

HIKE TO GERGETI GLACIER

by www.caucasus-trekking.com

A classic one-day hike from Stepantsminda (Kazbegi) village to the foot of Gergeti glacier covering Mt. Kazbek. On the way, you will pass beautifully situated Gergeti Trinity church, probably the most famous Georgian landmark.

Duration: 7-8 hours

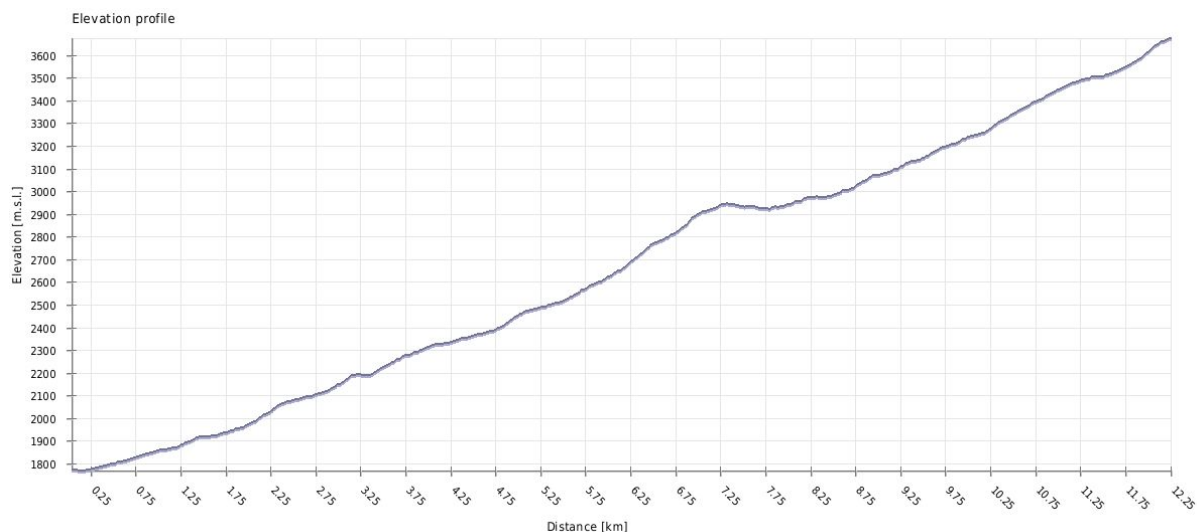
On average, it takes up to five hours to climb to the glacier and another three hours to return.

Difficulty: Moderate

In a single day, you will have to hike 1600 meters up and down - while the trail is well-trodden and easy to follow, this is certainly not an easy feat. If this looks like too much of a challenge, you can also take a taxi to the church - in such a scenario, the difficulty is moderate.

When to go:

Glacier is usually accessible to hikers from early June till October. During winter, a hiker can climb (with some effort) to Gergeti Trinity church but I recommend going any further.



How to get to Stepantsminda:

The best place to start your trip to Kazbegi is the Didube bus station (located by the metro station of the same name). Here, you will need to decide if you want to take a marshrutka or a taxi.

Marshrutka

Cheapest and the **least comfortable way** to get to Kazbegi. These depart when full from 8. am till late afternoon. **The ride costs 10 GEL and takes 3-4 hours.**

There is one thing you need to consider - **these are meant for locals, not tourists**. That means that the driver doesn't stop at any tourist hotspots along the Georgian Military Road. Instead, he will make only one break halfway, usually by some restaurant. So, as a first-time visitor, I would definitely forget about marshrutka and pay those few extra bucks for a taxi.

Shared taxi

While the seat in shared taxi usually costs about 25 GEL, **this mode of transport has many advantages**. Car seats are larger, provide more legspace and better views (marshrutka windows are small, dirty and positioned too low so you often have to crawl to see the mountains outside). Also, the drivers stop at popular sights along the Georgian Military Road and give you enough time to explore.

There are only few things to consider - most drivers stop just at Ananuri fortress and Treaty of Georgievsk monument so if you want something extra, better agree upon it beforehand. Also, it might be hard to find shared taxi which DOESN'T make breaks since these cater mostly to tourists.

Private taxi

If you travel in a group or money is not an issue for you, you can also hire a private taxi. Prices for the ride start at some 100-120 GEL, depending on the situation. Also, if you want to have everything planned in advance and prefer some proven driver, you could use [gotrip.ge service](http://gotrip.ge), but expect to pay 140 GEL or more.

How to leave Stepantsminda:

Marshrutkas to Tbilisi leave hourly from the bus stop at the main square. The first one departs at 6:00 am., the last one at 5 pm. and the trip also costs 10 GEL.

Description of the route

The trail starts at the main square of Stepantsminda. Follow the main road north and once it crosses the Tergi river, **turn left onto the road towards Gergeti village**. Follow the road for some 15 minutes until you reach a T-junction at the center of the village.

From the junction, **several routes climb to the Gergeti Trinity** (Tsminda Sameba) church. From hiker's perspective, **the best one is the one to the left which climbs to the church through the Bashi valley**. It offers the best views and while a bit longer, it's also not as steep and therefore not that hard to walk. As a bonus, it keeps you away from the road and traffic.

Trail parameters

Distance	20,4 km
Trail type:	Roundtrip ↔
Max. elevation:	3265m
Min. elevation:	1770m
Total climb:	1552m ↑
Total descent:	1552m ↓

How to find it? At the T-junction, turn left. After 100 meters, you will pass the Gergeti summer cafe and adjacent parking lot. **The track then leads you past a ruined tower and follows Bashi creek** for a while. To the right branches trail climbing directly to the church but its extremely steep so it's better to follow the route to the left.

Soon the trail splits again. The left branch closely follows the creek - it eventually also reaches the church but the final climb will be much more difficult. So it's better to stick to the right and start gaining some altitude right away. At these moments, you can already see the church on the hill above you. Finally, the trail turns to the right and after a short but steep climb, you will reach a new concrete road close to Gergeti Trinity church.

→ **Forest route to the church**: There is also one more trail to the church. To find it, at the T-junction in Gergeti village, turn right and then almost immediately left, onto small trail between houses. It will lead you out of the village, onto pastures. It crosses a new road, passes an old cemetery and enters the forest. Then starts unpleasant, steep ascent on a rocky trail. Your path will cross jeep track again, but don't follow it for too long and turn left into the forest. The trail will eventually lead you out of the woods, within sight of Gergeti Trinity Church.

Overall, **there are not many reasons to take this trail**. It's only a little shorter than southern trail and much less pleasant due to steep, stony track. Also, since you spend most of the time in the forest, there are no views. And it repeatedly crosses the car road. As you can see, I have a hard time coming up with reasons to take it. It could come **handy only if you seek protection from rain or sun. Or during winter**, when the trail in the forest is much easier to follow (compared to snow-covered hillside).

After the visit to the church, follow the new road back. The trail further up starts at the first junction, close to the new parking lot. After a short climb through the birch forest, you will make it to the top of a ridge rising to the west. Follow it for 200 meters. Far ahead, you see a flat pass to the right of a prominent, 3200m tall hill. **That place is called Sabertse pass and is your next destination. And now is the time to decide which of two routes leading to it you will take.**

The classic route, used by mountaineers and the majority of hikers turns left and traverses the hillside some 100 elevation meters beneath the top of the ridge. It is well-trodden and straightforward. However, it offers only limited views.

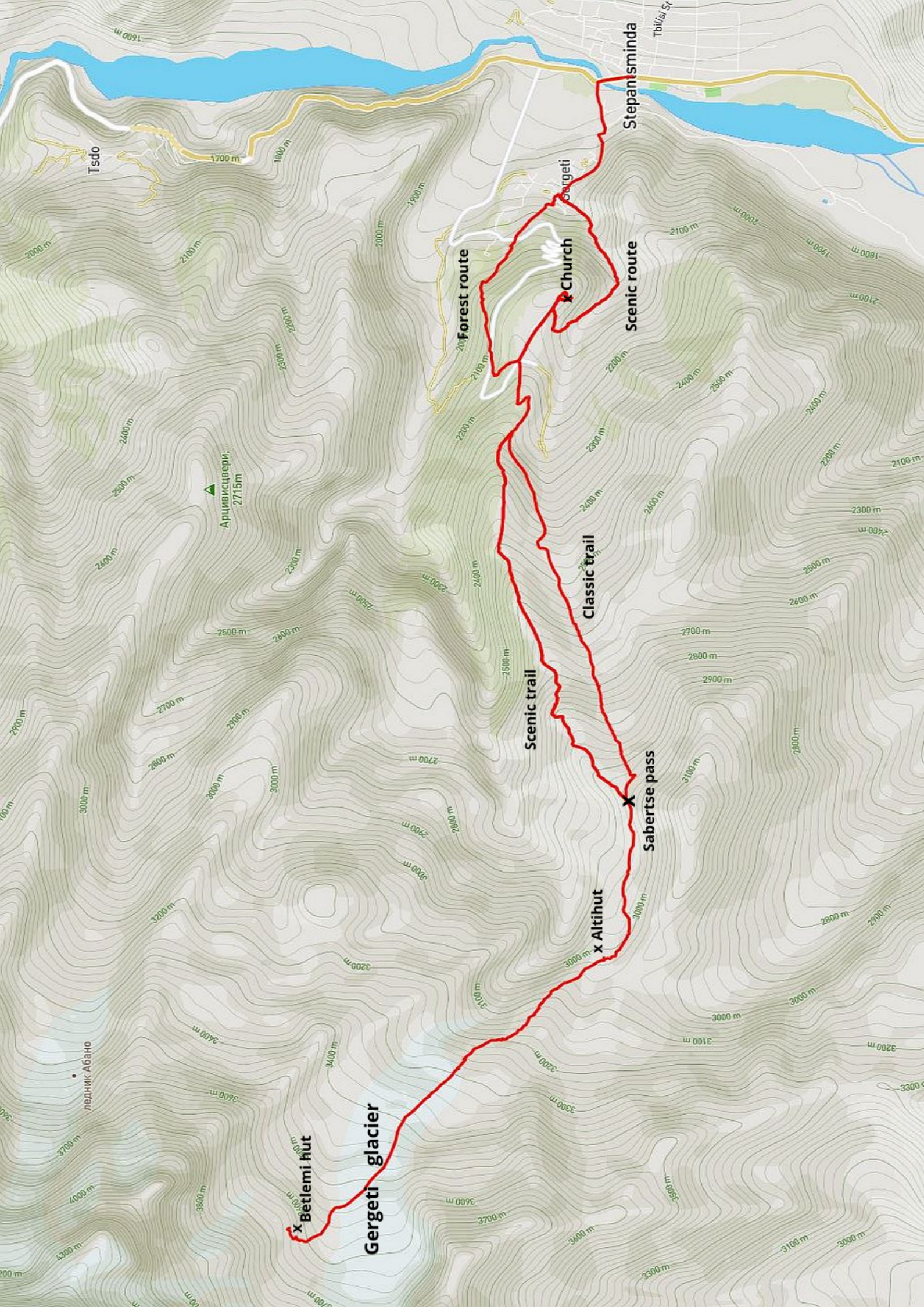
From a perspective of a hiker who doesn't plan to climb Mt. Kazbek, **more interesting might be the scenic route that follows the top of the ridge** all the way to Sabertse pass. Elevation-wise, I don't think it's harder but it's longer by 300 meters (3 vs 3,3 km).

At Sabertse pass (2900m), you will find a small shrine and enjoy first views of Gergeti glacier (if you took the classic route). From here, you need to traverse the hillside and eventually cross a subsidiary of Chkheri river (no need to soak your feet, there is a small metal bridge). Right ahead, you can see a campsite, often used by mountaineers planning to scale Mt. Kazbek, and not far to the right, you see newly-built Altihut.

Altihut 3.014: Altihut is a brand new mountain hut situated close to Sabertese campsite. This ambitious, private project funded by three Georgian entrepreneurs it strives to provide Swiss quality for Swiss prices. This can be a bit of a shock for a hiker used to Georgian prices but considering the costs of construction and the fact that most of their supplies are brought by helicopter, it is somewhat understandable. **The hut is modern, cozy and open for the most of the year** (in winter, you need to book ahead or you may find out that it's closed).

Behind the river, **the trail becomes steeper and climbs directly towards the foot of the glacier** - this last section takes about half an hour. At the glacier, you can try a small walk, take a few pictures and its time to go back the way you came.

Some trekkers also cross the glacier and reach meteostation Bethlemi, equipped only with trekking poles. Under some circumstances, it is not too risky, sometimes it's irresponsible. I don't want to encourage anyone to try it (cos I don't know who is reading this) but if you have experience and you are ready to evaluate the risk, it's also an option. The hut at elevation 3600 meters (route also included in the gpx log, but may change, it's a glacier, after all). Just keep in mind that to walk from Stepantsminda to Betlemi hut and back is very exhausting (11+ hours of walking). At the station, you can sleep (booking recommended) or camp nearby for 10 GEL.



x Betlemi hut

Gergeti glacier

x Altihut

Sabertse pass

Scenic trail

Classic trail

x Church

Forest route

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2715m

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Stepantsminda

Tbilisi St