

# EXPLORE!

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## Azerbaijan Caucasus Walking

AZERBAIJAN - TRIP CODE WAZ

WALKING AND TREKKING

### Why book this trip?

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A walking holiday that discovers the wild landscapes, history and contemporary culture of little-known Azerbaijan. Sitting on the easternmost fringes of Europe, flanked by the mighty Caucasus Mountains and Caspian Sea, it's a country undergoing rapid change and a fascinating place to visit.

- **Xinaliq** - Azerbaijan's highest inhabited village, spectacularly sited at 2350m
- **Caucasus walks** - Enjoy nature and observe rural life
- **Baku** - Cosmopolitan capital with a rich architectural heritage



**INCLUDED MEALS**

Breakfast: 8  
Lunch: 1  
Dinner: 3



**TRIP STAFF**

Explore Tour Leader / Trek Guide Driver(s)



**TRANSPORT**

Bus  
4WD



**ACCOMMODATION**

5 nights comfortable hotel  
3 nights simple hotel



**WALKING GRADE:**

Easy To Moderate



**GROUP SIZE:**

10 - 16

## Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

### DAY 1 - Join trip in Azerbaijan's capital city, Baku

The trip starts today in Baku, the cosmopolitan capital of Azerbaijan on the shores of the Caspian Sea which is home to around 25% of the population.

There are no activities planned for today and you are free to arrive at any time although please note that your hotel room may not be available until after 2pm. Complimentary airport transfers are provided to all customers arriving both today (day 1), and on day 2, into Baku Heydar Aliyev International Airport (GYD), which is around 30 minutes drive from the city centre. As many flights don't arrive into Baku until late tonight or the early hours of tomorrow morning, your Leader does not plan to hold the welcome meeting until after breakfast tomorrow (day 2).

If you have time free today, Baku is pleasant city to wander around and our hotel is centrally located. For a relaxing stroll we suggest heading to the waterfront area, known as the Bulvar, where gardens, fountains and a wide promenade sweep attractively around the city's Caspian shore.



**ACCOMMODATION:**

Central Park Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE





MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

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## DAY 2 - Walking tour in Old Baku; drive to coppersmiths' village of Lahic

If your flight arrives in the early hours of this morning; your room will be available for you to occupy on arrival. Your Leader will meet up with everyone for a trip welcome meeting after breakfast. Please check the hotel noticeboard for timings. Afterwards we plan to head out on a short walking tour through the delightful winding alleyways of Baku's UNESCO-listed Old City. It's 12th century battlements and towers enclose an area of old mosques, caravanserais and overhanging wooden balconies, some of which are currently undergoing renovation. We'll see the Maiden's Tower, an eight-storey fortress, and the Shirvanshah's Palace complex, parts of which date back to the 15th century.

Leaving the Baku by bus, we can see just how much the city has expanded in recent times into the desert-like landscapes that lie beyond the metropolis. We head north west towards the southern slopes of the Caucasus. These mountains stretch in an arc across the north of Azerbaijan, the continuation of a 1,200 kilometre range rising close to Sochi on the Black Sea and running through neighbouring Georgia. They form a natural border with the Russian republic of Dagestan.

We plan to stop in Shamakha, the former capital of Azerbaijan under the Shirvanshah's who ruled the country from the 7th to 16th centuries. We visit the impressive Djuma Mosque and call in at a local house to discover how typical Azeri yoghurt dishes are made and we'll also have the chance to taste them.

Our final destination today is the ancient mountain village of Lahic, reached after a picturesque drive through the steep sided valley of the Girdimanchay River. Lahic is named after the Persian-Caspian town of Lahicun from which the village founders are believed to have emigrated over a millennium ago, bringing with them their famous smithing skills. Today the main cobbled street is still dotted with coppersmiths and blacksmiths shops where you can call in and watch these skilled craftsmen at work.

Tonight we stay in the village at a welcoming family-run guesthouse. The rooms are simply furnished and have either an en suite bathroom or bathroom shared between two single-occupancy rooms. Our dinner today is taken at the hotel and we can expect to enjoy a selection of traditional dishes. Azerbaijani food is a mix of both Turkish and Central Asian culinary influences. Typical starters include fresh salad, herbs, yoghurt dishes and lentil soup followed by a main dish of grilled meats, stuffed vine leaves or stews. All are accompanied by generous hunks of fresh-baked bread.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Evim Otel (or similar)

Grade: Simple Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

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### DAY 3 - Walk around Lahic; drive to Sheki with great Caucasus views

This morning we head out on walk in and around Lahic, taking in village life and views of some of the high Caucasus peaks in the distance.

Later we continue our journey west along the southern flanks of the Caucasus with views of the plains to our south and forested mountains to the north. Along the way we'll see numerous tea gardens, where local travellers rest and picnic in the shade. From time to time we'll also pass road stalls selling a range of produce including local honey and brightly coloured circular discs called Lavashak which are made from dried fruit.

Sheki is our base for the next three nights. One of Azerbaijan's most-loved towns, Sheki's red-roofed houses nestle in a beautiful forested valley. For centuries Sheki has been an important market town on the east west trading route running across the Caucasus from the Caspian Sea in the east to the Black Sea in the west. A further trade route across the mountains to Dagestan in the north turned Sheki into a thriving commercial centre - especially during the 18th and 19th centuries, when there were no fewer than five working caravanserais providing safe lodging to merchants and traders.

In the afternoon we'll head out on a walking tour of the town's main sights including the 18th century Palace of the Sheki Khan's, with its famous stained-glass windows. We'll also visit a workshop where this colourful geometrically-patterned glass work, known as shabaka, is crafted, totally without the use of any nails or glue.

This morning's four kilometre walk is expected to take around one-and-a-half hours.



#### ACCOMMODATION:

Yaffle Inn Boutique Hotel (or similar)



**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### DAY 4 - Hike from Kish to ruined fortress of Gelsen Goresen

This morning we take a short drive to the nearby village of Kish. Our walk starts out in the village and we'll stop to see its ancient Albanian Church. (Albania was the name of a Caucasian state that lasted from around the 2nd century B.C. to the 8th century A.D. and confusingly has nothing to do with modern day Albania). Hiking along the cobbled streets, most of Kish's residences hide tantalisingly behind iron gates and high walls. Leaving the village behind, we ascend gently up the Kishcay Valley and find the best point to cross a tributary which flows into the main river. Continuing up the valley we pass a number of local resorts before entering a pine forest. Our aim is to reach the ruins of the 8th century fortress of Gelsen Goresen, hidden in thick native forest on a knoll on the valley side. The final 100 metres of the trail

involves quite a steep scramble up to the ruins.

Returning initially on the same route, we then cross the main river bridge to our waiting bus on the other side. The rest of the afternoon in Sheki is left free for further personal exploration. Sheki is best explored on foot; take a wander around its peaceful residential neighbourhoods from where you can walk up into the surrounding hills for a birds eye view over the town.

Today's seven kilometre walk is expected to take around two-and-a-half hours with a total ascent of 350 metres and descent of 150 metres.



**ACCOMMODATION:**

Yaffle Inn Boutique Hotel (or similar)



**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**



**SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE**



**MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST**

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## **DAY 5 - Walk from Ledit to ruined monastery of Yeddi Kilsa and Mamirli Falls**

We spend our day exploring to the west of Sheki, driving first to the delightfully unspoilt village of Ledit. It's a peaceful spot and great place to observe a rural way of life that's changed little over the centuries. Our walk from here takes us to two places hidden in the countryside, far from the tourist trail. We're likely to encounter none other but cattle peacefully grazing among the site of the scattered ruins of the Albanian Yeddi Kilsa Monastery, while the moss-covered Mamirli Falls make for an atmospheric riverside picnic spot.

In the afternoon we plan to drive into the picturesque, steeply-sided, Ilisu Valley to the north of Qakh. There are various historic monuments to see along the route including the 14th century watchtower and fortress of Sumuqqala and ancient Ulu Kozpu bridge over Kumruk River. We head up the valley as far as the road is sealed and, if there's time, there's the option to walk to the 26 metre-high Ramran Waterfall, a hike of around one-and-a-half hours.

This morning's six-and-a-half kilometre walk is expected to take around two-and-a-half hours with an ascent and descent of around 250 metres.



**ACCOMMODATION:**

Yaffle Inn Boutique Hotel (or similar)



**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### **DAY 6 - Full day driving through desert and mountain landscapes to Qirizdene**

Departing Sheki, it's a full day journey today around the flanks of Caucasus to Qirizdene on the northern side of the Caucasus massif. We'll cover around 450 kilometres through changing landscapes. Firstly we head back along the southern slopes of the Caucasus to the outskirts of Baku. We then head north along the main road heading up to the border with Russia. The landscapes here are dry and pretty desolate. Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coastline can be seen on our right. Sandwiched between the Caucasus and the steppe of Central Asia, it's the world's largest inland body of water, up to 1 kilometre deep. West from the town of Gilezi look out for a chain of low arid mountains nicknamed the Candy Cane mountains after their colourful rose and white strata.

It's only as we turn off the main highway and come closer to Quba, the main town of the north, that the landscapes become progressively greener. Heading up into the Caucasus Mountains once again, the air freshens and the valley starts to narrow. Our hotel base for the next two nights is a local resort spread out in a scenic location along the floor of the valley. We stay in the main hotel building, the pine clad rooms are simply furnished and have en suite bathrooms.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Nazli Bulaq Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Simple Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

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### **DAY 7 - Lunch with local family in Xinaliq; hike to Qala Xudat**

The winding road up to Xinaliq, Azerbaijan's highest village is an ever-changing series of scenic delights. We follow a lush and forested river valley that gradually narrows and steepens until we enter Cloudcatcher Canyon, a dramatic gorge. At the narrow and deep Tolkien Chasm the red and ochre cliffs are reminiscent of the American West. Ascending further the vistas widen and rolling green meadows and snow-capped mountain peaks come into sight. Eventually among these wild landscapes, Xinaliq

village comes into sight, a ramshackle collection of stone houses perched at 2350 metres on a knoll among a vast mountain amphitheatre.

Xinaliq is Azerbaijan's highest permanently inhabited village and its history is swirled in myths including the story that it was founded by the descendants of Noah. The people call themselves the Ketdid and have their own unique language. We'll lunch on home-cooking in one of the village houses and spend time wandering among the homes, some of which still retain the flat earth roofs which traditionally formed the courtyard of the house stacked above. There's a small museum here that is definitely worth a visit.

In the afternoon we head out on a hike to the neighbouring village of Qala Xudat. Following an old dirt road, the terrain is easy underfoot, allowing you to spend the walk taking in the panoramic mountain vistas all around.

Today's nine kilometre walk is expected to take around three hours with a total ascent and descent of 210 metres.



**ACCOMMODATION:**

Nazli Bulaq Hotel (or similar)



**Grade: Simple Hotel**



**SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE**



**MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER**

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## **DAY 8 - Hike in Shahdag National Park; return to Baku**

Our plan this morning is to return to Xinaliq and hike north west from the village along a valley into the Shahdag National Park to the Ateshgah, where a small natural gas flare sparks from the ground at the foot of Heydar Aliyev peak. Considered a sacred place by local people, it's believed to be the site of an ancient temple, possibly Zoroastrian and a small temple structure was built here in 2016. Due to our proximity to the Dagestan border this hike is subject to our obtaining the necessary permissions from the relevant authorities. The situation can be fluid so, should these not be forthcoming, we'll take an alternative route for our final hike of the holiday.

In the afternoon we'll say goodbye to this special place and head back to the modern world and metropolis of Baku for our last night in Azerbaijan.

Today's ten kilometre walk is expected to take around three hours with a total ascent and descent of 300 metres.



**ACCOMMODATION:**

Central Park Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### DAY 9 - Trip ends in Baku

The trip ends today after breakfast at our hotel in Baku.

There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you need to depart from Baku Heydar Aliyev International Airport (GYD), which is around 30 minutes drive from the city centre.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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## Trip information

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### Climate and country information

#### Azerbaijan

##### Climate

Azerbaijan experiences extremes of climate: while Baku and the Caspian coastal areas are hot and humid in mid-summer, May to September are the best months to visit the mountainous north-west.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+4	2 Pin Round	Islam	Azerbaijani

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### Budgeting and packing

#### Clothing



Take light and comfortable clothing that can be layered according to the temperature. Due to the differences in altitude on this trip, temperatures can range from very hot (in Baku and Sheki) to cool (in Xinaliq).

- Breathable wind and waterproof jacket and waterproof trousers (it can rain heavily in the mountains)
- T-shirts
- Long sleeved tops
- Sunhat
- Long trousers
- Shorts (if you prefer to walk in them)
- Midlayer Fleece/pullover
- Socks
- Headscarf (ladies) for visiting mosques and churches

## Footwear

We recommend you bring lightweight walking boots with ankle support, make sure that your boots are worn-in and comfortable before the start of the trip. Also trainers or sandals for relaxing and general wear. We suggest that on international flights you either carry your walking boots in your hand luggage or wear them - should your luggage be lost or delayed, your own boots are the one thing that will be irreplaceable.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage (most accommodation does not have porters) so don't overload yourself.

## Equipment

- Walking poles (if you normally use them)
- Sunglasses
- Sun cream
- Small torch
- Personal first aid kit - on each walk a first aid kit is carried but you should have your own blister kit, supply of plasters, aspirin and other essentials.
- Insect repellent
- Reusable water bottle (minimum 1 litre) - Get 15% discount on a Water-to-Go bottle [www.explore.co.uk/about-us/responsible-travel/water-to-go-discount-with-explore](http://www.explore.co.uk/about-us/responsible-travel/water-to-go-discount-with-explore)
- Lunch box/Tupperware (useful for picnic lunches)

## Tipping

### Explore leader

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. You may however, want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal

preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline.

### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow US\$ 25. In order to make things easier for you, the Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

## Azerbaijan

### Food and drink

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.

<b>Dinner price</b>	<b>Beer price</b>	<b>Water price</b>
£12.00 - 16.00	£2.00 - 4.00	£0.50 - 1.00

### Foreign Exchange

#### Local currency

Manat.

#### Recommended Currency For Exchange

We recommend you take your money in undamaged mixed denomination US\$ notes issued post 1993.

#### Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

#### ATM Availability

Only in major towns.

#### Credit Card Acceptance

Very limited.

#### Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are difficult to change

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## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, 4WD

### Accommodation notes

We stay in Comfortable grade accommodation in Baku (where our hotel is centrally located) and Sheki. Here is some additional information about the Simple grade accommodation we use in Lahic and Qirizdene:-

Lahic - Evim Otel is a welcoming family-run guesthouse set in a shady garden just a short walk from the

main street of the village. The spotless rooms are simply furnished and have either an en suite bathroom or bathroom shared between two single-occupancy rooms. Dinner is taken at the hotel and we can expect to enjoy a selection of traditional home-cooked Azerbaijani dishes.

Qirizdene - Nazli Bulaq resort complex occupies a scenic location along the floor of a river valley, flanked by steep cliffs on the route up to Xinaliq, Azerbaijan's highest village. We stay in the main hotel building, the pine clad rooms are simply furnished and have en suite bathrooms.

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## Essential Information

### Government Travel Safety Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

### Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa and Passport Information

Azerbaijan: All nationalities require a visa prior to arrival. British passport holders are eligible to apply for an e-visa from <https://evisa.gov.az/en/> which takes approximately 3 working days to process. Applicants should have access to an email account and at least 6 months validity on your passport.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

### Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## Transfers

Find out more about [Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions](#) before you book.

### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

## Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore 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. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them [here](#).

## 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.

## Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport. On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## Maximum altitude (m)

2450

## Azerbaijan

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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## Walking and Trekking information

DAILY DISTANCES		
Day 3	4km	1.5hrs
Day 4	7km	3hrs
Day 5	6.5km	2.5hrs
Day 6		
Day 7	9km	3hrs
Day 8	9km	3hrs

### Walking grade

Easy to moderate

### Trek details

We walk on 5 days for between 1.5 to 3 hours each day on a mixture of village and mountain paths.

Terrain can be rocky underfoot at times. There are no lengthy steep ascents or descents. The grade takes into account that the going can sometimes seem tougher at lower altitudes due to high summer temperatures.

## Max walking altitude (m)

2450

### Additional Information



## Reviews



AWARD WINNING  
EXPLORE LEADERS



PRICE GUARANTEE  
PROMISE



AIRPORT  
TRANSFERS