

## Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a mixture of cultures with the Caucasus Mountains splitting the country into the European north where it borders Russia and the Asian south bordering Iran. The east lies on the Caspian Sea providing beaches as well as industry and port activity. The fertile central valley between the Caucasus and the Little Caucasus to the southwest provides for farming of crops and raising sheep, goats and cattle on the slopes. With all their oil and gas reserves they have the money for a booming economy.

Baku is the capital and it is on the Caspian Sea. There as elsewhere in the country you will find beautiful Persian architecture on the many mosques. When you get out into the mountains there are numerous dwellings carved into the imposing rock formations along with ancient wall paintings and carvings. Gobustan Rock Art located an hour outside of Baku has cave paintings reminiscent of the cave paintings at Lascaux in France that are one of the top tourist attractions in the whole country.

With their independence from Russia in 1991, the Azeris have made the conscious decision to welcome international tourism. In Baku, the historic capital as well, you can find all kinds of accommodations including at the very high end with even The Four Seasons and JW Marriott having a presence there. If you venture into the Old Town you will find a different well preserved historic city with narrow winding streets and small shops and homes. Baku is a city of contrasts.

Azerbaijan is a welcoming country that wants you to visit. It doesn't matter if you come for the stark mountains, fabulous historic architecture or the beaches, just come.

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