



IT IS PART OF THE GEORGIAN WINE-MAKING TRADITION TO LET THE SUN NURTURE THE VINES BEFORE HAND-PICKING THEIR GRAPES AND TURNING THEM INTO WINE



THIS PAGE, TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT: SEALED CLAY KVEVRI JUGS, BURIED IN THE GROUND DURING THE AGEING PROCESS. MIDDLE: PRESSED GRAPES BEING DRAWN FROM THE BARREL. RIGHT: SOME TRADITIONAL GEORGIAN CUISINE



# A TRUE TASTE OF TBILISI

Georgia is known for its long history of wine making. Tamás Doma from website Wine Sofa heads to the country's capital city, Tbilisi, to experience Georgian viticulture first hand

Wine making has been a tradition in Georgia for 8,000 years, with locals cultivating vines in 6,000 BC. The country has 500 grape varieties and a unique ancient wine making technique called 'Méthode Kartuli', a method added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

Just like the rest of the country, wine plays a significant role in the capital city of Tbilisi and in the lives of its inhabitants; it determines their history, their culture and their identity. The statue of Kartvlis Deda (Mother Georgia) has a bowl of wine in her hand and stands on top of Sololaki Hill, serving as a constant reminder of the drink's importance.

The city's New Wine Festival in Deda Ena park is an annual highlight, with its unsurprisingly merry atmosphere, friendly exhibitors, and live music. I wander through the crowds, taking in the revelry, before tasting twenty or so of the wines on offer.

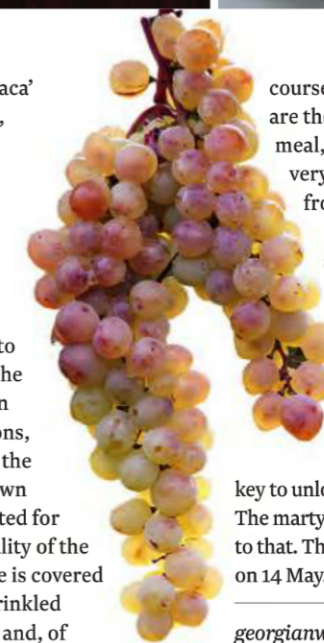
They have been made using the 'Méthode Kartuli' technique, during which grape juice is stored in clay jars (called *kvevri*) buried in the ground for months, ensuring micro oxidation and low-temperature fermentation during maceration. Because of this, not only do the colour pigments from the skin make their way into the wines, but phenols and tannins do too, giving them each a distinct appearance, aroma and texture that the general consumer might not be accustomed to.

When they were in power, the Soviets ditched this traditional practice in favour of mass-production, but the method has recently been revived.

The most well-known of Georgia's grape varieties are Rkatsiteli and Saperavi, although there are a fair few more which are worth getting to know, including Aleksandrouli and Usakhelauri.

Following a farewell 'chacha' brandy, I leave the festival, heady and satisfied in the knowledge that I have had a taste (or twenty) of true Georgian culture.

The next day, I am fortunate enough to be invited to the neighbourhood of Kiketi, to the Gotsa family winery. The family has been involved in wine making for generations, using traditional *kvevri* in the process. I am not only shown round the winery, but invited for dinner, such is the hospitality of the Georgian people. The table is covered with delicious food, all sprinkled with cumin and coriander and, of



course, glasses of the vineyard's own wine are there to wash it all down. Following the meal, I am treated to an impromptu but very appreciated tasting of wines made from the Seperavi grape.

I end my visit in a Tbilisi wine bar, in some vain attempt to try every kind that Georgia has to offer. With each sip I feel I am getting closer to understanding this country, its capital and, in turn, its people. When wine making has been a traditional local activity for thousands of years, it's no surprise that the drink in its many forms is the key to unlocking the secrets of Georgian culture. The martyr that I am, I will gladly dedicate myself to that. The 2016 New Wine Festival will be held on 14 May.

[georgianwine.gov.ge](http://georgianwine.gov.ge), facebook: [Wines.of.Georgia](https://www.facebook.com/Wines.of.Georgia)