tolerant nation
cultural fusion



azerbaijan

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK

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salam
שָׁלוֹם



Welcome to Azerbaijan, a country situated along the former Silk Road with deep traditions of hospitality, tolerance and multiculturalism – traditions so brilliantly illustrated by the story of the country's Jewish community. Come discover a rare land where Jews have always felt at home.

Jewish heritage *in Azerbaijan*





Located at the crossroads of cultures and continents, Azerbaijan has attracted a multitude of tribes and peoples since ancient times.

While some simply passed through along the Silk Road, others stayed and settled, and even today more than 20 national minorities live in peace in Azerbaijan. Among them are Jews, who have managed to maintain their unique culture and traditions, including religion, languages and world view, for centuries. To explore their heritage is to delve into thousands of years of history and discover a unique example of peaceful interfaith coexistence.

Today, the country is still home to many Jews, who are divided into three ethnic subgroups: Mountain Jews, Ashkenazi and Ebraelis or Georgian Jews. In the southern regions of Jalilabad and Lankaran you can also find Subbotniks and Gers – groups of ethnic Russians practising Judaism. Jewish heritage in Azerbaijan is also represented by monuments spread across Baku, Guba, Oghuz, Ismayilli and other areas. Many ruins of ancient synagogues have been found in diverse parts of the country and seven synagogues are still currently functioning.

Jewish footprints *in Azerbaijan*



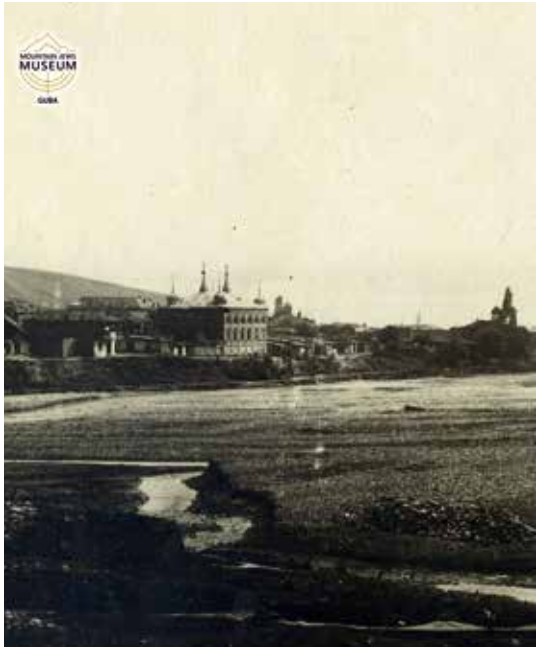
Mountain Jews

The Mountain Jews are thought to have first come to Azerbaijan in the 6th century having been banished from Mesopotamia for attempting to secede from the Sassanid Empire. Having settled in various parts of the country, in the mid-18th century the Mountain Jews were invited by the rulers of the Guba Khanate to Guba, where they established their own Jewish Village (from 1926 – Red Village or Qırmızı Qəsəbə) and prospered through practising crafts like carpet weaving and leather tanning as well as farming, winemaking and growing madder. The Mountain Jews call themselves Juhur and speak Juhuri, a Persian-Jewish language. Another centre of Mountain Jews in Azerbaijan is Oghuz, although most have emigrated from here since the collapse of the USSR.

Ashkenazis

Ashkenazis are European Jews who profess Orthodox Judaism. In Azerbaijan, they have mainly lived in Baku having first arrived there at the beginning of the 19th century. Later, many more were attracted by the economic opportunities generated by the late 19th-century Oil Boom, with further waves seeking sanctuary here during the Russian Civil War and World War II. In Baku, the Ashkenazis established their own Jewish schools, libraries, clubs and cultural centres, published magazines and newspapers in Yiddish and had several representatives in the parliament of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) in 1918-1920. During the Soviet era, they assimilated increasingly into Baku's extraordinarily multicultural society and continued to play a crucial role in its intellectual and cultural life.



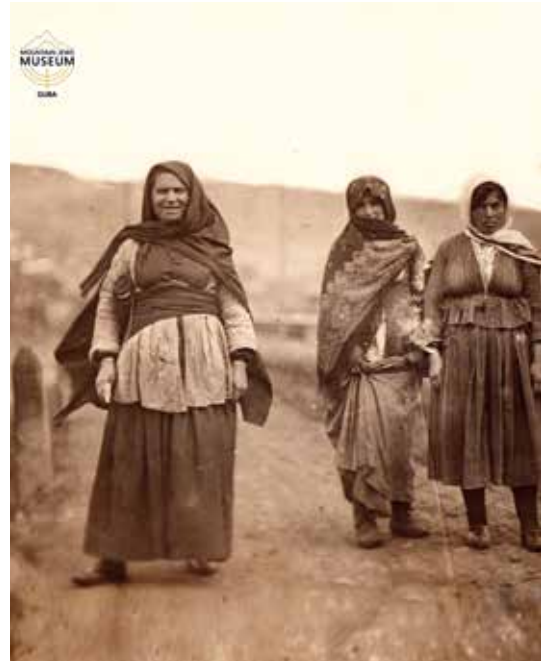


Ebraelis or Georgian Jews

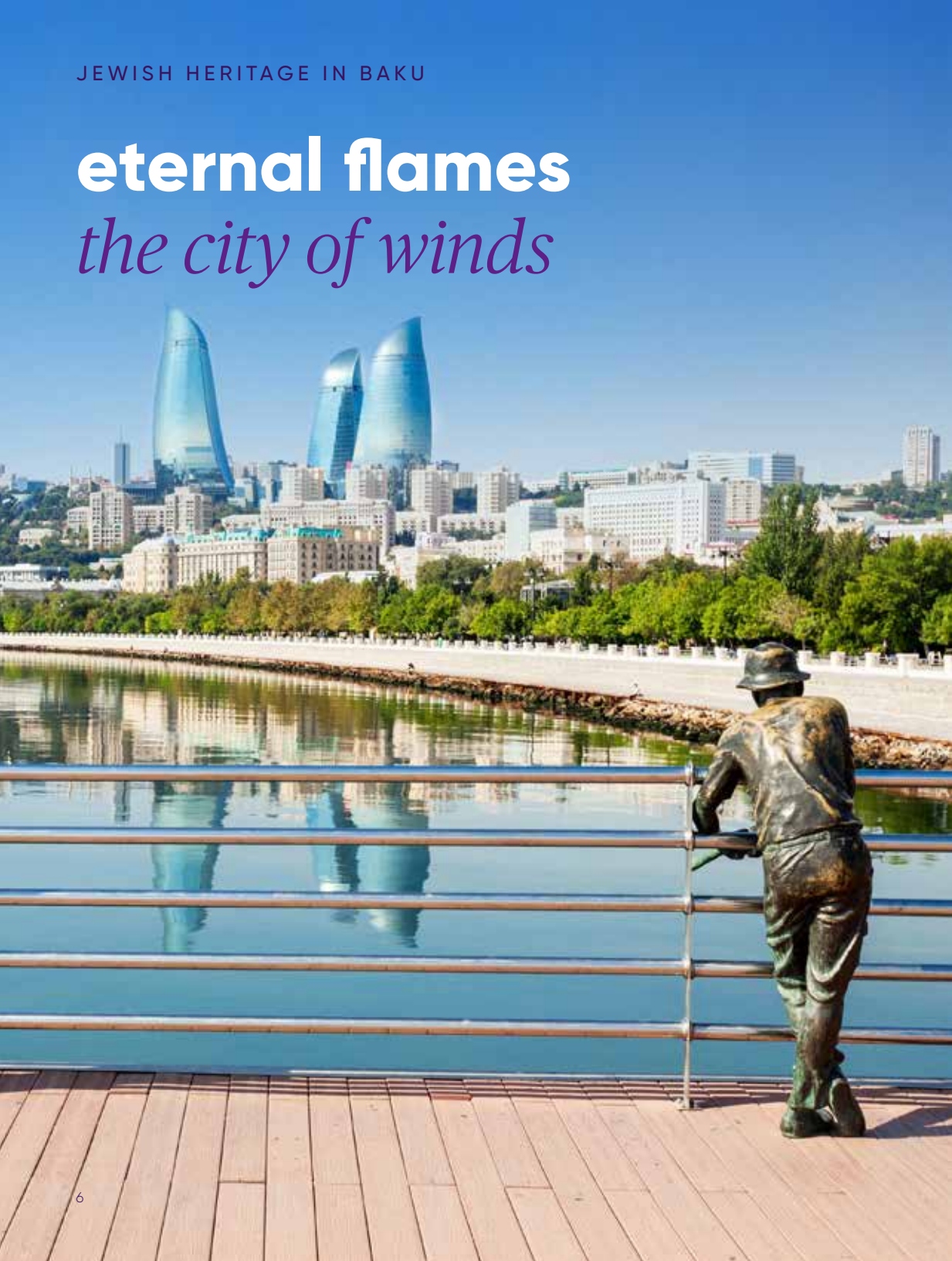
The third group of Jews in Azerbaijan are Kartli Ebraeli, or Georgian Jews, who first arrived in Georgia after the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BC. In Georgia they lived in various regions and adopted many Georgian customs and traditions. A small group moved to Baku at the turn of the 20th century for economic reasons and kept up their Georgian traditions while strictly observing Jewish religious customs. They became traders and craftsmen as well as partners of large Russian-Caucasian trading houses, stock exchanges, commercial banks and joint-stock companies. Currently, the Ebraeli community in Baku has about 300 members.

Subbotniks and Gers

Subbotniks and Gers are closely linked groups that arose as part of the spiritual Christian movement in Russia during the 18th century. As observers of the Sabbath, they believe in not working or discussing worldly affairs on Saturdays. Considered heretics by Imperial Russian officials and Orthodox clergy, they were suppressed, isolated and eventually resettled in the early 19th century. Some ended up in the Jelilabad region of southern Azerbaijan, founding villages such as Privolnoye, which today is only home to a few subbotniks still keeping up Jewish traditions.



eternal flames
the city of winds



From the modern elegance of the Flame Towers standing proudly above to the medieval UNESCO World Heritage-listed fortress at its core, there is something for everyone in our stunning capital – a city of amazing contrasts that combines the charms of old and new, east and west, with numerous paths all leading to adventure.

Experience Jewish heritage

The Jewish population of Baku consists mainly of Ashkenazis, who began to arrive here in the 1830s. With many more attracted by the Oil Boom and the economic opportunities it brought, by 1913 Jews made up 4.5% of the city's population yet accounted for between 30 and 40 per cent of doctors and lawyers. Years later, many Baku Jews emigrated during the instability that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The **Synagogue of Ashkenazi and Georgian Jews** in Baku is one of the few synagogues that have been built in this part of the world during the last century and is one of the largest in Europe. Elsewhere in the city, the **Synagogue of Mountain Jews** has been functioning since 1945 when Mountain Jews were given an old building for their religious needs in the city centre after World War II. The building was in poor condition until being restored in 2011 and since then, apart from its main purpose as a synagogue, has become a must-visit site for anyone with an interest in Jewish heritage in Azerbaijan. Another important landmark is the **State Song Theatre** named after Rashid Behbudov, a popular theatre for musical and other performances which, built in 1901, was the very first synagogue in Baku and functioned as one till 1934.

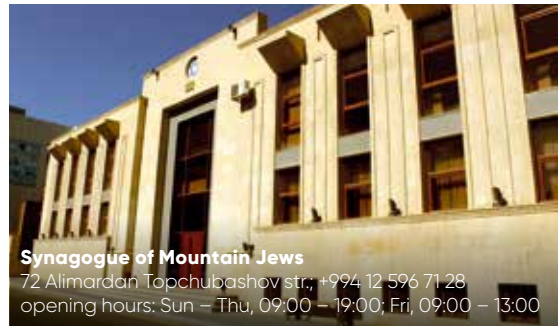
Recently opened in the city centre, **Restaurant 7/40** serves kosher food only and besides traditional Jewish cuisine you can also sample dishes from Azerbaijani cuisine which aren't contrary to the rules of Kashrut. The restaurant is inspected by the Ashkenazi rabbi and a representative of Chabad to make sure the food is prepared properly, and also offers a kosher food catering service upon request.



State Song Theatre
12 Rashid Behbudov str.; +994 12 493 94 15



Synagogue of Ashkenazi and Georgian Jews
171 Dilara Aliyeva; +99412 597 91 90



Synagogue of Mountain Jews
72 Alimardan Topchubashov str.; +994 12 596 71 28
opening hours: Sun – Thu, 09:00 – 19:00; Fri, 09:00 – 13:00



Restaurant 7/40
25 Samed Vurgun str.; +994 51 250 0784;
opening hours: Mon – Thu, 12:00 – 23:00; Sun, 15:00 – 23:00



Explore the Old City

Wander through the quarters of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Icherisheher (the Old City), and don't be afraid to get lost in its cobbled streets. These historical alleys will take you to some of the city's key landmarks – the Maiden Tower, the Shirvanshahs' Palace and the Old City walls, as well as centuries-old mosques and hammams that provide a fascinating contrast to the ultra-modern Flame Towers visible in the background. What's more, Icherisheher bustles with art galleries, bars, cafes and small museums. Speaking of which, the Museum of Miniature Books is another intriguing attraction.

Stroll along the Boulevard

Baku's much-loved Boulevard has been central to city life for well over a century. Here you can take a ride in gondolas in Little Venice, a complex of shallow waterways, bridges and Venetian-inspired colonnades, or visit the contemporary Carpet Museum for a glimpse into our rich culture and traditions.



Admire Azerbaijani art

A number of art spaces exist in the city – including the Heydar Aliyev Centre, Museum of Modern Art or Yarat Contemporary Art Space – where you can admire the fast-developing contemporary art scene. For a deeper dive into Azerbaijani art, wander around the galleries hidden away in the Old City or visit the National Museum of Art which is housed in a beautiful Oil-Boom mansion.

Tue – Sun, 10:00 – 18:00
9/11 Niyazi str.
+994 12 492 0707
10 AZN





Travel to Gobustan

Travelling a little further to Gobustan is an ideal half-day tour. There, the Gobustan State Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to an extraordinary collection of over 6,000 ancient petroglyphs depicting awe-inspiring scenes carved by some of Azerbaijan's earliest inhabitants. From here, a short taxi drive will take you to some of Azerbaijan's up to 400 gurgling mud volcanoes – a natural wonder formed by rising subterranean gases that creates a truly otherworldly landscape.

Every day, 10:00 – 17:00
Baku city, Garadag district, Gobustan settlement
+994 12 544 6627
10 AZN
gobustan-rockart.az

Soak up the local atmosphere

No trip to Baku is complete without savouring the local food scene. Restaurants and cafes offering local cuisine can be found all over the city, while in the Old City you can also join culinary masterclasses. Wine connoisseurs should try local Azerbaijani wines at cosy wine bars and jazz cafes, and the city's dazzling nightlife can be experienced at a great selection of clubs, pubs and bars.



unspoiled nature *timeless traditions*



Experience Jewish heritage

A beautiful 19th-century arched bridge over the Gudialchay river connects Guba with one of Azerbaijan's most unique settlements: **Red Village**. Considered the world's last surviving shtetl, Red Village (Qırmızı Qəsəbə) is an all-Jewish settlement of about 3,000 inhabitants. Its name was inspired by the characteristic red bricks and tiles used to construct the houses, which today form an eclectic mix of 19th-century red-brick buildings and lavish mansions belonging to wealthy residents – Red Village boasts one of the world's highest concentrations of millionaires per square kilometre.

Guba is a historic, multicultural city and gateway to the Caucasus Mountains, whose stunning scenery is the major reason to visit. Elsewhere, the atmospheric streets of its old quarter are flanked by elegant brick houses interspersed with several historic mosques and hammams.

Many of the ornate houses and synagogues built at the turn of the 20th century were designed by a local architect named Hillel Ben-Hayyim, who strongly influenced the settlement's unique appearance. The charismatic **three-storey house once belonging to the Aghababyev family** is a wonderful example of the architecture of this era. Right in front of this is a cosy teahouse which is worth calling into for an authentic tea experience. The people of Girmizi Gasaba speak Juhuri, a language similar to oral Persian, and in the past practised a range of trades and crafts such as winemaking, tobacco and madder growing and carpet weaving – carpets with different Jewish motifs such as menorah and dragons can still be found in local houses and museums.

If you are hungry, a great option is to pre-arrange a **Mountain Jewish culinary masterclass** with local resident Naami Ruvinova, whose repertoire includes interesting twists on classic Azerbaijani dishes like dolma (stuffed leaves) and pilaf, and a vegetarian dish called gaylo.

Only two of the original 13 synagogues in Red Village still operate, however a third has recently been restored to house the state-of-the-art **Museum of Mountain Jews**. Equipped with cutting-edge technology, the museum leads visitors on an inspiring journey through the community's fascinating history and culture. As well as tracing the Mountains Jews' centuries-long migration from the Middle East through Persia to the Caucasus, it unravels key traditions, trades and events through various mediums including short documentaries, animation, archive photos and touch-screen panels. It also functions as a synagogue. Tickets can be bought from the equally new **Information Centre** where you can also book walking tours and guides and enjoy coffee in the contemporary cafe area.







Information Centre
Fatali khan str.; +994 55 559 9595; opening hours: Sun – Thu, 10:00-18:00, Fri 10:00-14:00.



GREAT EXPERIENCES IN GUBA

Visit Khinalig

Guba is home to one of Azerbaijan's top ethno-tourism spots – the picturesque village of Khinalig. Located at over 2,000 metres and surrounded by breathtaking mountains, the village abounds with legends, including one linking its origins to the story of Noah. Due to the steep terrain, its old stone houses are built very close together, with roofs doubling up as courtyards for houses above. The villagers even speak an entirely unique language.





Hike in the mountains

The Shahdag National Park (partly located in Guba) and rustic villages just outside it present fantastic opportunities for hiking and mountaineering, with a number of established routes ranging from easy to difficult. The park is home to iconic peaks such as Bazarduzu, Shahdag and Gizilgaya, while quaint villages such as Khinalig, Laza and Griz are the best spots for authentic mountain homestays.

Hit the slopes

In winter, the luxury resorts at Shahdag Mountain Resort in nearby Gusar have world-class amenities, access to smooth and off-piste slopes and an international ski school. The resort is also open in summer, offering a host of outdoor activities.





Tee off in Azerbaijan

Golf may not be the first thing travellers associate with Azerbaijan but Guba's National Golf Club course is truly splendid. This was the first golf course to open in the country and boasts a clubhouse with luxurious locker rooms, a shop to suit every golfer's needs and an idyllic countryside setting with mountain views.

Eski Iqriq village
Guba
+994 12 404 3434
info@qubapalce.com



Sample local cuisine

With Guba being famous for its sweets, don't leave without tasting pakhlava and bukma, both made of thin layers of dough filled with ground, caramelised walnut and soaked in honey and syrup though differing in size and shape. For another unique experience, visit a local apple farm – apples are symbolic of this region, which hosts a grand festival each autumn to celebrate the harvest.



Wander to waterfalls

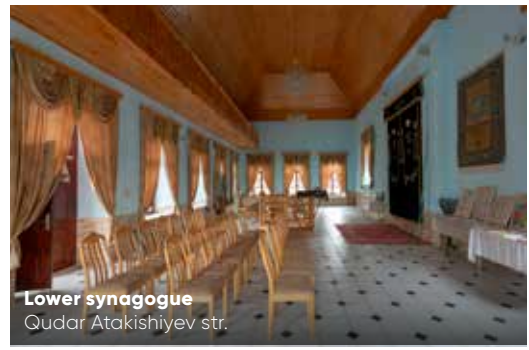
In this region of stunning nature are several impressive waterfalls. One of the country's best is located along the Velvelichay river near Tengealti village south of Guba. Named Afurja, the falls are about 70 metres high with a footpath curving beneath the cliff behind. Waterfalls in two authentic mountain villages, Griz and Laza, freeze over in winter, adding drama to the scenery. The one in Griz requires trekking to, but it's well worth it.

peaceful nature
relaxing escape

Oghuz is a quiet and picturesque town nestled at the foot of the Caucasus Mountains, surrounded by lush foothill forest with good potential for walking. Besides its Jewish Heritage, Oghuz boasts a basic museum of local lore as well as one of the most imaginative teahouses you will find in the country. Overall, it makes for a relaxing and authentic stopover en route to or from north-western Azerbaijan.



Upper synagogue
Arzu Aliyeva str.



Lower synagogue
Qudar Atakishiyev str.



Experience Jewish heritage

Oghuz was historically one of the main Jewish settlements in the country. A unique community that formed here of Jews and Muslims living together harmoniously, sharing holidays and traditions. While many left following the fall of the USSR, the few that remain, as well as the several Jewish-style houses (featuring Jewish ornaments and often facing towards Jerusalem), two synagogues and cemeteries, offer a window into the town's Jewish past.

The synagogues are named simply Upper and Lower due to their location in the town. The **Lower Synagogue**, built in 1849, was the first synagogue in Oghuz, while the **Upper Synagogue**, built in 1897, was completely restored in 2006 and is still visited every Friday and Saturday by Oghuz's small remaining Jewish population for prayers.

Both synagogues operate all day.





Visit Sheki

Located an hour's drive west from Oghuz, Sheki is one of Azerbaijan's true travel gems, with a historic centre recently included on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Rich in Silk Road history, this charming city is renowned for its fascinating architecture, unique crafts, local cuisine and friendly residents. From the Sheki Khan's Palace to hiking in the mountains, this is travel and leisure in the Caucasus at its finest.

Visit Gabala

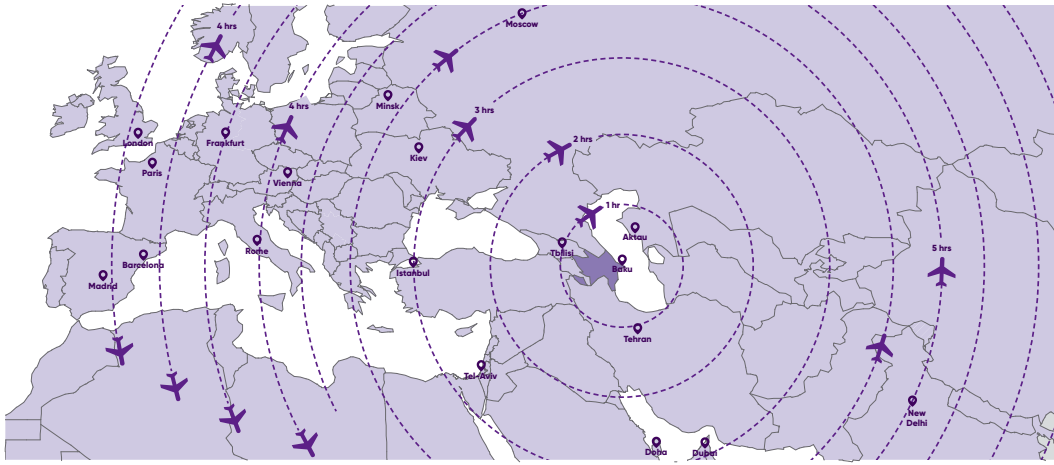
Gabala is one of Azerbaijan's foremost resort towns located an hour by car east from Oghuz. It builds on a beautiful landscape with an exceptional range of upmarket and affordable hotels. Activities are aplenty, including quad biking, skiing, hiking, bowling, horse riding, spas and shooting, and visitors can choose from several fabulous swimming pools. Mountain waterfalls, large forests and the magnificent Caucasus Mountains make Gabala an ideal place for relaxation in both winter and summer.



salam *Azerbaijan*

Country Size
86,600 km²

Population
10 million



Visa
Israeli citizens can obtain visas upon arrival or get an e-visa within 3 days or 3 hours (urgent) via **evisa.gov.az**. The visa is valid for only 30 days and provides a single entry. The visa fee is 24 USD for a standard and 51 USD for an urgent visa. We advise you to check requirements before booking your trip.

Money
Our currency is the manat (AZN). Card payments are accepted at most shops and restaurants in the country. Mastercard/Visa ATMs are very widespread and available in main towns. Changing money back is no problem.

Weather
Summer +27
Winter +4

Accommodation
We have a complete range of options, from luxury and mid-range hotels, to rural ensuite bungalows, provincial motels and even private homestays.

Telephone
The country code is +994, the dial out code from Azerbaijan is 00.

Internet
Most good hotels are fully equipped with Wi-Fi connection throughout, and big hotels will also have business centres with at least a few computers. Major hotels sometimes charge for Wi-Fi, but it's free in dozens of cafes, parks and restaurants across Baku and beyond. Mobile phone providers offer relatively inexpensive dongles so that you can access the web through 3G mobile networks.

Language
Our state language is Azerbaijani, which is similar to Turkish. Many people speak fluent Russian. Basic English is understood by most of the population. A few mountain villages have their own unique languages.

Time
4hrs ahead of GMT. Since 2016, we no longer put the clocks forward an hour in summer, so while the time is 3hrs ahead of Western Europe in winter, that drops to 2hrs April-October.

Shopping
Most international goods are available in Baku, which has a phenomenal range of designer boutiques. Export certificates are only required for carpets, art and antiques. There's a 125g limit on exporting caviar.



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