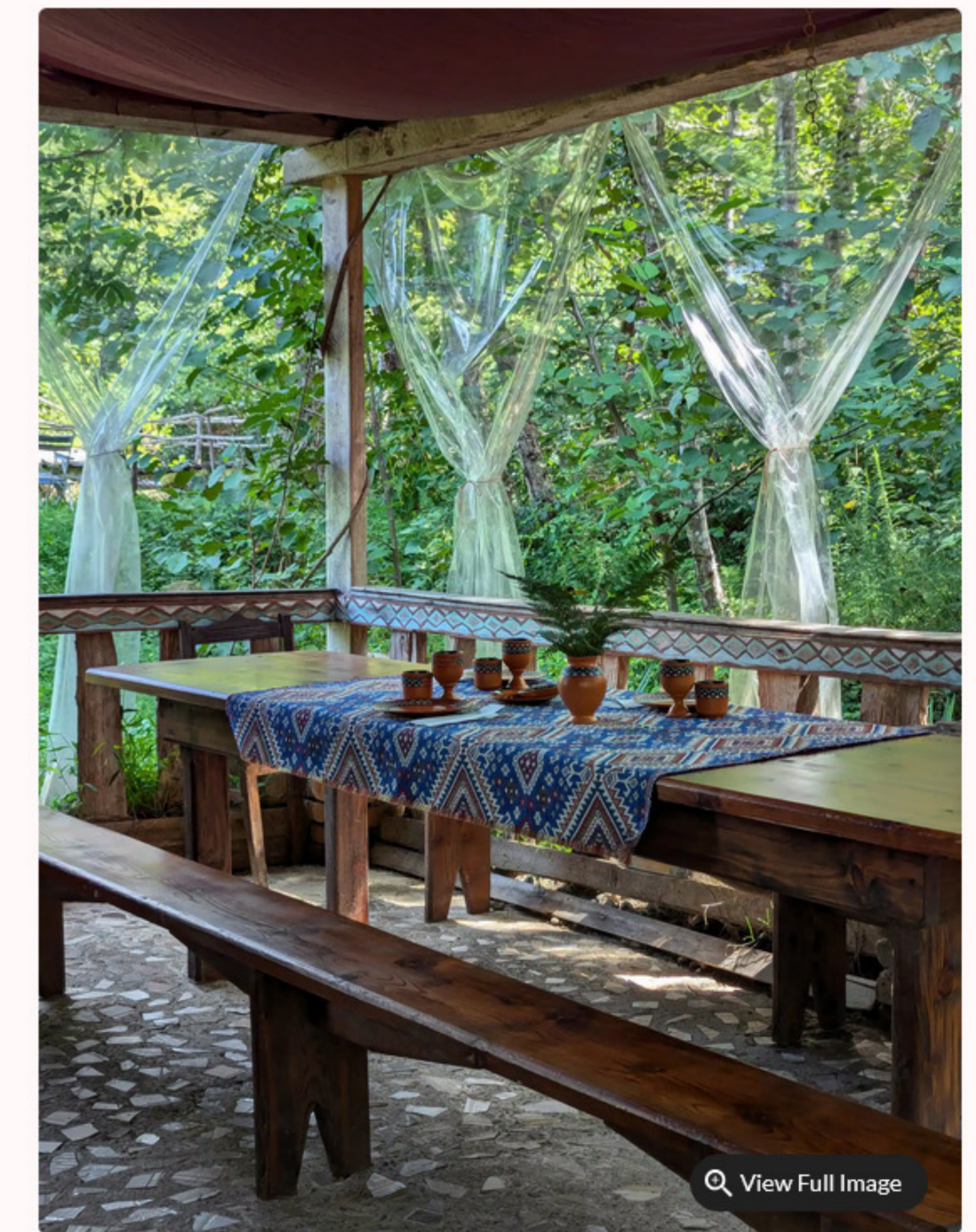
In her kitchen, Marika was entirely in command – part chef, part storyteller, and part mentor. The crackling of a wood-fired stove, the aroma of fresh herbs, and clay pots lined up on shelves lent an earthy authenticity to it. She handed us a wooden bowl and a chunk of *sulguni* cheese – Samegrelo's pride – and guided us through kneading dough into the signature boat-shaped Mingrelian *khachapuri*. In Georgian, "*khacho*" means cheese and "*puri*" means bread, a fitting name for a dish so iconic that it's on the nation's Intangible Cultural Heritage list and even lends its name to the country's inflation metric: the *khachapuri index*! Our version was the double-cheese kind – filled as well as topped with *sulguni*.



The 'supra' at Sisa Tura. (Kunal Bhatia)

As we worked on our novice dough shapes, Marika added local spices. Peeking into her spice cabinet revealed jars of sun-dried marigolds, blue fenugreek, and savoury Svanetian salt (blend of spices). She encouraged us to taste, smell, and ask questions. We made *gebzhalia* next – softened cottage cheese rolled in fresh mint leaves and dressed in a tangy yoghurt sauce. "These are more than recipes passed down over generations," she quipped, "they're history and identity for us." Marika, who had completely won us over by then, soon declared that it was time for the *supra*. This traditional feast is far more than just a meal. Her husband, stepping into the role of *tamada*, or toastmaster, guided us through the rituals of this spirited celebration of togetherness. We raised our glasses in sincere toasts: to peace, to ancestors, to friendship, to love, and to those who could not be with us.

The splendid spread on the community table got us busy with our cameras. Beyond the *khachapuri* and *gebzhalia* we had prepared, there was *kuchmachi* – a hearty stew of chicken gizzards slow-cooked with aromatic spices; fresh fish from the farm's pond, bathed in a rich walnut-based sauce called *bazhe*; *phkali* – vegetable pâtés wrapped in eggplant slices; and more. Marika stood smiling at our awe while working a stretchy, stringy mix of cornmeal and copious amounts of *sulguni* cheese into a luscious *elarji* with the practised flair of a proficient juggler. *Elarji* is Georgia's ultimate comfort food, also served during festive gatherings as a symbol of hospitality and abundance.



The community table at Sisa Tura. (Kunal Bhatia)

Another toast, another round of *chacha*. The laughter grew louder as the stories flowed. It felt familiar, like being back at home in India. It turns out that we share many culinary commonalities – abundant feasting with extended families, a shared agrarian past, and a love for spices and chilli. Our gastronomic kinship runs deeper than we knew – from the word *puri* for bread to the clay ovens we cook them in (Georgia's *toné*, India's *tandoor*). Even their fragrant spice mix *khmeli-suneli* – a blend of coriander, fenugreek, marigold petals, bay leaves and more – felt like a cousin to the Indian *garam masala*. The conversations drifted from food to culture in both countries, focusing on the erosion of traditions and the gradual rediscovery of heritage through endeavours like Sisa Tura.

While there was more to do – grinding corn in a 200-year-old mill, fishing in the pond, or donning ethnic *chokha* dresses – we lingered at the lunch table. Before we knew it, the sun had dipped behind the hills and it was time to say goodbye. Marika wouldn't let us leave empty-handed. She packed us parting gifts of her homemade *ajika* – the lip-smacking fierce red Georgian condiment of paprika, pepper, and garlic – and a shopping list of local ingredients to pick up from the markets. We couldn't possibly say no.

*Shuvajit Payne is a Mumbai-based food and travel writer.*