

Katharinenfeld was the largest and most developed German settlement in Georgia, largely fuelled by the successful wine business. The Germans began cultivating grapes from the very founding of the village, with vines received from the local population. To deepen their knowledge of viticulture, they regularly visited the famous Georgian winegrowers in Tsinadali and Mukhrani. In Katharinenfeld there were private wine producers as well as a winegrower's cooperative, founded in 1908. The

### Success in viticulture and horticulture brings prosperity and growth

In 1818, two German settlements were established in the south Caucasus: Katharinenfeld, today known as Bolnisi in Georgia, and Elizavetpol, today the town of Ganja in Azerbaijan. Due to the poor soil and drinking water quality at the original site, the settlement was moved already in 1819 to the location where Bolnisi is today. The settlers named their community in honour of Katharina, Queen of Württemberg. In August 1826, there was an incursion of Kurdish, Persian and Turkish raiders into Katharinenfeld. Many of the inhabitants were killed or abducted and their houses burnt to the ground. However, with substantial material and financial support from the state, the settlement was able to recover quickly.

Katharinenfeld was the centre of Protestant "separatists" who believed in the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Throughout the 1830s, culminating in 1843, there was unrest among the population. Some of the settlers demanded permission to move to Jerusalem, but the government did everything to turn them away from this idea. Soon the construction of a new, larger church began, which was festively consecrated in the spring of 1854. Its high bell tower was destroyed at the beginning of the Soviet era and several extensions were added. The reconstructed church building is still used as a sports hall today.



## Katharinenfeld

German settlers learned from the Georgian experience, planted vineyards with different grape varieties and applied the methods of local wine production. For storage and transport, however, they used only their traditional wooden barrels.

In addition to viticulture, also horticulture flourished in Katharinenfeld. In the 1880s, three farms were producing and processing fruit. At that time, the village also had a brickyard and three mills. In total, 33 families of craftsmen manufactured a wide variety of products and provided services. Some of the craftsmen made covered wagons, while others specialised in wooden barrels. In 1890 a hospital was opened in the village.

**A thriving social and cultural life**

In Katharinenfeld, as in the other German settlements, much emphasis was placed on music from the very start. In addition to the church choir, singing groups, chapels and orchestras were formed. In 1898, the "Musical Society" of Katharinenfeld was founded, joined in 1908 by a string orchestra and in the 1920s by two harmony orchestras, with brass and woodwind instruments, one for the younger and one for the older generation.

In 1916, during the World War I, Katharinenfeld was renamed Ekaterinovka. In 1921, the communists decided that the village should henceforth bear the name Luxemburg in honour of the Polish-German communist Rosa Luxemburg. In 1943, the village finally received its present name Bolnisi. After World War I, it quickly regained its old cultural and economic prosperity and once again became one of the most successful settlements in the country. The settlement now also had the "Lustgarten" park, with a cinema and a dance floor. Katharinenfeld had its own theatre and a "Circle of Theatre Lovers", staging plays in Georgian. The village also had a hunting club, cycling club and several football teams. A volunteer fire brigade of 40 villagers provided fire protection.

Until 1930, children were educated in the Katharinenfeld school up to the eighth grade. The school system was eventually expanded by two grades, so that pupils could attend the village school up to grade ten and then enrol in a technical institute, consisting of three departments. Many inhabitants continued their education in Tbilisi, Saint Petersburg and Germany.



At the beginning of the 20th century, Katharinenfeld, which had an excellent reputation in viticulture, became one of the most important economic and cultural centres of the Lower Kartli region. Its success was grounded on the rapidly developing economic strengths of the village. It gradually developed into a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural place. Due to the rich German architectural heritage, as well as its history of diverse artistic and architectural achievements, Katharinenfeld occupies a special place among all German settlements in Georgia.

### A stroll through Katharinenfeld and two centuries of history

The opulent architecture created by German settlers 200 years ago still awakens great admiration among today's visitors. The ideal time to visit Katharinenfeld is from early spring to late autumn. A three- to four-

In the 1940s and 1950s, German World War II prisoners of war were used by the Soviets for various infrastructure projects throughout Georgia, including Bolnisi. Their cemetery is located just a few kilometres north.

In 1930, the collective farm "Anfang" was founded in Katharinenfeld. The communist authorities expropriated the vineyards of some families, transferring them to the collective farm. At that time, the rich winegrower Ernst Allmendinger decided to return to Germany. Before his departure, he documented Katharinenfeld in detail. In October 1941, after Hitler's Germany invaded the Soviet Union, most of the German inhabitants of Katharinenfeld were deported to Kazakhstan, sharing the fate of their compatriots throughout Georgia. Only the wives of non-German men were spared and could stay.

### Deportation and the loss of the Caucasian homeland



hour walk offers ample opportunity to explore the former German settlement. Its structure and architectural heritage are well preserved, with more than 400 residential houses at its core.

Notable buildings include the former Evangelical Lutheran Church, the former wine factory of the "Union" collective, the public park "Lustgarten", two water mills as well as the military commissariat built in the 1920s. The German cemetery is no longer there; a memorial on the edge of the former cemetery grounds testifies to its existence. Only a few gravestones from the old cemetery remain on St. Nino Street, at the site of the memorial to those who died in World War II.

The oldest settlement core of Katharinenfeld is located in the area of today's streets Shota Rustaveli (formerly Garden Street), Giorgi Saakadze and Stefania (formerly Katharinen Street), King Pharnavaz Street (formerly Nikolai Street), Merab Kostava (formerly "Church Street") and Egnate Ninoshvili (formerly Mill Ditch Street). The next stage of development extended to the streets today known as Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (formerly Tbilisi Street), Ilija Chavchavadze (formerly Alexander Street), Athoni (formerly Fountain Street) as well as Holy Nino (formerly New Street). The German residential buildings of Bolnisi are among the best preserved from any German settlement in Georgia. The majority of the houses on King Pharnavaz Street have been granted the status of cultural monuments by the Georgian state. Information boards (in Georgian, German, English) provide more details on their history as well as artistic and cultural significance. The boards were set up with the support of the Council of Europe Representation in Georgia. Residential buildings of special architectural value are also located along Giorgi Saakadze Street, Shota Rustaveli Street, Ilija Chavchavadze Street and Stefania Street. In addition to the historical sites of the village, visitors to Bolnisi should also visit the former Kötzele Mill on the Mashavera River.

After extensive reconstruction and investment by German proprietors, the hotel and restaurant "Deutsche Mühle" was opened, offering excellent accommodation and food. A visit to the ruins of the former Morlach Mill is also worthwhile.



## Katharinenfeld Bolnisi



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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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# Katharinenfeld Bolnisi

Tracing the German Heritage of the South Caucasus



# 1 Evangelical Lutheran Church of Katharinenfeld

Originally built in 1854, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Katharinenfeld is located on what now is known as Merab Kostava Street. With the arrival of Soviet power in Georgia, the place of worship lost its function and stood empty for a long time. In the 1940s, the bell tower was demolished and additions built on the nave, the main facade, and both side facades. The building served various purposes throughout the decades, as a warehouse, a club and finally as a sports hall. The building has an elongated gable roof that rests on the segmented nave and the separate altar area.

# 2 King Pharnavaz Street 50: Residential House

At a road junction, near the former "Kirchplatz" (church square), lies the residential house owned by the carpenter Johannes Krämer. The two-storey structure was built in the second half of the 19th century. On the upper floor there are three different wooden balconies: one with carved ornaments and figures, one with sculpted bars and another with simple wooden beams. Remnants of the original paint can still be seen on the facades. Under the southern part of the house is a vaulted cellar, accessible from the ground floor area, which was used for agricultural tasks. The typical rectangular air shafts can be noted in the cellar walls.

# 3 King Pharnavaz Street 47: Residential House

The two-storey residential house was also built in the second half of the 19th century and belonged to the winegrower Franz Breuninger. The roof gables were built as a half-timbered construction and are lined with narrow tiles. There is a narrow wooden balcony on first floor of the long west facade, which faces the courtyard. On this balcony there is still an entrance, which can be reached via a wooden staircase. The house has a cellar only on its west side. The cellar has a vaulted stone ceiling and the cellar walls have air shafts. An old wine press can be found in the northwest corner of the cellar.

# 4 King Pharnavaz Street 41: Public Building

The single-storey building was constructed in the 1840s to host the village administration of Katharinenfeld. In addition to the community room and offices, it also had a prison cell in the basement. In the 1920s an additional floor was built, and the inhabitants of Katharinenfeld used it as a secondary "Armenian School" until the 1990s. One gable of the high roof is half-timbered and lined with red bricks. Remnants of the Katharinenfeld drinking water system are still clearly visible under the building on the west and east sides of the facade. The courtyard is enclosed by a wall. The building has been granted the status of an architectural monument by the Georgian state.

# 5 King Pharnavaz Street 46: Residential House

The former home of merchant Georg Walker and his family was built at the turn of the 20th century. This two-storey house is made up of three independent, adjoining buildings, which are connected to each other from both the front and the back by open wooden balconies. The backyard can be accessed via the middle building. All three parts of the structure have a high attic, which is covered with a tiled roof, and its gables have wooden balconies. The cellars are on different levels, whereby the lowest room has a vaulted stone ceiling and the others have ceilings made of solid wooden beams. The facades of all three parts of the house as well as the upper floors were built in the half-timbered style. For a long time, the ground floor housed a pharmacy and a textile shop, operated by Joseph Allmendinger.

# 11 King Pharnavaz Street 15: Residential House

This single-storey dwelling was built in the second half of the 19th century and belonged to the family of the merchant Georg Walker. The building has a semi-cylindrical basement covered with tiles and a high attic. There are two wooden balconies on the courtyard side. In the middle part of the house there used to be an entrance to the backyard; however, this is blocked by a newly added building on the street side. In the courtyard the ruins of another house and a storehouse can be found. The house is situated on a slope and is therefore supported on the courtyard side by a stone wall.

# 10 King Pharnavaz Street 27: Residential House

Built in the 1860s by the Schmied family, this residence has unique architectural features for Bolnisi and German settlements in Georgia. On the courtyard side of the house, which is almost fully preserved in its original state, a wooden balcony extends across the entire width of the facade. The house has a full basement. The cellar consists of two rooms, both of which have wooden beam ceilings. A one-storey stone stable lies in the back of the courtyard.

# 9 King Pharnavaz Street 30: Residential House

This belonged to the Allmendinger family. It was built in the second half of the 19th century and with its 16 living rooms is one of the largest German historical dwellings in Bolnisi. Due to the sloping ground relief, the two-storey house is only has only one storey on the courtyard side. The wooden balcony on the gable is divided into three parts. The middle section served the family as a half-open veranda. The cellar rooms are on different levels. The cellar rooms located under the north and south sides of the house are on one level, while the cellar under the middle part of the house extends over two levels. The lower part has a vaulted stone ceiling.

# 8 King Pharnavaz Street 38-40: Residential House

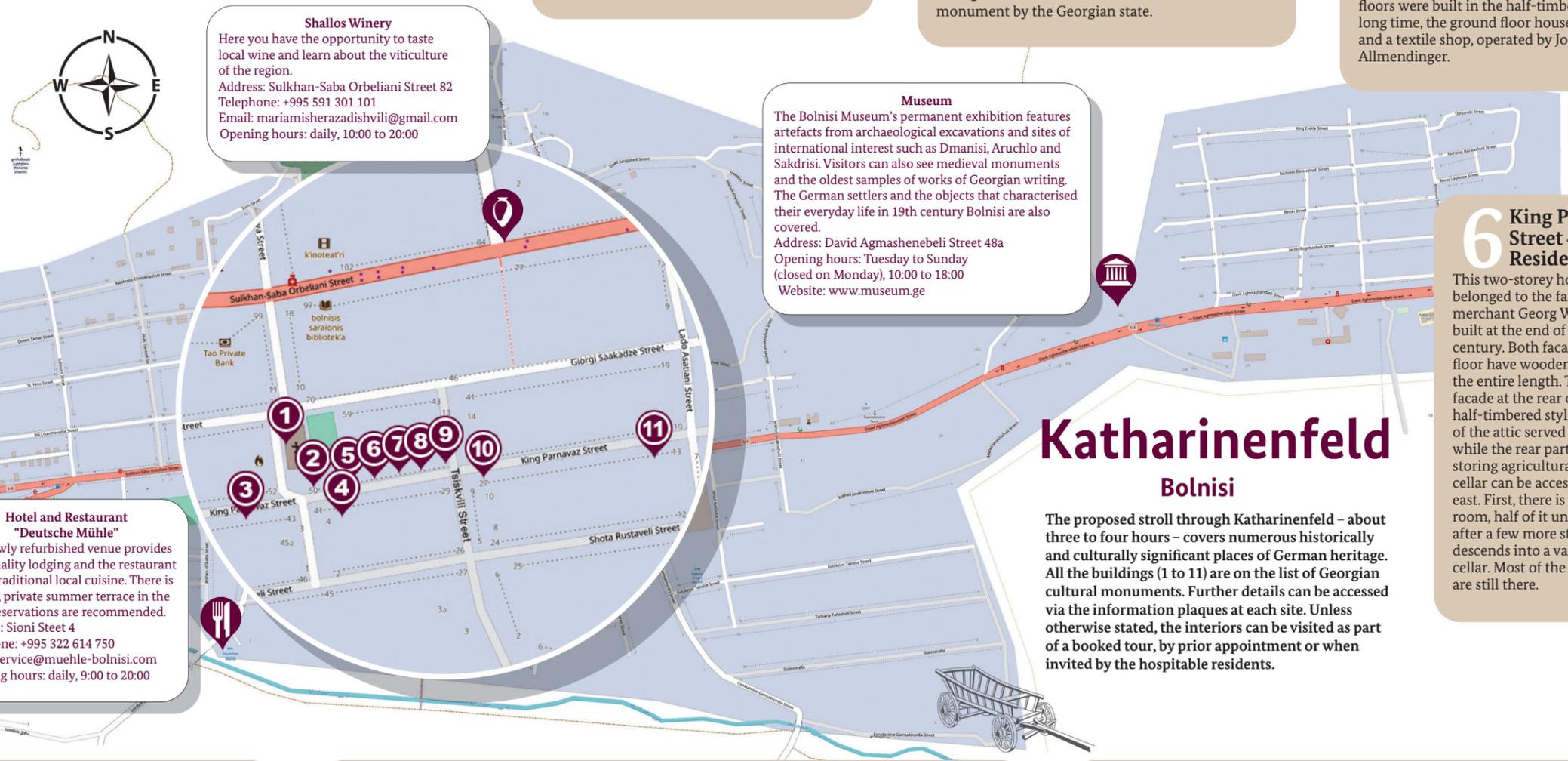
Built in the first half of the 19th century, this residence belonged to the winegrower Fritz Sackmann. The living quarters face the street, and the agricultural rooms adjoin them in the direction of the courtyard. The high gable roof of the house has gables in half-timbered style, lined with red bricks and ornamented with decorative diamond-shaped and triangular elements. On the courtyard side, the house has an open wooden balcony along its entire length, which has been reconstructed and altered from its original shape. At the end of the balcony is a staircase that leads to an expansive cellar, extending over several floors with ceilings of varying design.

# 7 King Pharnavaz Street 42: Residential House

In the first half of the 19th century, the wine merchant Eduard Allmendinger built this single-storey house, with an elongated inner courtyard. The original stone paving of the courtyard is still partly preserved. On the courtyard side, there is a wooden balcony along the entire length of the facade; originally resting on a stone foundation, it has since been heavily modified. The entire floor area of the building has a cellar. Except for the basement walls, the building is entirely half-timbered.

# 6 King Pharnavaz Street 44: Residential House

This two-storey house also belonged to the family of the merchant Georg Walker. It was built at the end of the 19th century. Both facades of the first floor have wooden balconies along the entire length. The short gable facade at the rear of the house is in half-timbered style. The front part of the attic served as living space, while the rear part was used for storing agricultural products. The cellar can be accessed from the east. First, there is a wood-panelled room, half of it underground, and after a few more steps, one descends into a vaulted wine cellar. Most of the original bricks are still there.



## Katharinenfeld Bolnisi

The proposed stroll through Katharinenfeld – about three to four hours – covers numerous historically and culturally significant places of German heritage. All the buildings (1 to 11) are on the list of Georgian cultural monuments. Further details can be accessed via the information plaques at each site. Unless otherwise stated, the interiors can be visited as part of a booked tour, by prior appointment or when invited by the hospitable residents.

