



Azerbaijan

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Best Places to Stay

- » Karavansaray Hotel (p239)
- » Rustam Rustamov (p234)
- » Şəki Saray Hotel (p239)
- » John & Tanya Howard's Guesthouse (p236)
- » Afra Hotel (p238)

Best Rural Getaways

- » İlisu (p244)
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- » Lahıc (p234)

Why Go?

Neither Europe nor Asia, Azerbaijan (Azərbaycan) is a tangle of contradictions and contrasts. A nexus of ancient historical empires, it's also a 'new' nation rapidly emerging on a petroleum-funded gust of optimism.

Surrounded by semidesert on the oil-rich Caspian Sea, the cosmopolitan capital, Baku, rings its Unesco-listed ancient core with mushrooming new skyscrapers.

Yet barely three hours' drive away are timeless rural villages, clad in lush orchards and backed by the soaring Great Caucasus mountains. Here, aimlessly wandering cattle trump Baku's flashy limousines while potbellied bureaucrats scratch their heads in confusion on finding that an outsider has wandered into their territory.

When to Go

Lowland Azerbaijan is especially lovely from April to June as showers interspersed by clear skies enliven bright-green, flower-dappled fields. In October, Baku is particularly pleasant though much of the rural countryside is parched brown.

Summer gets oppressively hot and humid in low-lying areas but late July is by far the best trekking season in the higher mountains.

Winters are relatively mild around the Caspian shores, but do bring heavy sweaters for Şəki.

In January, brass monkeys may panic in Xınalıq or Lahıc while remote Caucasian villages like Qriş can be cut off for months by snow.

Connections

By air, Baku has numerous connections to Europe and Central Asia, plus to China and Dubai. There are additional air links to Moscow from Lənkəran, Naxçıvan and Gəncə.

Direct international buses from Istanbul run three days a week to Baku (via Georgia and Gəncə) and six times daily to Naxçıvan. Between Naxçıvan and the rest of Azerbaijan you'll need to fly, or transit Iran.

All borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia are closed and seriously militarised. Similarly, Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied areas are entirely inaccessible from the rest of Azerbaijan.

Borders with Russia are closed to foreigners but locals can cross by road/rail at Samur/Yalama.

Between Baku and Tbilisi there are direct buses and overnight trains but it's far more satisfying (and scenic) to travel in bus hops via İsmayılı, Oğuz, Şəki and Zaqatala.

To reach remote mountain villages you may need to rent a 4WD.

ITINERARIES

Three Days

Soak up the atmosphere of bustling Baku and make trips to Qobustan and the Abşeron Peninsula.

One Week

Work your way between Tbilisi (Georgia) and Baku via Zaqatala, Şəki and Lahıc or head up from Baku to Quba and explore its mountain hinterland.

Two Weeks

Combine the suggestions above and consider adding a trip to Lənkəran and Lerik, perhaps en route to Iran.

Visas

Most nationalities require a visa, and getting one requires an awkward-to-procure letter of invitation (see p268). Applying in Georgia is generally the easiest option.

Visas on arrival are not available.

RESOURCES

Azerbaijan International (www.azer.cm)

TEAS (www.visions.az, www.teas.eu)

Window to Baku (www.window2Baku.com)

News (www.news.az, www.today.az, www.apa.az)

Az.az (www.azerbaijan.az)

BTIC (www.bakutourism.az)

MCTAR (<http://azerbaijan.tourism.az>)

Navigator (www.navigator.az)

Fast Facts

- » **Country code** ☎994
- » **Population** 9 million
- » **Currency** Manat (AZN)
- » **Language** Azerbaijani (Azeri)
- » **Emergency** Police ☎102, Ambulance ☎103, Baku 012-4970911

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	1.77 GEL
Canada	C\$1	1.69 GEL
Euro Zone	€1	2.36 GEL
Japan	¥100	2.16 GEL
NZ	NZ\$1	1.41 GEL
UK	UK£1	2.70 GEL
USA	US\$1	1.66 GEL

Set Your Budget

- » Budget accommodation AZN40 double
- » Two-course meal AZN15
- » Museum free–AZN10
- » Beer 70q–AZN5
- » Baku bus ride 20q

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