

South ossetia peak shaving

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South Ossetia is mountainous, isolated and home to only 55.000 people. The drive from Vladikavkaz/North Ossetia to Tshivali, the tiny capital of this tiny county, was long but scenic. A smooth road meanders along the bottom of a narrow steep gorge, all covered with trees that come in all shades of green. But the real highlight of the trip is passing through the Roki Tunnel connecting Russia and South Ossetia.

The country is formally independent from Russia, but only by four countries recognize it as such: among those is, surprise, surprise RUSSIA, along with Syria, Venezuela, Nauru and Nicaragua. But people in North Ossetia actually see South Ossetia's independence as a joke, since it is financed by Moscow, uses the Rubel as a currency, and its citizens have a Russian passport. Russians, unlike foreigners, travel freely between the two Ossetias, whereas I needed a multiple visa since I left the Russian Republic of North Ossetia for South Ossetia and returned three days later. Visitors need an invitation. This was also the reason why I join a super small group put together through Lupine Travel. They also took care of the paper work.

The Roki Tunnel – connecting North and South Ossetia

The only way to reach South Ossetia is from North Ossetia/Russia, there are no other options, since entering from Georgia is impossible due to the political situation. This route that is open all year, before the 3,6km long Roki Tunnel was opened in 1885, the only way to cross the Caucasus mountains was over the Ruki Pass at 3000m sea level, naturally this was not possible from November till end of April

On the South Ossetian side it is very relaxed. A few containers sit next to the road, through a small office window we pushed our passport and waited. While doing so we listened again and again to the same five words of German from a former soldier who was stationed in East Germany. He and his buddies thought that this was hilarious.

Tshivali – a sleepy capital

Tshivalil is the home of 35.000 people, the quiet streets are shaded by large trees and what immediately caught my attention were the grapevines in front of many houses. They provide shade and are a cozy place to rest. They also reminded me very much of the area in Austria where I grew up, the Wachau. Beside this promised good wine.

We checked into the only hotel that exists, it is brand-new Uyaat. It is a bit of a walk into the center. 135 Oktyabrskaya St., +7 929 808 66 93 (WhatsApp), (23-69 US). It seemed we were the first guest to stay in these rooms. We learned that a small group with Lupine Travel visited in 2018 and they had to stay with locals. A super large hotel was under construction right next to Vincenzo in August 2019 when I visited.

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Our little group of five was welcome by the Minister of Tourism and his wife who did the translating for the entire three days. Of course more people joined, drivers, friends: since tourists are rare they did not want to miss the opportunity.

Everybody bent backwards to make us feel welcome and comfortable. Food and local wine kept coming, the place to eat in Tshivali is the trendy Vincenzo that serves Italian and Japanese food.

South Ossetia National Museum

The local museum was our first stop, an excellent guide with endless knowledge about the history and traditions of the area explained every item in great detail. I was completely exhausted after three hours. What impressed me most were the large paintings, some by Ossetia's most revered artist, Costa Khetagurov.

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