

*WorldDenver Presents:*

# STAYCATIONS

a new way to travel the world without leaving your home

## BROWSING IN BAKU

It's been a long flight home from Mars, and fellow travelers are discussing what they might have for dinner that night. One person shouts out "eggs!", and everyone laughs, until a strange smell permeates the air. Doors open and the group nervously jostles out, only to find that they are back on Mars. Or so it seems... There are signs about Guinness Book of World Records mud volcanoes and a slight sulphuric tinge to the air... What is going on?! Welcome to Azerbaijan! For those of you who have traveled here in 2017 or 2018 with WorldDenver's Citizen Diplomat Excursions, welcome back!

## CULTURE

Baku, capital of Azerbaijan and home to 2.2 million people, sits at 92 feet below sea level and is the lowest lying national capital city in the world. Famous for its medieval walled city which contains the 15th century built Palace of the Shirvanshahs and iconic stone Giz Galasy (Maiden Tower), it is equally recognizable by its contemporary architecture of the Flame Towers, three pointed skyscrapers covered with LED screens located around the city. A city of great extremes, Baku is home to the largest flag in the world, made of silk and measuring 100x50 meters, as well as the Museum of Miniature Books which features over 6,500 books from 64 nations. In the collection, three of the books can only be read with the use of a magnifying glass. Along Baku's seafront, tourists and locals can enjoy the sight of a building shaped like a massive rolled up rug, home to the Azerbaijan Carpet Museum. Take a stroll along the Caspian Sea's shoreline up to UNESCO heritage site Icheri Sheher (the Inner City) to see evidence of Zoroastrian, Sasanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian presence in cultural continuity. The grandeur of Icheri Sheher lies in the combination of its distinct architectural monuments and living, vibrant residential areas housing local communities, a merged entity reflective of the long history and the melding of cultures that have influenced its development over the past nine centuries.



## CUISINE

Ok so it's clear we aren't on Mars anymore despite the 400 mud volcanoes that call Azerbaijan home, but now fellow travelers are noticing loaves hanging from trees. What is going on?! Bread is considered sacred in Azerbaijan, and wasted bread isn't thrown away, as it's considered too important to be discarded. Legend has it that Azeris occasionally kiss bread they find on the ground, and then place it on a higher surface, off the ground and away from the dirt. Most Azeri bread is similar to what we would recognize as a flatbread or lavash, cooked on the side of a clay oven called a tendir, also known as a tandoor! Kutabi – filled pancakes – are one of Azerbaijan's most popular foods, taking a lavash that has been filled with a savory stuffing while the dough is still raw, then folded in half and pan-fried with a sprinkle of sumac on top. Often they're stuffed with pumpkin, veggies, meat, or just a sprinkling of herbs, then flipped and toasted on a griddle. Leave your Nutella at home: Azerbaijan's pancakes are strictly savory and often served with sides of sides of yogurt, sautéed onions, or mushrooms in cream sauce!

## BEVERAGE

*Çay nədir, say nədir*

*“When you drink tea, the cup count does not matter”*

Black tea is the most common beverage in Azerbaijan, often served with cubes of sugar, lemon, honey, jam, nuts, and other small snacks. According to a common belief, drinking tea with lump sugar instead of sand sugar comes from the medieval period, when rulers who were afraid of being poisoned checked their tea by dunking a piece of sugar in a beverage as it was believed that the poison would react to the sugar. In Azeri culture, tea is associated with hospitality so tradition says that one should not allow the guest to leave the house without at least one cup. Tea in Azerbaijan is also served during matchmaking. After the matchmakers' negotiations are complete, the family will bring out tea. If the tea is served without sugar, that is a sign that the chances for marriage agreement are very low; conversely, if tea is served with sugar, it means that there will be a wedding. Enjoy some tea over the chilly weekend or try some of these other popular beverages.

