

ASIA · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · FOOD · MOUNTAINS · CULTURE



Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan squeezes a lot between the Caspian Sea and the Greater Caucasus: Baku's walled Old City beneath the glass Flame Towers, Stone Age rock carvings at Gobustan, burning hillsides on the Absheron Peninsula and the silk-road town of Sheki in the green northern foothills. Distances are short, and few capitals mix medieval, Soviet and oil-boom architecture so boldly.



The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Azerbaijan.

Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.

FCDO advice last updated 8 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Baku	 CURRENCY Azerbaijani manat (AZN) £1 ≈ AZN 2.27	 LANGUAGE Azerbaijani, Russian	 BEST TIME Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 5h 30m direct ~£400–£750 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+4 standard time

Azerbaijan is the Caucasus at its most cosmopolitan and most Caspian. Baku dominates: a medieval walled core with the Maiden Tower and Palace of the Shirvanshahs, wrapped in 19th-century oil-baron mansions and then in the swooping curves of the Heydar Aliyev Centre and the Flame Towers. Most first trips spend three or four days there, with day trips to Gobustan's petroglyphs and mud volcanoes and the Absheron fire sites, then head north-west to Sheki and its caravanserais, or north into the mountains around Quba and the high village of Khinalug. A week covers the essentials; ten days adds Lahij, Gabala and Ganja.

Baku is pricier than the rest of the country but good value by western European standards: metro rides cost pennies, Bolt taxis are cheap, and a long lunch of kebabs, fresh herbs and tea rarely breaks the bank. Outside the capital, guesthouses are simple and English thins out quickly, so a few words of Azerbaijani or Russian help. Visitors are often surprised by how secular and relaxed Baku feels, by the scale of the hospitality (tea arrives unasked), and by the sensitivity around Armenia and Karabakh, a subject best left alone. It suits food lovers, architecture fans and anyone curious about the post-Soviet world.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

HISTORY

Icherisheher (Baku Old City)

Baku's walled medieval core is a UNESCO site of stone lanes, caravanserais and carpet shops. Climb the enigmatic Maiden Tower for Caspian views, then explore the 15th-century Palace of the Shirvanshahs and its royal tombs.
- 2

HISTORY

Gobustan rock art and mud volcanoes

More than 6,000 petroglyphs of hunters, dancers, boats and animals cover the boulders of this UNESCO-listed reserve about 60 km south-west of Baku. Most tours add the nearby mud volcanoes, where cold grey mud gurgles from small cones.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Palace of the Sheki Khans

The khans' 18th-century palace in Sheki is covered in frescoes, and its windows are shebeke: coloured glass set in wooden latticework assembled without nails or glue. Stay in the town's old caravanserai and eat piti.

4

CULTURE

Khinalug

This ancient stone village at around 2,300 m in the Greater Caucasus has its own language, spoken by only a few thousand people. The drive up from Quba through a deep canyon is spectacular, and simple homestays allow an overnight.

5

SACRED SITE

Ateshgah Fire Temple

A pentagonal fire temple at Surakhani, built by Indian traders and used by Hindu and Zoroastrian worshippers into the late 19th century. Pair it with Yanar Dag, a hillside where natural gas has burned for decades.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Baku

≈ 2.3 million people

The capital and the reason most people come: a UNESCO-listed Old City, oil-boom boulevards, a long seafront promenade and outlandish modern landmarks, plus the liveliest restaurants and bars in the country.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Sumgait

≈ 430,000 people

A Soviet-planned industrial city about 30 km north-west of Baku with a pleasant seafront boulevard. Interesting only if Soviet urbanism appeals; most travellers skip it.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Ganja

≈ 330,000 people

The country's historic second city, home of the medieval poet Nizami and his mausoleum, the quirky Bottle House and leafy avenues; a good base for Lake Göygöl in the mountains.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Azerbaijan

Best time: **Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

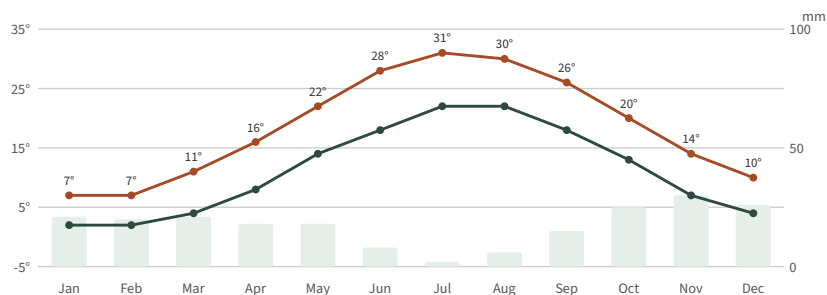
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Baku

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar	Novruz The spring new year around 20–21 March brings bonfire jumping, painted eggs, trays of sprouted wheat (samani) and sweet pastries such as pakhlava and shakarbura, with street performances in Baku's Old City.
Oct–Nov	Goychay Pomegranate Festival Goychay, the heart of Azerbaijan's pomegranate country, celebrates the harvest in late October or early November with fruit stalls, juice and sauces, folk music and dancing.

How much does Azerbaijan cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ AZN 79.38 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ AZN 181 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ AZN 386 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Plov Saffron-tinted rice cooked separately from its toppings of lamb, chestnuts, dried fruit and caramelised onion; shah plov arrives baked inside a crisp lavash crust.	Piti Sheki's lamb and chickpea stew, slow-cooked in an individual clay pot. Eat it in two stages: broth poured over torn bread first, then the meat.	Qutab Thin half-moon flatbreads griddled with fillings of herbs, pumpkin or minced meat, brushed with butter and often dusted with sumac.
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Getting around

Baku has a cheap, efficient metro and city buses paid for with a rechargeable BakuCard, and Bolt and Uber work well. Intercity trains link Baku with Ganja, while buses and minibuses leave the main bus terminal for Sheki, Quba and Gabala; shared taxis are quicker. Hiring a car or driver makes mountain villages such as Khinalug and Lahij far easier.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 103 Fire: 101 Police: 102 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +994	TIME ZONE UTC+4 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right
TIPPING Around 10% is usual in restaurants, but check the bill first, as many Baku places already add a service charge. Round up taxi fares.	

ETIQUETTE

Remove shoes in homes and mosques, dress modestly outside Baku, and accept tea when offered. Greet older people first, and avoid raising Armenia or Karabakh politics in conversation.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Heydar Aliyev International Airport (GYD), Baku

Visas & entry for Azerbaijan

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Azerbaijan.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic 6–8 weeks before you go. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B Measles Rabies Tuberculosis Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Azerbaijan

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 8 Nov 2026	Victory Day
Mon 9 Nov 2026	National Flag Day
Tue 10 Nov 2026	Victory Day (observed)
Thu 31 Dec 2026	International Azerbaijanis Solidarity Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 2 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 4 Jan 2027	New Year's Day (observed)
Wed 20 Jan 2027	Martyrs' Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Women's Day

Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sat 20 Mar 2027	Spring Festival
Sun 21 Mar 2027	Spring Festival
Mon 22 Mar 2027	Spring Festival
Tue 23 Mar 2027	Spring Festival
Wed 24 Mar 2027	Spring Festival
Thu 25 Mar 2027	Spring Festival (observed)
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Spring Festival (observed)
Sun 9 May 2027	Victory over Fascism Day
Mon 10 May 2027	Victory over Fascism Day (observed)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (observed, estimated) (date may shift)
Fri 28 May 2027	Independence Day
Tue 15 Jun 2027	National Liberation Day
Sat 26 Jun 2027	Armed Forces Day
Mon 28 Jun 2027	Armed Forces Day (observed)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Azerbaijani

ENGLISH	AZERBAIJANI	SAY IT
Hello	Salam	<i>sah-LAHM</i>
Thank you	Təşəkkür edirəm	<i>teh-shek-KYUR ed-ee-REM</i>
Please	Zəhmət olmasa	<i>zah-MET ol-mah-SAH</i>
Excuse me	Bağışlayın	<i>bah-ghish-LAH-yin</i>
How much is this?	Bu neçəyədir?	<i>boo neh-cheh-YEH-dir</i>

Know before you go

- Buy a rechargeable BakuCard at a metro station on day one: you need it for the metro and city buses, which do not take cash.
- Carry manat in cash outside Baku. Cards work in city hotels and restaurants, but village guesthouses, markets and shared taxis expect cash, and ATMs thin out in the mountains.
- Check the FCDO travel advice before planning any overland route into or out of Azerbaijan, as land border arrangements have changed in recent years and may change again.