



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Azerbaijan - Land of Fire

Tour Duration – 8 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●○○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ●●○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

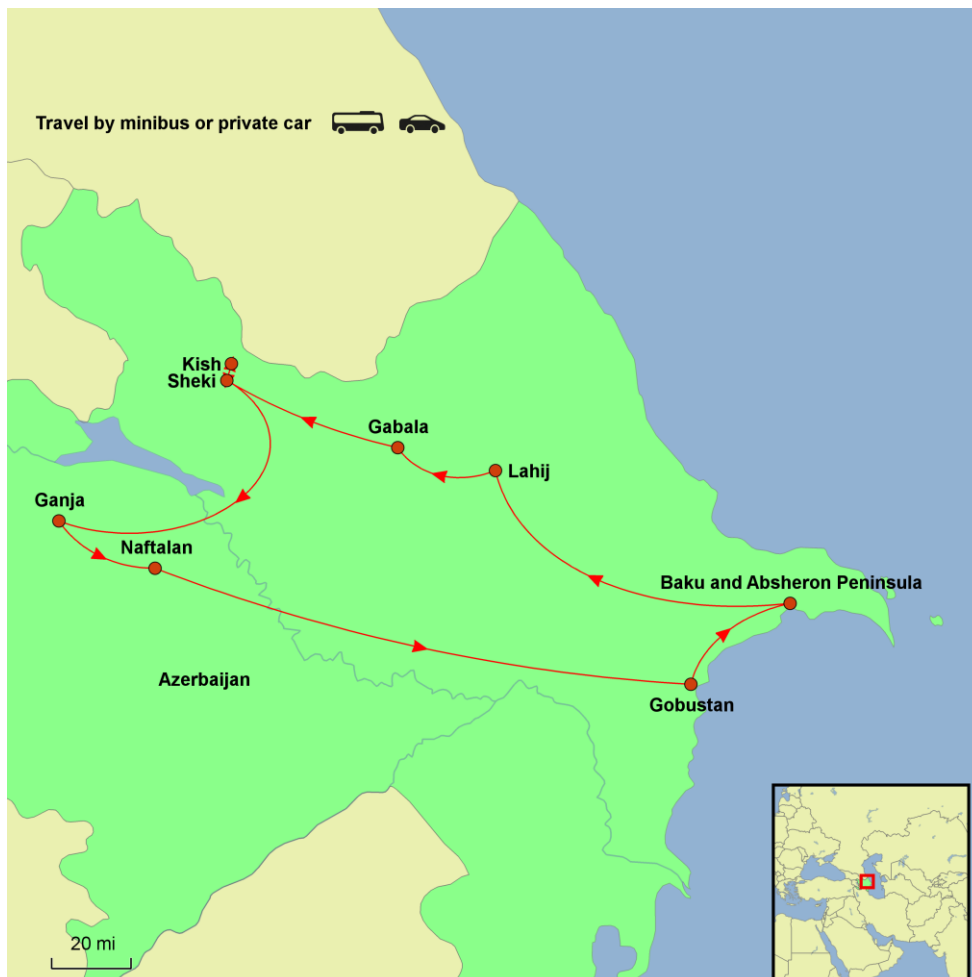
- ✓ Baku, famed for its medieval walled old city
- ✓ Khan's Palace in Sheki
- ✓ The fire-worshippers temple of Ateshgah
- ✓ Gobustan's rock engravings dating back as far as 40,000 years





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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Comfortable mid-range hotels, with private en-suite bathrooms
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size: Maximum 12
Start Point: Baku – you can arrive any time on day 1
End Point: Baku – you can depart any time on day 8 (main tour)
Transport: Mini-Bus
Countries: Azerbaijan
Optional Extension: Nakhchivan



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Azerbaijan - Land of Fire

A curious country, Azerbaijan shares the trait of its Caucasian neighbours of not really belonging to either Europe or Asia, taking elements from both but in a class of its own. With flaming hillsides, ancient temples and the grandeur of Baku, this intriguing little country is as unusual as it is enigmatic. Our short tour to Azerbaijan starts in the capital, a mish mash of Soviet planning, medieval architecture and modern buildings, distinctly unique and rather alluring. We explore the surrounding Absheron Peninsula with Yanardag, the fire mountain and the Temple of the Fire Worshippers, and then gaze in amazement at the bizarre mud volcanoes of Gobustan, yet another quirky side of Azerbaijan. After exploring the historic centre of Baku we head away from the big city to Sheki with its centuries old caravanserais, old Khan's Palace and a distinct flavour of yesteryear, as well as visiting nearby monasteries and churches. Returning back to the capital, we have a little more time to soak up its ambience and also take a boat trip on the Caspian Sea, the world's largest body of inland water. For those with a little more time to spare, why not extend your visit with a brief stay in Nakhchivan, a landlocked Azeri enclave with some fantastic old monuments and superb scenery.

Tour Itinerary Notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Baku (approx. driving time 30mins, 25km)

Arrive in Baku and transfer to your hotel. The rest of the day is free to relax or explore. Overnight Boutique 4* Hotel or similar.

Baku

Baku is a city with a decidedly split personality. While uber-modern buildings continually spring up and there is talk of turning the city into 'another Dubai', much of Baku is still made up of Soviet style apartment blocks. Oil wealth at the turn of the 20th century led to a profusion of rather elegant European style architecture, giving it yet another façade. But without a doubt Baku's most enigmatic part is the historic centre, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Icheri Sheher with its ancient collection of mosques, palaces and caravanserais, some of which date back to the 11th century. Located on the Absheron Peninsula, Baku can be rather windy – one theory of the origin of its name states that it means 'wind-pounded place', and it has numerous parks and squares like many of the old Soviet cities. Its first heyday came at the beginning of the 20th century, when the city produced more than half of the world's petroleum – after falling into decline during Soviet times, Baku is once again on the up.

Day 2 – Baku - Absheron Peninsula (approx. driving time 3 hours, 90km)

Explore Azerbaijan's capital, including the medieval fortress of Icheri Sheher, the Shirvanshahs' Palace and the 15th century caravanserai among other sites. From Baku we head to the Absheron Peninsula to visit the





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'flaming mountain' of Yanardag, continuously alight with burning underground gases that seep through holes in the earth's surface. We then visit the Gala Museum, the 'fire-worshippers' temple of Ateshgah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and continue to the medieval fortress at Amirjan before returning to Baku for the night. Overnight Boutique 4* Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Yanardag

The burning hillside of Yanardag is one of Azerbaijan's most bizarre sites. From beneath the earth flammable gases seep through the porous sandstone, erupting into flames that can reach 10 metres in height, although this is rare these days as extraction has considerably reduced the amount of gas. The flames are never extinguished having been lit accidentally in 1958. Most of the world's 'flaming mountains' are situated in Azerbaijan and Marco Polo recorded similar sights nearby as he passed through the region.

Day 3 – Baku – Lahij – Gabala (approx. driving time 6 hours, 300km)

Today we will travel west to Gabala city. En route we visit the Diri Baba Mausoleum in Maraza and the Yeddi Gumbaz Mausoleum at Shamakha. We continue across the Muganly Pass, with great views of the mountains along the way. We have a stop at Lahic village, a historical ethnographic reserve with local people producing handicrafts and carpets. There are also metal engravers, ancient mosques, baths and beautiful cobbled streets with original apartment houses in this ancient mountain settlement. From here continue to Gabala city. Overnight Gabala Gardens or similar (BLD)

Day 4 – Gabala-Sheki-Kish (approx. driving time 1.5 hours, 90km)

This morning we set off from Gabala to Sheki. The delightful town of Sheki is one of Azerbaijan's highlights. An important centre on the Trans-Caucasian trade routes, it was an independent khanate up until the 1820s and evidence of its former grandeur is not hard to spot. The splendid Khan's Palace was built in 1762 without the use of any nails and is elaborately decorated with ornate patterns on its exterior. There are also a number of old caravanserais and mosques to explore. Sheki is a delight to wander around, with winding streets and traditional houses giving the feeling of yesteryear. From Sheki we take a trip to the nearby village of Kish with its interesting Albanian church. Overnight Sheki Park or similar (BLD)

Day 5 – Sheki – Mingachevir - Ganja (approx. driving time 3 hours, 180km)

We travel to Mingachevir and take boat trip around the Kur river where we will enjoy a tea with local jam. After visiting Mingachevir we head to Ganja, Azerbaijan's second city. Upon arrival visit the local bazaar, the 17th century mosque of Shah Abbas and the unique 'bottle house' a local building decorated with nearly 50,000 bottles. Overnight Vego Hotel or similar (BLD)

Mingachevir

Founded in 1945 and the fourth largest city in Azerbaijan, Mingachevir lies on the banks of the Kura River. The Kura hydroelectric power station, the largest one in Azerbaijan, is also located here. The Mingachevir Reservoir, formed by a dam and called a 'sea' by locals, is the largest artificial reservoir in the country. Today, Mingachevir attracts both local and foreign tourists; the entire tourist infrastructure is concentrated on the banks of the Kura which is where you will also find the world-class KUR Olympic Rowing Centre

Day 6 – Ganja-Gobustan-Baku (approx. driving time 6 hours, 360km)

This morning we depart for Gobustan. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007, Gobustan is rich in archaeological monuments with over 6000 rock engravings dating back as far as 40,000 years. The petroglyphs depict ceremonial dances, battles, warriors, boats and many other scenes, as well as more recent Roman 'graffiti' from the 1st century. But Gobustan is equally well known for its natural phenomena – mud volcanoes that simmer and belch muddy bubbles from their cones, an incredibly atmospheric place and probably unlike anything you will have seen before. Azerbaijan is home to more than half of the mud volcanoes in the world with nearly 400 of them within its borders. Roughly every twenty years one of them



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explodes with great gusto, showering tons of mud over the surrounding area. Overnight Boutique 4* Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 7 – Baku (approx. driving time 1 hour, 20km)

Our last full day in Azerbaijan. We visit the History Museum for an insight into the various cultures and civilisations that have held sway here. We also visit the Heydar Aliyev Center, designed by Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid and noted for its distinctive architecture and flowing, curved style that eschews sharp angles. The rest of the day is free for you to explore. Overnight Boutique 4* Hotel or similar. (BLD)

The Caspian Sea

Larger by far than any of the world's lakes, the Caspian Sea became landlocked around 5 million years ago but still retains a certain level of salinity, hence its classification as a sea. Bordering Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, it measures an astonishing 143,000 square miles in surface area, and some of Eurasia's greatest rivers including the Volga and the Ural flow into it. The Caspian is home to a broad diversity of wildlife – perhaps the best known being the sturgeon, and has its own species of seal.

Day 8 – Baku (approx. driving time 30mins, 25km)

Transfer to the airport for your departure flight. (B)

POST TOUR EXTENSION TO NAKHCHIVAN

Take a short break to visit to Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan's landlocked enclave.

Day 8 - Baku – Nakhchivan (Domestic flight)

This morning we transfer to the airport and catch a flight to Nakhchivan, the capital of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, separated from the rest of the country by Armenia, and bordered elsewhere by Iran and Turkey. On arrival we check-in to hotel accommodation before exploring some of the surrounding sights. Highlights include the 12th century Momina Khatum mausoleum and the tomb of Yusuf Ibn Kuseyir. After lunch we drive to Alinja Fortress, one of the strongest defensive constructions of the 12th century. During Amir Timur's attacks on Nakhchivan in 1386, 1392 and 1399 the fortress served as headquarters for the Atabayler dynasty. Afterwards we return to Nakhchivan. Overnight Hotel Tabriz or similar. (BLD)

Day 9 - Nakhchivan visits – Baku (Domestic flight) – Departure from Azerbaijan

After breakfast we drive to the remarkable 14th century Garabaghlar Mausoleum in Nakhchivan's north west, and later call in at Duzdagh's vast therapeutic salt mines. After lunch we return to Nakhchivan city and visit Ashabi-Kahf cave sanctuary, a site of Islamic pilgrimage. There is also time to take in the city's history museum and the carpet museum. Dinner at the local restaurant and then, transfer to Nakhchivan airport for your flight back to Baku, and onward overnight flight back home. (BLD)

Note: If required, we can arrange an extra night post tour in Baku. Contact us for details.

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

- Arrival and departure transfers
- All accommodation
- Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader
- Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)





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Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Visas
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Drinks

Important Information

Foreign Government Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to the areas of Azerbaijan that we visit. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation which meets our own exacting standards. With a few exceptions you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.



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Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £5.00

Dinner £10.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Beer £1.80

Water £0.75

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is commonly recognised as a way of rewarding guides and drivers for good service. If you are happy with your guide and driver, please consider leaving a tip for them.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Baku is well equipped with ATMs

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are widely accepted in Baku, less so elsewhere

Local Currency: Manat

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euro or US Dollar

Where to Exchange: There are banks and bureaux de change in the larger towns and cities throughout Azerbaijan. In smaller towns and villages it is generally not possible to change money and you will need local currency

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.



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Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals require a visa for a tourist visit to Azerbaijan. For further details please visit the applicable website shown below.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Should you require any documentation to support a visa application, such as a letter of invitation, upon request this will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations after receipt of your balance payment.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for travel to Azerbaijan. However we recommend that you speak with your doctor for the most up to date advice regarding any vaccinations that may be recommended.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on best practice when travelling with medicines. For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.



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Preparing for your tour

Climate

Generally speaking, the best time to visit Azerbaijan is between May to October. It can get very hot in the summer but the winter is often bitterly cold inland with very strong winds, especially in Baku.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy. Please note that it can get quite cool in the mountains in the evening.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two round pins.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These notes were updated 11 April 2023.

