PACK LIGHTLY

THE LAND OF FIRE, ON THE CASPIAN

Azerbaijan

Glass towers over a walled old city, hillsides that burn on their own, and Silk Road towns in the mountains behind.



p. 11 The Land of Fire: Yanar Dag and Ateshgah

p. 30 What a day really costs, printed as a till receipt

p. 19 Azerbaijani food, dish by dish, with prices

45 PAGES USD PRICES E-VISA 30 DAYS EDITION 2026.07

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of an Azerbaijan trip, what it costs, what to sort first



Azerbaijan is where Europe, Asia and the Middle East blur, and it feels like nowhere else in the Caucasus. Baku, the capital on the Caspian, sets the tone: a walled medieval old city ringed by oil-money skyscrapers and Zaha Hadid curves. Around it the country really is a land of fire, with hillsides and temples that burn from natural gas. Head inland and you reach ancient rock art, bubbling mud volcanoes, and Silk Road mountain towns of coppersmiths and khan palaces. It is a little pricier than its neighbours but still cheap, and most travelers just need a quick online e-visa.

The shape of a trip

Base in Baku for the city, the fire sites and Gobustan, then loop northwest into the mountains to Sheki, Lahij and Gabala. Most of it runs off the capital.

What a day costs

Backpacking runs about 30 USD a day, mid-range around 65, captured for this edition. The full receipt, bed to nightcap, is itemised on page 30.

Sort before you fly

Most nationalities need the quick online ASAN e-visa. Add travel insurance, an eSIM, and book your first nights. Page 32 lists the order.





HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

Contents

tap a line to jump straight there

01 The country 06

02 Where to go 09

03 What to do 16

04 Routes and itineraries 22

05 When to go 27

06 Practical 31

07 Safe and smart 36

08 Tools, print cards, sources 40

QUICK JUMPS

The route picker 23

What a day really costs 30

The Land of Fire 11

Your trip on one page

9-12 days · 30 to 150 USD/day · best Apr-Jun and Sep-Oct

If you read nothing else, this page is the trip. Base in Baku for the walled city, the fire sites and the Gobustan day trip, then loop northwest into the Greater Caucasus foothills to Sheki, Lahij and Gabala. It is one overland loop on buses and shared taxis, no domestic flights. Book from the bars below, not from resort rates, and only lock your first couple of nights.

THE ROUTE

Baku day 1-4 — day trips — **Sheki** day 5-6 — 1h30 drive — **Gabala** day 7-8 — via Lahij — **Quba** day 9-11

BUDGET PER DAY

Backpacker	30 USD
Standard	65 USD
Comfort	150 USD

BOOK FIRST

01	International flights, 6 to 8 weeks out	Aviasales
02	First two nights in Baku	Booking.com
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
cold, damp Caspian winter	cold, damp Caspian winter	shoulder: hot coast or cooler mountains	best: mild, dry, comfortable	best: mild, dry, comfortable	best: mild, dry, comfortable	shoulder: hot coast or cooler mountains	shoulder: hot coast or cooler mountains	best: mild, dry, comfortable	best: mild, dry, comfortable	shoulder: hot coast or cooler mountains	cold, damp Caspian winter

Baku is card-friendly, but the mountain towns, shared taxis and bazaars run on cash. Keep small manat on you outside the capital.

Sort the ASAN e-visa online before you fly. It takes three working days, so do not leave it to the last minute.

Azerbaijan at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Friendliness	80
Budget friendly	75
Culture	75
Food and drink	70
Nature	65
Cities	60

Budget travel	30 USD/day
Mid-range	65 USD/day
Luxury	150 USD/day

BAKU · FIRE · SILK ROAD · CASPIAN · BUDGET

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-07

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP













photos: Wikimedia Commons

01

The country

What Azerbaijan is, why fire and oil run through its whole story, and the regions to know before you pick dates.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What Azerbaijan is 07

Land of fire, sea of oil 08

What Azerbaijan is

10M people · Turkic and secular · on the Caspian

A Turkic, mostly secular, Shia-majority nation of ten million on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, where the Caucasus meets the Middle East. Azerbaijan is the richest and most modern of the three Caucasus states, thanks to oil and gas, and nowhere shows it like Baku: a UNESCO-listed walled old city surrounded by a skyline of glass towers. Beyond the capital it turns older and slower, with mountain villages of coppersmiths and silk weavers, Silk Road caravanserais, and some of the oldest rock art on earth. The language is close to Turkish, the welcome is warm, and prices are low outside the flashiest corners of Baku.

CAPITAL
Baku
the largest Caspian city

POPULATION
10M
Turkic, secular, Shia

CURRENCY
AZN
1 USD = ~1.7 manat

BEST MONTHS
Apr-Jun
and Sep-Oct

THREE REGIONS, THREE CHARACTERS



Baku and the Absheron

walled city · skyscrapers · the fire sites

Where the trip lives. A medieval old city under glass towers, with the burning hill, the fire temple and Gobustan all a day trip away.



The northwest: Sheki, Lahij, Gabala

Silk Road · khan palaces · coppersmiths

The Caucasus foothills: the silk town of Sheki with its painted khan palace, the copper lane of Lahij, and green, resort-town Gabala.



The high north: Quba and Khinalug

apple orchards · carpets · the roof villages

Behind Quba the road climbs to Khinalug, one of Europe's highest villages, with its own ancient language and long views.

Land of fire, sea of oil

why the ground burns, and why Baku is rich

Azerbaijan calls itself the Land of Fire, and it is not a slogan. Natural gas seeps through the rock and has burned on hillsides for thousands of years, which is why fire-worshipping Zoroastrians built temples here and why the flame is the national emblem. The same geology gave the country the world's first industrial oil boom: by 1900 the Baku fields produced half the planet's oil, drawing the Nobel and Rothschild families and building the mansions of the old center. Soviet rule, then independence in 1991, then a second oil boom raised the glass skyline you see today. That petro-wealth explains the contrast at the heart of every Baku view.

FIRE TEMPLES
Ancient
Zoroastrian roots

BY 1900
~50%
of world oil, from Baku

INDEPENDENCE
1991
from the Soviet Union

ROCK ART
40,000 yr
Gobustan petroglyphs

☆ The eternal flame at Yanar Dag and the Ateshgah fire temple are the two sites where you can stand in front of the fire itself.

⌂ First trip? Give Baku and its day trips four nights, then pick one mountain loop northwest. That is a comfortable ten days.

GO DEEPER

The top picks in best places, the fire heritage in religious landmarks, and the traditions in the culture page.

02

Where to go

The capital and its fire sites, the ancient rock art of the coast, and the Silk Road towns of the mountains. What each is worth, and which can wait.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Baku 10

The Land of Fire 11

Gobustan and the mud volcanoes 12

Sheki and the Silk Road 13

Lahij and the mountain villages 14

Gabala and Ganja 15

Baku

the Caspian capital · 3-4 nights · your base for everything



One of the most striking capitals anywhere, and where the whole trip is run from. Baku is a study in contrast: inside the medieval walls of Icherisheher lie the Maiden Tower and the Shirvanshahs Palace, while just outside rise the three Flame Towers and the swooping white Heydar Aliyev Center by Zaha Hadid. Walk the walled city, stroll the long Caspian boulevard, ride up to Highland Park for the towers-and-sea view, and eat and drink well in the old-money center the oil boom built. Three or four nights covers the city and its day trips, which is most of what people come for.

WORTH THE CITY DAYS

- [ ] **Icherisheher.** The walled old city, Maiden Tower and palace.
- [ ] **Heydar Aliyev Center.** Zaha Hadid's landmark of white curves.
- [ ] **The Flame Towers.** Best seen lit at night from Highland Park.
- [ ] **The Boulevard.** The long Caspian seafront promenade.

→

Use the Bolt app for taxis; it is cheap and metered. The metro is clean and simple with the BakiKart travel card.

Base inside or just outside the old-city walls to reach the sights, the boulevard and the bars on foot.

MORE ON THE SITE

Neighbourhoods and sights in the Baku guide, the towers in Flame Towers, and the old-city keep in Maiden Tower.

The Land of Fire

Yanar Dag and Ateshgah · half a day from Baku


YANAR DAG, THE BURNING HILL

The trip's signature outing, and the reason for the country's nickname. On the Absheron peninsula just outside Baku, Yanar Dag is a hillside where natural gas has burned continuously for centuries, a wall of flame licking straight out of the rock and best seen at dusk. Nearby, the Ateshgah of Baku is a walled fire temple where Zoroastrian and Hindu pilgrims once worshipped a natural flame at the center of a stone courtyard. Together they make an easy, atmospheric half-day by taxi or tour, and they turn the country's abstract name into something you can stand in front of.


ATESHGAH FIRE TEMPLE


HEYDAR ALIYEV CENTER

Yanar Dag looks best after dark, when the flames stand out. Combine it with Ateshgah on one late-afternoon loop out of Baku.

Both sit on the Absheron peninsula, close together. A half-day taxi split between a few people is the easy way to do both.

MORE ON THE SITE

The burning hill in Yanar Dag, the temple in Ateshgah, and the landmark in the Heydar Aliyev Center.

photos: Wikimedia Commons

Gobustan and the mud volcanoes

rock art and bubbling mud · half a day southwest of Baku



The other essential day trip runs southwest along the Caspian to Gobustan, a UNESCO reserve where over six thousand rock carvings, some forty thousand years old, cover the boulders: hunters, dancers, boats and animals scratched by the people who lived here across the ages. A slick museum sets it in context. Just beyond, the semi-desert hides a cluster of mud volcanoes, low grey cones that gurgle and belch cold mud, one of the largest concentrations on earth and oddly hypnotic to watch. A rough track and a local 4x4 get you out to them. The two pair naturally into one half-day from the capital.

The mud volcanoes sit off the main road down a rough track. Local drivers wait at the turn-off with beat-up Ladas to run you out.

Do the museum and petroglyphs first for the context, then the mud volcanoes. Wear shoes you do not mind getting muddy.

MORE ON THE SITE

The reserve in Gobustan, the carvings in the rock art, and the cones in mud volcanoes.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Sheki and the Silk Road

the silk town · 1-2 nights · the northwest highlight


THE PALACE OF THE SHEKI KHANS

The loveliest town in the country and the anchor of any mountain loop. Sheki sits in the green Caucasus foothills on the old Silk Road, and its jewel is the Palace of the Sheki Khans, a small eighteenth-century summer residence with a facade of stained-glass shebeke lattice and interiors painted top to bottom. Stay in or beside the restored eighteenth-century caravanserai, wander the craft workshops and the covered bazaar, and eat Sheki halva and the local piti stew. It is a three-to-four-hour drive from Baku, a UNESCO-listed old town, and worth a night or two rather than a rushed day.

Sleep in the old Sheki caravanserai itself; the stone rooms around the courtyard are simple and full of atmosphere.

Watch the shebeke stained-glass being assembled without glue or nails in a workshop, then try the famous Sheki halva.

MORE ON THE SITE

The highlights in best places, the copper lane at Lahij, and the resort valley of Gabala.

Lahij and the mountain villages

coppersmiths and roof-of-the-world hamlets · day trips or overnights



The mountains hide a set of villages that reward the detour. Lahij is a cobbled hamlet high in the hills, famous for centuries of coppersmithing, where you can still hear hammers ringing in the workshops along its main lane. Further north, behind the apple town of Quba, a spectacular road climbs to Khinalug, one of the highest continuously inhabited villages in Europe, whose people speak their own ancient language and live among stone houses and long views. Both are slow, atmospheric places that show the older, mountain Azerbaijan behind the Baku glass, reachable by shared taxi or a hired driver.





The Khinalug road is paved but steep and high; go with a driver who knows it, and check the weather before committing to the climb.

Buy something small from a Lahij coppersmith. The craft survives on visitors, and a hand-beaten piece is a real souvenir.

MORE ON THE SITE

The copper village in Lahij, the high hamlet in Khinalug, and the apple town of Quba.

Gabala and Ganja

the green resort and the western city · 1-2 nights each



Two more stops for travelers with time. Gabala, in the forested Caucasus foothills, is Azerbaijan's home-grown mountain resort, with the Tufandag cable car and ski slopes above town, waterfalls and lakes around it, and a laid-back green feel that suits a slow day or two. Far to the west, Ganja is the country's handsome second city, birthplace of the poet Nizami, with a restored old center, the mirrored Bottle House oddity, and the mausoleum and gardens that carry the poet's name. Neither is essential on a first trip, but both round out a longer loop through the mountains and the west.

The Tufandag cable car above Gabala runs year-round: skiing in winter, and cool green ridge views and walks in summer.

Ganja is a long way west; slot it in only if you are looping toward the Georgian border rather than returning to Baku.

MORE ON THE SITE

The resort valley in Gabala, the ropeway in Tufandag, and the western city of Ganja.

03

What to do

The mountains and the Caspian for the outdoors, the tea and table culture that runs through it all, what to eat, and where to sleep.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The mountains and the Caspian	17
Tea, wine and the table	18
Food spotlight	19
Where to stay: Baku, Sheki	20
Where to stay: Gabala, Quba	21

The mountains and the Caspian

ropeways, ridges and the inland sea


THE CAUCASUS ABOVE GABALA

Azerbaijan is more city and culture than hardcore trekking, but the outdoors are there for the taking. The Greater Caucasus foothills around Gabala and Quba give easy ridge walks, waterfalls and the Tufandag cable car, which turns into a ski lift in winter. The high road to Khinalug is a scenic drive in its own right. On the coast, the Caspian is the world's largest inland sea, and while central Baku is not for swimming, beach resorts stretch north up the Absheron. It all sits a rung below the alpine drama of Georgia, but it rounds out a trip built around the fire sites and the towns.

PICK YOUR OUTDOORS

- [ ] **Cable car.** Tufandag above Gabala, summer views or winter skiing.
- [ ] **Foothill walks.** Waterfalls and ridges around Gabala and Lahij.
- [ ] **Scenic drive.** The high road up to Khinalug behind Quba.
- [ ] **The Caspian.** Absheron beaches north of Baku in summer.

The mountain weather turns fast at altitude. Carry a warm layer and a shell for the Khinalug road and the higher walks.

Do not expect a swim off central Baku. For the sea, head to the Absheron resort beaches or one of the northern coastal towns.

GO DEEPER

The ranges in mountains and the protected areas in national parks.

Tea, wine and the table

the armudu glass, the emerging wine, the long spread


TEA IN THE ARMUDU GLASS

If Georgia runs on wine, Azerbaijan runs on tea. Black tea served in a waisted armudu glass, with jam, lemon and sugar cubes, is the fixture of every welcome, every deal and every long conversation, and the tea house is a social institution. The country does make wine, an old tradition being revived by modern estates around Ganja and Shamakhi, and the pomegranate wine is a curiosity worth trying. All of it comes out at the sofra, the shared table, where a spread of small plates, grilled meat, herbs and bread turns dinner into a slow, generous event. Sit down to one and the hospitality does the rest.


KEBAB ON THE GRILL


THE SHEKI CARAVANSERAI

Accept the tea. Turning down a glass in a shop or a home reads as cold; sip it slowly and the conversation opens up.

Try the local wine as a curiosity, but tea and sherbet are the real drinks of the table in this Muslim-majority country.

GO DEEPER

The table and customs in the culture page and the dishes in food and drinks.

Food spotlight

grilled meat, saffron rice and herbs, and what it costs

Azerbaijani food blends Turkic, Persian and Caucasian flavours, built on the grill, saffron rice and fresh herbs. Plov, the saffron rice pilaf, is the ceremonial centerpiece, and the Shah plov crowned in a crust of buttery rice is the showpiece version. Kebabs, lula minced and tika chunks, come off charcoal with sumac and flatbread. Below is what you will actually order, with typical restaurant prices.

DISH	WHAT IT IS	PRICE
Shah plov	Saffron rice pilaf baked in a crust, the showpiece	USD 7-15
Lula kebab	Minced lamb grilled on skewers	USD 7-15
Tika kebab	Chunks of marinated lamb off the charcoal	USD 7-15
Dolma	Spiced meat and rice in grape leaves	USD 5-11
Dushbara	Tiny lamb dumplings in a light broth	USD 4-8
Qutab	Thin folded pancake with greens or meat	USD 1-3

prices from the local-food-and-drinks dataset, captured 2026-06


SHAH PLOV, THE CROWNED PILAF


KEBAB OFF THE CHARCOAL

See the full dish list with photos, regional variants and prices in the free food tool on pack-lightly.com.

Open What to Eat and Drink

Where to stay: Baku and Sheki

prices per night, double room · the base and the silk town

Your first and most-used bases. In Baku, sleep in or just outside the old-city walls to walk the sights and the boulevard. In Sheki, the standout is the restored eighteenth-century caravanserai, or a guesthouse near the khan palace. Book Baku ahead in spring and autumn; Sheki you can usually sort a day or two out except in peak summer.

Baku (old city)

hostel **11 USD** mid **45 USD** comfort **130 USD**

In or beside Icherisheher puts the walled city, the boulevard and the bars on your doorstep. Check what a central room costs, or the hostel scene through Hostelworld.

Sheki

guesthouse **12 USD** mid **40 USD** comfort **95 USD**

Sleep in the old caravanserai or near the khan palace. See what Sheki is charging, or budget beds on Hostelworld.

Day trips to Gobustan and the fire sites fill up in spring and autumn; book the popular ones a day or two ahead.

See guided tours from Baku

Where to stay: Gabala and Quba

prices per night, double room · the mountain resorts

Two green mountain bases. Gabala is the resort town, with everything from guesthouses to spa hotels near the Tufandag cable car. Quba, the apple town, is the base for the climb to Khinalug and a relaxed stop with simple guesthouses and a famous carpet-weaving tradition nearby. Both are easy to book close to the day outside high summer weekends.

Gabala

guesthouse 14 USD mid 45 USD comfort 130 USD

From simple guesthouses to spa hotels near the Tufandag cable car. Check Gabala rooms, or budget beds on Hostelworld.

Quba (for Khinalug)

guesthouse 11 USD mid 38 USD comfort 90 USD

The apple town and base for the Khinalug road. See what Quba is charging; hostels list on Hostelworld.

Mid-range and up across the country, with free cancellation while your plans are still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com

04

Routes and itineraries

Eight ready-made trips by who you are and how long you have, a two-week loop from Baku, and the real map of how it joins up.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The route picker 23

Two weeks, days 1–7 24

Two weeks, days 8–14 25

The route on a map 26

The route picker

find the closest trip to yours, then adjust

Eight trips by traveler, length and budget. Totals are per person unless noted, on-the-ground costs excluding international flights, using this edition's prices.

SOLO · 6D · BACKPACKER

Baku and the fire sites

USD 320 · hostels + shared taxis

- Baku 4
- Yanar Dag + Ateshgah
- Gobustan day

SOLO · 10D · MID

City plus the Silk Road

USD 800 · adds the mountains

- Baku + day trips 4
- Sheki 2
- Lahij + Gabala 3

COUPLE · 10D · MID

The classic loop

USD 1,700 for 2 · hotels + a driver

- Baku 4 · day trips
- Sheki 2
- Gabala + Quba 3

FIRE AND ROCK · 7D · MID

The Land of Fire trip

USD 620 · Baku base

- Yanar Dag + Ateshgah
- Gobustan + mud volcanoes
- Old city + museums

MOUNTAINS · 12D · MID

The high villages

USD 1,200 · the slow north

- Quba + Khinalug 3
- Lahij 2
- Sheki + Gabala 4

FAMILY · 9D · MID

City, cable car and coast

USD 2,500 · family of 4

- Baku 4: old city, boulevard
- Gabala cable car 2
- Absheron beach day

TWO COUNTRIES · 21D · MID

Azerbaijan into Georgia

USD 2,000 · the overland pair

- Baku + fire sites
- Sheki toward the border
- Cross to Tbilisi

WINTER · 7D · COMFORT

City and the slopes

USD 1,100 · Gabala base

- Baku 3
- Gabala Tufandag ski 3
- Old city and tea houses

Two weeks around Azerbaijan

days 1-7 · the capital, the fire, the rock art

The first week runs from Baku. Work through the walled city and its day trips to the fire sites and Gobustan, then head northwest into the mountains to the silk town of Sheki. Sort the day trips through a local operator or a shared taxi.

1	**Arrive Baku** GYD · day zero	Land, eSIM and cash, taxi to the old city. Evening walk on the Caspian boulevard, first plov and a pot of tea.
2	**Baku old city** Icherisheher	The Maiden Tower, the Shirvanshahs Palace, Highland Park for the Flame Towers view. Book the day trips.
3	**The Land of Fire** Absheron	The Ateshgah fire temple by day, then Yanar Dag's burning hill at dusk. Heydar Aliyev Center on the way back.
4	**Gobustan** rock art + mud	Southwest to the Gobustan petroglyphs and museum, then the gurgling mud volcanoes. Back to Baku for the night.
5	**To Sheki** into the mountains	The long drive northwest to the silk town of Sheki, stopping at Shamakhi on the way. Sleep in the caravanserai.
6	**Sheki** palace + crafts	The painted Palace of the Sheki Khans, the shebeke workshop, the bazaar, and a plate of Sheki halva.
7	**To Lahij** the copper village	Over to the cobbled coppersmith village of Lahij, hammers ringing in the workshops. Overnight in the hills.

Two weeks around Azerbaijan

days 8-14 · the green mountains, the high villages, the way back

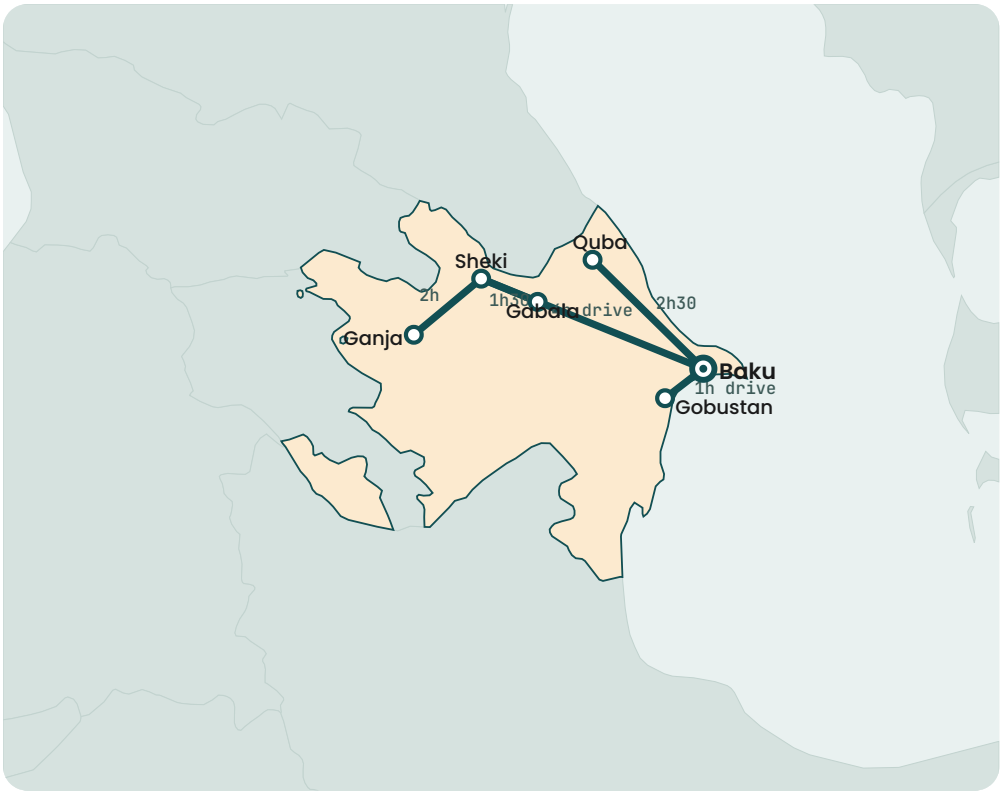
The second week works through the green foothills and the high north before looping back to the coast. Add Ganja and cross to Georgia instead of returning if you are pairing the two countries.

8	**Gabala** the resort valley	The Tufandag cable car for the ridge views, waterfalls and lakes around town, an easy green day.
9	**To Quba** the apple town	Across to Quba in the northeast, a relaxed base with a carpet-weaving tradition and orchards all around.
10	**Khinalug** the roof village	The spectacular climb to Khinalug, one of Europe's highest villages, for the stone houses and the long views.
11	**Back to Baku** the coast road	Down from the mountains and along the coast to the capital. Last night in the old city and the tea houses.
12	**Baku spare day** museums + boulevard	A slower day for the carpet museum, the boulevard and a Caspian sunset, or an Absheron beach in summer.
13	**West to Ganja** optional add-on	If you are looping toward Georgia, the handsome second city of Ganja and the Nizami mausoleum break the drive.
14	**Depart or cross** Baku or the border	Fly home from Baku, or carry on overland into Georgia to pair the two countries in one trip.

The route on a map

a hub in Baku, a loop into the northwest mountains

Azerbaijan is a hub-and-loop trip: Baku on the Caspian for the city and the fire sites, then a swing northwest through the Silk Road towns and the green foothills, with the high villages of the north as a detour. The map shows the real shape, with the capital far out on the coast.



05

When to go

The windows worth targeting in a country of humid coast and cooler mountains, the festivals to time, and what a day really costs.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, crowds, price 28

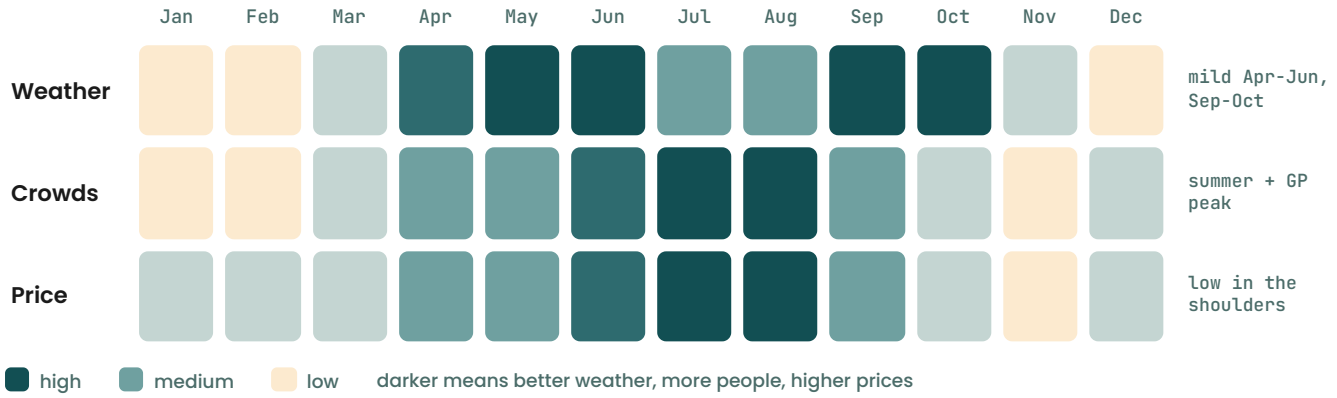
Festivals worth timing 29

What a day costs 30

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · humid coast, cooler mountains

Azerbaijan splits between the coast and the hills. Baku and the Caspian are hot and humid in July and August and buffeted by a famous wind the rest of the year, while the northwest mountains stay cooler and greener. Winters are cold and damp on the coast, cold and snowy in the hills. The sweet spots are spring, April to June, when the country is green and mild, and September into October, when the heat eases and the harvest fills the markets. Gabala gives skiers a winter window.



source: best-travel-time dataset and country-comparison, captured 2026-06

Baku in July is hot and sticky. Escape to the cooler northwest mountains around Sheki and Gabala in high summer.

The Formula 1 Grand Prix and big concerts spike Baku hotel prices for a few days. Check the calendar before you book.

Festivals worth timing

the dates that change what you see



Most of the year is fine to visit, but a few dates transform a place or fill the hotels. Novruz, the spring festival, is the one to plan around; the summer Grand Prix and a couple of regional fairs are worth knowing about too.

THE CALENDAR

- [ ] **Novruz, around 20 to 21 March.** The Persian-rooted spring new year: bonfires, sweets and street celebration everywhere.
- [ ] **Formula 1 Grand Prix, spring.** The Baku street circuit fills the capital and spikes hotel prices for a week.
- [ ] **Sheki Silk Road festival, summer.** Crafts, music and the caravanserai town at its liveliest.
- [ ] **Gabala Music Festival, summer.** Classical and jazz in the mountain resort.
- [ ] **Ramadan, dates shift.** Many locals fast; some rural eateries keep shorter daytime hours.

GO DEEPER

Dates and closures in the public holidays page and the month-by-month picture in best travel time.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

What a day costs

three travel styles · printed the way the day spends it

Daily budgets hide in averages, so here is the day itemized instead: a bed, meals, getting around, one thing worth doing, and the pot of tea at the end. Three real versions of the same day in Azerbaijan, a touch pricier than its neighbours but still cheap. Fire-site tours and mountain drivers sit on top of these.

A DAY IN AZERBAIJAN

* backpacker *

hostel bed	11.00
bakery breakfast	2.50
qutab lunch	4.00
canteen dinner	6.00
metro + shared taxi	2.00
entry or site	3.00
tea and sweets	1.50
TOTAL / DAY	**~30 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

A DAY IN AZERBAIJAN

* standard *

3-star double, half	22.00
cafe breakfast	4.00
restaurant lunch	8.00
dinner with drinks	13.00
Bolt rides	5.00
tour or site, split	10.00
tea and extras	3.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~65 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

A DAY IN AZERBAIJAN

* comfort *

4-star double	75.00
hotel breakfast	incl.
restaurant lunch	13.00
dinner, good table	24.00
private driver, half day	25.00
guide or site	10.00
tea and extras	3.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~150 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

Run the same numbers for your own dates, group size and currency in the free budget calculator on pack-lightly.com.

Open the Budget Calculator

06

Practical

Visa, money, transport, eSIM, health, packing. The boring parts you only read once. Done right, you never think about them again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 32

Money and transport 33

Bed, bag, signal 34

Health basics 35

Book in this order

a few things before you fly · the rest on the ground

Azerbaijan is an easy country to organise, with one small extra step: the e-visa. Hotels, drivers and tours are simple to sort once you arrive, so the short list below is really the flights, the visa, your first nights, and the admin that is cheaper done at home.

8 wk before

International flights

Most routes connect through Istanbul, the Gulf or Moscow into Baku (GYD), with some direct low-cost flights from Europe. Fares soften six to eight weeks out.

Compare fares on Aviasales

3 wk before

ASAN e-visa + insurance

Apply for the ASAN e-visa online; standard processing is three working days for a 30-day stay. Buy travel insurance with medical cover at the same time. Keep your passport valid well beyond your trip.

Check entry rules per passport

2 wk before

First nights + a driver

Book your first two nights in Baku. For the mountain loop, line up a driver for Sheki, Lahij and Khinalug; it beats piecing together shared taxis over the passes.

Book stays on Booking.com

1 wk before

eSIM

Install before departure, activate on arrival. 10 to 15 GB covers two weeks of maps, Bolt and uploads, though a local SIM is cheap for longer stays.

Set up a Saily eSIM

The Armenian border is closed and there is no travel between the two. Enter and leave via Georgia, Iran, Turkey or by air.

Print or save your e-visa PDF; you may be asked for it at check-in and on arrival. Cards work in Baku, cash in the mountains.

Money and transport

cheap outside Baku · metro, buses, shared taxis

Azerbaijan is affordable, though central Baku can bite. Cards and contactless work across the capital, but the mountain towns, shared taxis and bazaars want manat, so keep small notes on you outside the city. ATMs are common in the towns. Baku has a clean metro and cheap buses with the BakiKart card, and Bolt runs the honest taxis. Between cities, comfortable buses and shared taxis leave from the main terminals; there is a sleeper train to Sheki and a modern line toward the Georgian border, but the road is usually quicker.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Bed, hostel to 4-star	USD 11	USD 45	USD 130
Meal out	USD 5	USD 12	USD 24
Bolt across Baku	USD 2	USD 4	USD 7
Bus between cities	USD 3	USD 6	USD 10
Day tour or driver, split	USD 18	USD 35	USD 80

verified 2026-06 · per-category detail in the budget guide

GETTING AROUND: WHAT BEATS WHAT

In Baku, the metro and Bolt cover everything cheaply. Between cities, comfortable coaches and shared taxis run from the main terminals to Sheki, Quba, Gabala and Ganja, and are the sensible way to move. A hired driver is worth it for the mountain loop, where shared taxis to Lahij and Khinalug are slow and infrequent. There is an overnight train to Sheki and a fast line toward the Georgian border, useful if you are pairing the two countries. Compare cross-border options through 12Go.

THE FULL PICTURE

Cash and card detail in the currency rundown, the full cost model in budget saving, and driving notes in traffic.

Bed, bag, signal

hotels · packing · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

For mid-range and up, Booking.com has the deepest inventory and free-cancellation options across Baku and the towns. For hostels and social stays in the capital, Hostelworld has the better review pool. In the mountains, a guesthouse in Sheki or the old caravanserai beats any hotel for atmosphere.

BAG: THE LAYERED LIST

- [ ] Real layers: humid coast, cool mountain nights
- [ ] A warm jacket even in summer for Khinalug and the passes
- [ ] Sturdy walking shoes for the villages and Gobustan
- [ ] Sun hat, sunglasses, SPF 50; the coast light is strong
- [ ] Windbreaker for Baku's famous Caspian wind
- [ ] Modest layer for mosques and conservative rural areas
- [ ] Refillable water bottle; stick to bottled outside the cities
- [ ] Type C/F plug adapter, 220V
- [ ] A power bank for long bus and driving days
- [ ] Some cash in small manat for the mountain towns

Signal. Install an eSIM before you fly and activate on arrival. A 10 to 15 GB plan covers two weeks. Local Azercell or Bakcell SIMs are cheap for longer stays; bring your passport to register.

Set up a Saily eSIM

06

GO DEEPER The full season-by-season list in the packing list, what to wear in clothes, and plans compared in the eSIM write-up.

Health basics

six weeks out · most of this list is reassurance

Azerbaijan is a low-drama health destination. There is no malaria in the tourist areas, pharmacies are common in the towns, and the main risks come from the outdoors: altitude on the high roads, sun and heat on the coast, and cold in the mountains. Stick to bottled water outside the cities. The list below is everything that actually needs doing, in order.

THE SHORT LIST

- [ ] **Six weeks before:** travel-clinic visit. Confirm routine vaccines (MMR, DPT, flu) are current.
- [ ] **Recommended:** Hepatitis A and typhoid for a food-and-travel trip. Hep A is a two-shot series; start early.
- [ ] **Rabies:** stray dogs turn up in towns and near sites; consider the pre-exposure course for long rural trips.
- [ ] **Altitude:** the Khinalug road climbs high; go up gradually and drink plenty of water.
- [ ] **Water:** drink bottled or filtered outside the main cities to be safe.
- [ ] **Insurance:** medical cover with evacuation, useful for the remote mountain villages.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Baku has the best private clinics, with English-speaking doctors; the regional towns cover the basics and serious cases go to the capital. Pharmacies (aptek) handle stomach upsets, minor infections and altitude headaches over the counter. Dial 112 for the unified emergency line, which covers ambulance, police and fire; hotel reception is the fastest route to a doctor who speaks English.

READ ON The shot-by-shot schedule in the vaccinations breakdown, clinics in the hospitals page, and cover compared in the travel insurance rundown.

07

Safe and smart

Why Azerbaijan is a safe and easy trip, the few things worth watching, the etiquette of a Muslim-majority country, and the language minimum.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Staying smart 37

Etiquette: do and do not 38

Language and emergencies 39

Staying smart

a safe country, and the few things to watch

Azerbaijan is a safe, easy country for travelers, with low street crime and a police presence that keeps the tourist areas calm. Entry is a simple e-visa. The things worth attention are ordinary: taxis, one sensitive political subject, and a couple of regional no-go zones near the frontlines.

WATCH 01

The taxi without a meter

Flagging an old Lada on the street or taking an airport tout usually means a tourist price well above the going rate.

The fix: use the Bolt app in Baku for a fixed, honest fare, and agree the price up front for any street taxi elsewhere.

WATCH 02

Karabakh and the frontlines

The regions near the former Nagorno-Karabakh frontlines can hold landmine risk and military restrictions.

The fix: stay on the routes in this guide, do not attempt to reach the frontline areas, and check current advice first.

WATCH 03

The Armenia question

Any Armenian stamp or perceived sympathy is sensitive, and the border with Armenia is fully closed.

The fix: route via Georgia or by air, keep the topic light, and do not try to travel directly between the two countries.

BONUS

Photography rules

Government buildings, the metro and military sites can be off-limits for photos, and guards will tell you.

The fix: put the camera away around officials and infrastructure, and ask before photographing people.

MORE ON THE SITE

The full safety and entry picture in the safety breakdown and the rules in the visa page.

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing · the rest smooth the day

Eight things that matter. The first four cause real offense if you ignore them; the rest simply make you a welcome guest. Azerbaijan is Muslim-majority but largely secular, and hospitality is warm and generous.

DO

Dress modestly at mosques

Cover shoulders and knees; women cover their hair. The country is relaxed, but holy sites are not.

DO NOT

Bring up Armenia or Karabakh

The conflict is raw and personal. Let locals raise it, and listen rather than take a side.

DO

Accept the tea

A glass of tea is the universal welcome. Turning it down reads as cold; sip and stay a while.

DO NOT

Photograph officials or the metro

Government buildings, guards and some transport are off-limits. Put the camera away when in doubt.

DO

Take your shoes off in homes

There are usually slippers at the door. Follow your host's lead when you are invited in.

DO NOT

Refuse food outright

The sofra keeps filling. Pace yourself and leave a little rather than turning plates away.

DO

Learn salam and sag olun

Hello and thank you in Azerbaijani land warmly. Turkish and Russian are also widely understood.

DO NOT

Be loud during Ramadan

Many fast during daylight. Eat discreetly and respect the rhythm of the fasting month in rural areas.

If a family invites you in, a small gift of sweets or something from home is a warm gesture, never expected.

A raised voice loses the room. Patience and a smile solve most snags; Azerbaijanis warm fast to a polite guest.

MORE ON THE SITE

Customs and hospitality in the culture page and what to wear in clothes.

Language and emergencies

a handful of words · the number to keep

Azerbaijani is the state language and is close to Turkish, so a little Turkish goes a long way. Russian is widely understood, especially by older people and in Baku, and English is common among the young and in tourism. A few words of Azerbaijani open doors.

THE EIGHT WORDS THAT HELP

ENGLISH	AZERBAIJANI	SAY IT
Hello	salam	sa-LAM
Thank you	sag olun	sah-oh-LUN
Yes / No	beli / yox	beh-LEE / yokh
How much?	nechedir?	neh-cheh-DEER
Water	su	soo
Delicious	dadli	dad-LUH
Cheers	nush olsun	noosh ol-SUN
Sorry	bagishlayin	ba-ghish-la-YIN

UNIFIED	AMBULANCE	POLICE	FIRE
112	103	102	101

GO DEEPER

More phrases and the alphabet in the language page.

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 41

Print cards: cut, fold, take 42

Sources and methodology 43

A note on the links 45

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Azerbaijan data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Azerbaijan: 30 USD/day backpacker, 150 USD/day comfort.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Country Map

Baku, the fire sites, Gobustan and the Silk Road towns, mapped.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/



Best Time to Travel

Best: April-June and September-October. Month by month.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



What to Eat and Drink

Plov, kebab, dushbara and more, with prices.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/local-food-and-drinks/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

AZERBAIJANI · ESSENTIALS

Hello	salam
Thank you	sag olun
Yes / No	beli / yox
How much?	nechedir?
Water	su
Cheers	nush olsun
Delicious	dadli
Sorry	bagishlayin

pack-lightly.com

EMERGENCY · AZERBAIJAN

Unified	112
Ambulance	103
Police	102
Fire	101
Currency	AZN (manat)

My hotel: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Azerbaijan hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition.

pack-lightly.com/azerbaijan/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is at the hotel.

Save the Bolt app and an offline map of Baku too. Between them they cover taxis and getting around the old city.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Twenty-plus countries on the ground, data-led travel writing with a performance-marketing background. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hotel and hostel pricing: Booking and Hostelworld snapshot 2026-06, Baku, Sheki, Gabala and Quba centers.
2. Currency rates: ECB and open reference rates, 2026-06.
3. Visa policy: Azerbaijan ASAN e-visa portal (evisa.gov.az), retrieved 2026-05-15.
4. Daily-cost model: Pack Lightly country-comparison dataset, captured 2026-06.
5. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last checked 2026-06.
6. Climate and seasons: best-travel-time dataset and 10-year averages, captured 2026-06.
7. Pack Lightly Azerbaijan cluster pages, retrieved 2026-07: visa · budget · safety · best travel time · eSIM

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored on a regular cycle. Budget figures come from the country-comparison and budget-calculator datasets, climate verdicts from the best-travel-time dataset, both stamped with their capture date where they appear.

What changed in edition 2026.07: first release of the Azerbaijan guide on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: January 2027. Not covered in depth here: winter ski logistics at Gabala, the far Nakhchivan exclave, and the southern Talysh and Lankaran subtropics, which are trips of their own.

Photo credits. Every photograph is sourced from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons or public-domain license. The full per-image list, with each photographer and license, is on the next page. The cover shows the Flame Towers over the old city of Baku.

Image credits

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1. **Ateshgah of Baku, the walled fire**. Wikimedia Commons, Public domain.
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8. **Green Caucasus foothills and forested mountains**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
9. **Khinalug, the high stone mountain village**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
10. **Lahij, the cobbled artisan village street**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
11. **Palace of the Sheki Khans, painted**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
12. **Sheki caravanserai courtyard**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0.
13. **The Heydar Aliyev Center, Zaha Hadid's**. Wikipedia, Public domain.
14. **The three Flame Towers of Baku**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
15. **Yanar Dag, the natural burning hillside**. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a transport leg, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

A hotel area or a transport platform is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. An overrated sight is still called overrated, and a cheaper option that beats the famous one keeps the slot. The commission funds the guide; it does not choose what goes in it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales** · **Booking.com** · **12Go** · **Saily** · **Hostelworld** · **Stay22** · **GetYourGuide** · via **Travelpayouts**

Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/azerbaijan.

This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands January 2027 and replaces this file at the same download.