

The village had a houses for a pastor and one for a teacher. Furthermore, Elisabeththal also had various workshops and two water mills, one on the Asutula River and the other on the Alget River. According to the records of Pastor Martin Friedrich Schrenk (1833–1911), Albert Salzmann, a descendant of the first colonists of Neu-Tiflis, was the architect of the church. The new church was festively consecrated on 29 August 1871. The inhabitants of Elisabeththal lived from cattle breeding, beekeeping and fruit growing. Potato growing also played a vital role. The well-developed livestock breeding and the production of milk and butter for sale brought prosperity to the German settlers. As was already common in Katharinenfeld at that time, covered wagons were also built in Elisabeththal. The sale of these four-wheeled carts, atypical for the Caucasus, was a good source of additional income. In addition, the wagons were used by the settlers for agricultural work, haulage and travel.

Village structure and settler livelihoods

Elisabeththal was founded in 1818 on the site where the village of Samachveti once stood (today called Asuret'i, Tetritskaro municipality). The name of the village comes from its founding day, the 19 November, the day of St. Elisabeth. The German settlers received support to establish the village. The government obliged the Georgian soldiers stationed in neighbouring Manghisi to help the Germans build their houses free of charge. The inhabitants of neighbouring villages also brought building materials with oxcarts and helped plough the farmland. The famous German scientist and traveller Mortiz Wagner (1813–1887) visited Elisabeththal during his trip to the Caucasus between 1843 and 1846. He wrote of "small, but neat and solid houses, inside even furnished homely with tiled stove, pendulum clock and velvet armchair, everything clean and cosy, like back home in the Black Forest and on the Neckar."



Elisabeththal



The historic streets and buildings of Elisabeththal are still well preserved, including more than 160 residential buildings. Due to their high artistic-historical value, the houses of the village can be counted among the most beautiful examples of German architecture in Georgia. Today's inhabitants of Asuret'i have preserved many old agricultural implements, furniture, musical instruments, photographs and paintings from the early German settlers. The main streets in the village centre are connected by short side streets, following the set-up of such settlement. The oldest of these is Swabian Street (former Church Street), where the Evangelical Lutheran church also stands. At the end of the street, northwest of the village, is a relatively large German cemetery, enclosed by a stone wall. The gravestones are unique for Georgia and impress with their decorative ornamentation and elaborate script.

A historical stroll through Elisabeththal



buildings, these include the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the former community house, the potato warehouse and the bath-house dating from the 1930s. The latter is located in the far north-east part of the street and was once supplied with thermal water by pipelines from a nearby forest. Swabian Street meets the 9th of April Street in the south (former Garden Street). Then as now, it connects to a path that leads to the fields and vineyards of the village.

Visitors can also use it to reach the wine factory built in 1931, six kilometres from the village. It is one of the best preserved former German production plants that still exists today. As part of a restoration project financed by the Georgian government, Swabian Street was completely renovated in 2016, with the old fences and doors of the residential buildings being restored to their original form. These efforts were followed by repairs of the church, the residential buildings and the cemetery, fixing damages accumulated over the decades, as well as the comprehensive renovations of several buildings. The works were completed in early 2020.

Elisabeththal is located only 30 km from Tbilisi and can be visited at any time of the year, thanks to its mild climate, but spring and autumn are especially recommended. Visitors are advised to first visit the Swabian Street with its historic buildings, but many of the houses built later in the village centre are also worth a look. Two to three hours should be planned for a visit to the historic village centre, the cemetery and the wine factory.



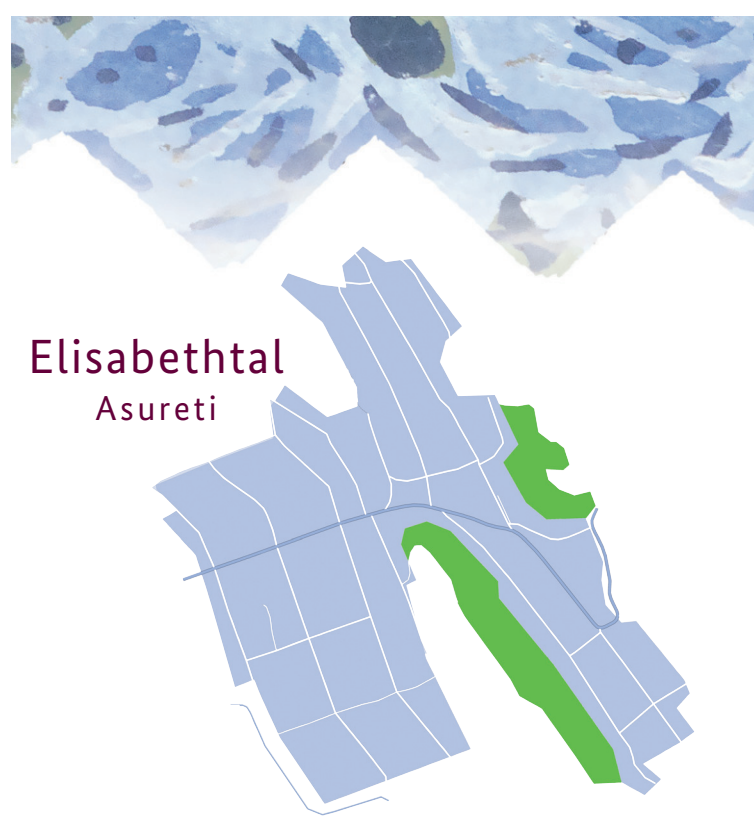
Together with Erich Bernstein, Paul Bühl signed the country's declaration of independence on 26 May 1918. On 12 March 1919 he was elected as a member of the National Assembly of Georgia, on the list of the Social Democratic Party. In the 1920s, after the invasion of the Bolsheviks, Bernstein left the country but Bühl remained in Georgia. He was imprisoned but was soon released and resumed his work in Elisabeththal. During the Soviet repression of 1937 and 1938, he was arrested again, and on 20 April 1938 was sentenced to death and shot on the same day.

Born in Elisabeththal in 1878, he was one of two German deputies in the first National Assembly of independent Georgia. He received his teacher training at the Saratov-Werner College in the province of Bessarabia (in today's Ukraine). He worked as public school teacher at the German school of Elisabeththal from 1897.

Paul Bühl: Life and work of a teacher from Elisabeththal

During World War I, several German settlements were renamed by the government, and in 1916 Elisabeththal became "Asuret'i". In Soviet times, the collective farm of Elisabeththal was one of the leading ones in all of Georgia. This can still be seen today in the buildings of the village. There was a school, a bathhouse, a club, a power station, a wine cellar, a warehouse for potatoes and a tractor workshop. Elisabeththal even had a small public park, called the "Garden of Eden", with rare trees and flowers. When the Bolsheviks came to power, they expropriated the property of most Germans in Elisabeththal, followed by kidnappings, deportation and for many, sadly, death. Until today, the life stories of most of the villagers remain unexplored. So far, only the story of the teacher of Elisabeththal, Paul Bühl, has been extensively documented.

The heyday and repression of the Soviet era



Elisabeththal Asuret'i

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Further information on the history of the German settlers can be found in the brochure "Tracing the German Heritage of the South Caucasus".

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Elisabeththal Asuret'i

Tracing the German Heritage of the South Caucasus

1 Ordzhonikidze Street 7: Residential House

The two-storey residential house at 7 Ordzhonikidze Street was built in the second half of the 19th century. On the first floor, a balcony extends on both sides of the façade, but its floor and parapet are no longer preserved. The gable roof is still covered with original tiles. The cellar consists of two rooms, which are on different levels. A stone staircase leads to the storage room, continuing to the vaulted wine cellar below.

2 Public Park "Lustgarten"

The public park, called Lustgarten by the German settlers, is located at the beginning of Swabian Street. The entrance gate of the park was reconstructed true to original form. The short 1939 documentary film about the park, discovered in the Georgian state archives, helped guide the restoration design. The park once had a fountain and a dance floor surrounded by old trees and various bushes and flowers. There was also a pergola with a native vine growing on it. Today, the Lustgarten no longer shines with its original splendour; however, there is a plan to restore it to its former glory in the near future.

14 Wine Factory

The Wine Factory was designed by Austrian and German engineers during the Soviet period in 1931. The building project was subsequently led by the Greek engineer Ivan Muratidi. The factory building is constructed of carefully cut stone blocks. On the west side of the building is a semi-circular lintel, decorated with barrels and grapes and bearing an inscription.

Due to the sloping ground relief, the building has two storeys on the south side. In the cellar there is a vaulted stone tunnel where wine was stored. The high roof of the wine factory is still covered with the original tiles and the courtyard is enclosed by a high wall. After decades of neglect, the building is now in very poor condition; the roof has already collapsed in several places. The factory has been granted the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

13 9th of April Street 19: Koch Residence

Located on a steep hill, this single-storey dwelling house belonged to Otto Koch. It was built in the second half of the 19th century. The house has wooden balconies on three sides, which were later partly rebuilt and widened. A staircase leading to both the attic and the cellar is located inside. The cellar is divided into two areas, a vaulted stone space and a cellar room with a wooden ceiling. The gable roof is still covered with the original tiles and is crowned by two chimneys made of adobe. The house has been granted the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

12 Karl Marx Street 10: Residential House

This single-storey residential house was built in the late 19th century. The building has a low single-storey, partly underground cellar, which was used for agricultural purposes. It has a wooden ceiling and a wide oak entrance door. The facades have wooden balconies on both sides, which were rebuilt, widened and supported with additional metal pillars in the 1960s. The roof truss was also rebuilt and widened, with the expansions of the gable balcony and the addition of a pantry.

11 Cemetery

The cemetery of Elisabethtal is located a little bit outside of the village to the north-east. It is enclosed by a medium-high stone wall. Its edges, as well as the entrance, are paved with sandstone. During the reconstruction of the cemetery in the early 2000s, the 25 iron crosses and basalt gravestones found there were arranged in a circular shape. In 2019, the cemetery was restored as closely as possible to its original state, with Georgian public funds.

10 Galaktion Tabidze Street 13: Residential House

This two-storey residential house was built in the 1850s. Due to the sloping ground relief, the house is single-storey on the side facing the street. The upper floor is used as living space, while the ground floor contains a wine cellar. On the first floor, along the entire length of the courtyard side, there is a wooden balcony supported by a rectangular stone column. Both gables of the high roof are half-timbered. It should be noted that while the half-timbering style of German houses in Georgia mostly follows very similar form, the half-timbering pattern of this house is very different. There are only a few comparable examples of this type of half-timbering in Georgia. The original roof tiles have been preserved. The cellar is divided into two sections, a vaulted stone cellar and a cellar room with a flat wooden ceiling.

9 Bathhouse

In 1933, during the Soviet era, the village was given a bathhouse, fed by sulphur water brought from the forest through a system of pipes. The water was heated on site in the bath. It is a two-storey building, with mosaic-decorated interiors. The bath also included a reading room. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it came into private ownership and remains unused to this day. The bathhouse has been granted the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

8 Swabian Street 79: Residential House

The two-storey residential house at Swabian Street 79 was built in the middle of the 19th century and is still preserved in almost original condition. The ground floor hosts a wine cellar and a stable. The first floor serves as the living area. A narrow wooden balcony covers its entire front side, with gables in half-timbered style. The tiles of the high roof are still the original ones. Facing the street, the house has a traditional German wooden fence. There are masterfully shaped wide stone posts with narrow fence boards between them. On one of the stone posts another six-petalled flower is carved. This symbol of life can also be found on the gravestones in the German cemetery. The house has been granted the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

7 Swabian Street 68: Residential House

The residential house located at Swabian Street 68 has two floors and was built in the middle of the 19th century. The first floor serves as a living area, while the ground floor contains a wine cellar that is still in its original condition. A wooden balcony stretches along the entire length of the first floor facade, supported by stone columns, with a parapet made of ornamented wooden poles. Both gables of the house are half-timbered. The original tiles still adorn the high gable roof. The property is enclosed by a wooden fence. A six-petalled flower is carved on one of the stone posts, probably as a symbol of life, a popular decoration among the Germans living in Georgia at the time. The house has the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

6 Evangelical Lutheran Church of Elisabethtal

The church is located in the middle of Swabian Street. Originally there was a smaller church there, but it had become too small for the growing congregation. By 1868 the Germans had become so economically so strong that they were able to build a new church with their own financial means and some state support. They entrusted the architect Albert Salzmann (1833–1897) with the project. In 1871, the new church was solemnly consecrated. In the 1930s, the Bolsheviks turned the church into a cultural centre and finally a theatre. They also demolished the pointed bell tower and built additional storage rooms. In 2019, the church was restored to its original state with Georgian public funds. It has the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

4 Swabian Street 8: Residential House

The single-storey residential house at Swabian Street 8 was built in the middle of the 19th century. A wooden balcony extends along the entire length of the facade. It has been widened and thus no longer retains its original shape. The roof gables were built in half-timbered style. Under the entire floor space of the house lies a cellar, with an old massive wooden door and a historic lock. The house is covered by a high gable roof and does retain a few of its original tiles.

5 Swabian Street 19: Residential House

This residential house has two storeys and was built in the middle of the 19th century. The ground floor, with wine cellar and stable, was used for agricultural production, while the living quarters were located on the first floor. The house has two entrances, one facing the street and one facing the courtyard. Both facades have wooden balconies, with masterfully sculpted wooden parapets. Another balcony is located on the gable. The windows still have the original shutters and the roof tiles are also originals.

3 Swabian Street 15: Dirk House

The stately two-storey residential house at Swabian Street 15 was built in the second half of the 19th century and was once owned by Irma Dirk. It is very different from the other houses in the street: it is the only German house in Georgia with half-hip roof and a clearly defined gable in half-timbered style. The left half of the ground floor and the ground floor serve as living space, while the right half of the ground floor is used as a cellar. On the first floor, there is a narrow balcony along the entire length of the facade facing the street. There was also a balcony facing the courtyard; however, it was not preserved. On the other hand, the cellar, extending over two levels, has been maintained in almost original condition to this day. The roof tiles are also still original.

Ten years ago, the house was bought by the German Manfred Tikhonov from Berlin, who has lived in it ever since. Tikhonov is involved in the cultivation of wine as well as various agricultural and handicraft activities. The house has been granted the status of a Georgian cultural monument.

Elisabethtal Asureti

The proposed walk through Elisabethtal ties together historically and culturally significant sites of German heritage (1 to 14) and takes about two to three hours. Many of the buildings are on the list of Georgian cultural monuments. Further details can be found on the information boards on each site. Unless otherwise stated, the interiors can be visited as part of a booked tour, by prior appointment or at the invitation of the hospitable house residents.

