



# DISCOVER AZERBAIJAN

BAKU 2015 EDITION

CELEBRATING THE INAUGURAL EUROPEAN GAMES





DISCOVER  
AZERBAIJAN

**Discover Azerbaijan: Baku 2015 Edition**

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First published in the United Kingdom  
in 2015 by Senate Publishing  
5 Wythburn Place  
London W1H 7BU  
United Kingdom  
[www.senateconsulting.co.uk](http://www.senateconsulting.co.uk)

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**Photography:**

Azerbaijan State News Agency,  
Dreamstime.com, Getty Images, iStock,  
Sport In Pictures Photo Agency

**Print management:**

TU ink, London  
[www.tuink.co.uk](http://www.tuink.co.uk)

Printed in Italy

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**AZERBAIJAN**  
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# Contents



AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY



## Foreword

### 06 **Azerbaijan: playing an active role on the global stage**

Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

## Welcome to Azerbaijan: Land of Fire

### 10 **Where tradition meets modernity**

Since gaining its independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has been discovered by increasing numbers of visitors every year, all experiencing the combination of tradition and modern influences that give the country its unique qualities

### 16 **Map of Azerbaijan**

Highlighting Azerbaijan's cities and regions, plus a selection of facts and statistics about the country

### 18 **The origins of today's Azerbaijan**

How modern Azerbaijan has been shaped by its rich heritage and traditions, its position at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, its shifting borders and influential leaders

### 26 **The changing face of Azerbaijan**

Exploring how the development of Azerbaijan's oil sector over the past two decades has transformed the country, as seen most notably in the infrastructure and rapidly evolving skyline of its capital, Baku

### 31 **Working for continued prosperity**

Rovnag Abdullayev, President of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), explains his organisation's activities, its environmental efforts and contribution to the welfare of the country's citizens

## Tourism and culture

### 92 **Tourism: a wealth of attractions**

Azerbaijan has much to offer foreign visitors – from iconic historical monuments and beautiful natural landscapes to its modern architecture and high-quality hotels and shopping



## 98 A cultural crossroads

The blend of Azerbaijan's cultural heritage with current influences presents a distinctive mix of traditional and modern art forms, enhanced by innovative venues and facilities to reflect this combination of old and new

## Events and exhibitions

### 104 Playing host to international events

A look ahead to major sporting events taking place in Azerbaijan in the near future, including F1's 2016 European Grand Prix, the 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games and Uefa Euro 2020 matches. Plus the reasons why Baku is becoming an increasingly popular choice for events, concerts and conferences

### 110 Directory

Useful contacts for government offices, Azerbaijan's foreign embassies, cultural venues, tourist attractions and city hotels

## Baku 2015: the First European Games

### 34 A historic moment for European sport

Introducing a review of 17 days of competition and celebration as Baku played host to the inaugural European Games – a major multi-sport event that established a new fixture in the Olympic calendar

### 36 A first for Europe

How Azerbaijan's capital made sporting history with the staging of the first European Games – an idea that was almost five decades in the making

### 40 Interview: Mehriban Aliyeva

Azerbaijan's First Lady and Chair of the Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee reflects on the achievement of hosting Europe's first continental Games

### 44 Venues and facilities

Exploring the venues that hosted 20 sports at Baku 2015, including the award-winning Olympic Stadium, and the Athletes' Village that was home to around 6,000 competitors for the duration of the Games

### 60 The Torch Relay

A look back at the Journey of the Flame, during which more than 1,000 torchbearers carried the burning symbol of Baku 2015 to all corners of the country, generating excitement and anticipation in the run-up to the Opening Ceremony

### 64 Baku 2015: day by day

A review of the highlights, key moments and medal winners at the Games, including the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies at the Olympic Stadium

### 88 Interview: Patrick Hickey

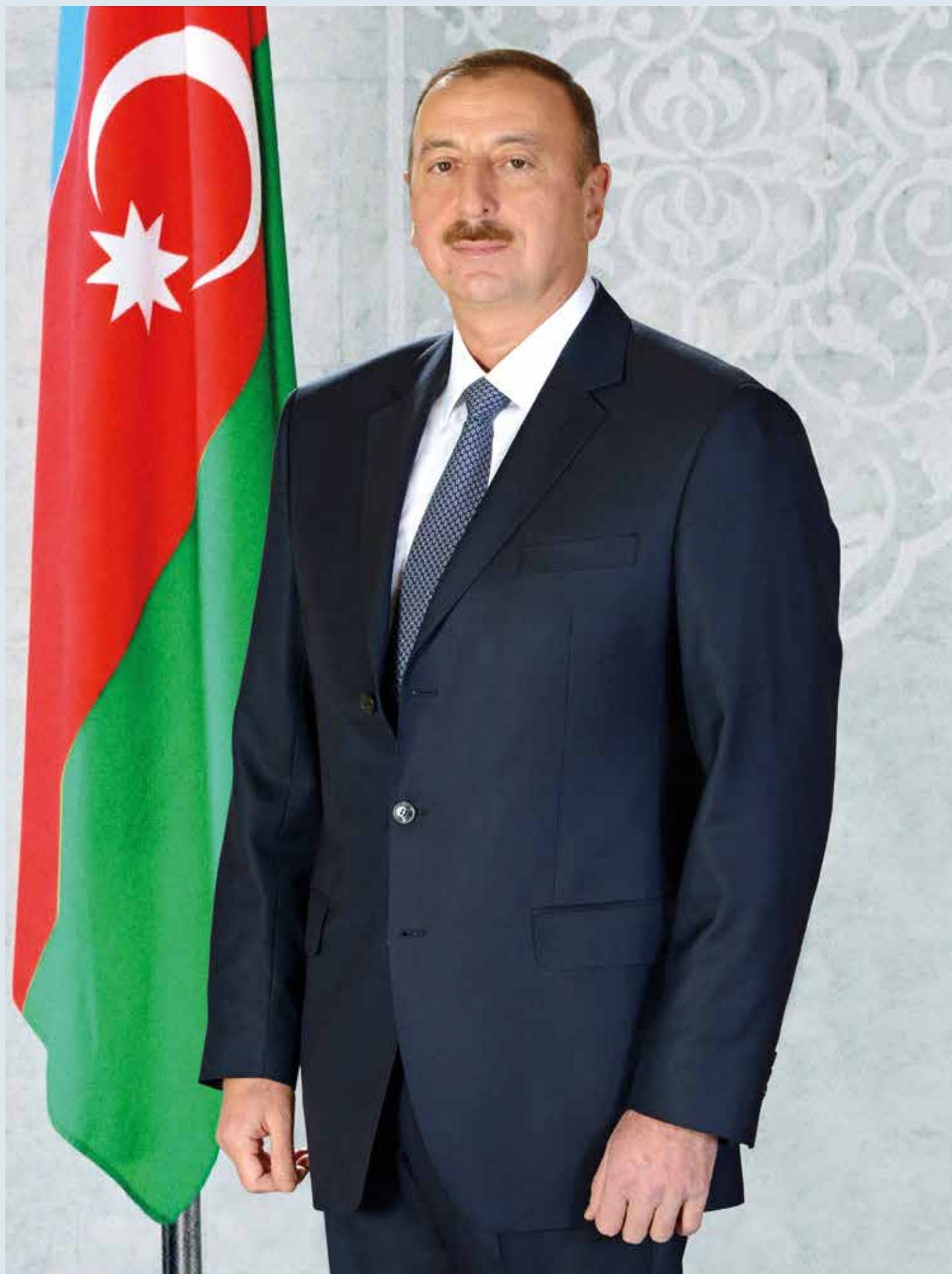
The President of the European Olympic Committees explains why Baku was an ideal host for the inaugural Games and shares his views on the future of the event

### 90 The athletes' view

Three of Azerbaijan's gold medallists in martial arts offer their recollections of a successful European Games – for themselves, their teammates and for their country







# Azerbaijan: playing an active role on the global stage

**Ilham Aliyev**, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

**Q How would you assess Azerbaijan's economic, social and cultural development 20 years after it restored independence in 1991?**

**A** It has been a remarkable period of exceptional significance in our history, since Azerbaijan restored state independence. Developing rapidly, Azerbaijan has assumed a well-deserved role in the global community and overcome longstanding socioeconomic and cultural challenges.

Nevertheless, the national state-building process has not been easy. The occupation of our territory as a result of Armenian aggression in the early years of our independence, as well as the threat of civil war put our national sovereignty at risk. Meanwhile, deep economic recession resulted in hyperinflation, with people facing acute social problems.

Only when Azerbaijan's national leader Heydar Aliyev assumed power again in 1993 could these precarious processes be halted. Subsequently, the issues related to state-building became a priority.

Azerbaijan gradually transitioned to a period of stability and dynamic development, the foundations of our statehood started to be established. Adoption and development of a democratic state model, implementation of the oil strategy and execution of transnational energy projects, as well as the establishment of a vigorous liberal economy and conducting of a successful domestic and foreign policy are major factors that have allowed us to become a worthy member of the international community. The signing of the Contract of the Century in 1994 was of critical importance for Azerbaijan's independent development, while transnational projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines played a key role in transporting country's energy resources to world markets and cementing our economic and political ties globally.

The groundwork laid during the crucial years of our statehood allowed us to take our country forward confidently and enabled favourable environment for successfully coping with all challenges. Back in 2003, having realised the need for both comprehensive and balanced development of our country and anticipating substantial oil revenues generated by the massive energy projects, we made socioeconomic development of our regions a priority.

Two state programs on regional development – one running from 2003 to 2008 and the other from 2009 to 2013 – were successfully

implemented. Another program from 2014 to 2018 has been just as effective. In a short space of time, we have been able to achieve strategic economic goals by continuing liberal economic reforms, prioritizing economic sectors and stimulating their development, promoting investment, and implementing result oriented state programs.

Thanks to these efforts, the economy has more than tripled in the past ten years, the unemployment and poverty rates have dropped to five per cent, socioeconomic infrastructure has been revitalized, and the standard of living has improved dramatically. These and other successes can truly be considered an outstanding accomplishment for any country.

Today, Azerbaijan is known on the international arena as a prominent country, which pursues an independent foreign policy, has its principled position, and contributes considerably to efforts to solve problems facing all of humanity. All this bears testimony to the appropriateness and success of Azerbaijan's national development strategy after the country's restoring of its independence.

**Q The energy sector was the driving force of Azerbaijan's economic growth the past 10 years. Which initiatives have been proposed to diversify the economy?**

**A** The energy sector remains a leading segment of the economy. However, we have succeeded both in rebuilding traditional sectors and developing new ones such as IT, tourism, space and defence industries, by channelling energy-sector revenues into promoting the non-oil sector. Because of the consistent measures of the recent years, the non-oil sector has grown by 9 to 10 percent annually. In the first half of 2015, the non-oil sector grew 9.2 percent, while non-oil industry saw an over 14 percent growth. The non-oil sector has accounted for more than 50 percent of Gross Domestic Product in recent years, and reached 66.9 percent of GDP in the first half of 2015. These figures demonstrate clearly that Azerbaijan's economy is being diversified and becoming less dependent on oil.

Some countries are facing financial constraints these days. The national debt in some surpasses their GDP. Azerbaijan's debt is a comfortable 10 to 11 percent of GDP, one of the lowest ones in the world. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has amassed substantial



SOVFOTO/UIG/GETTY

foreign exchange reserves. This is a testament to our efficient use of oil-export revenues and commitment to preserve our reserves for future generations.

We have revitalized cities, towns and villages and improved people's welfare and livelihood through implementing vital state programs and large-scale projects. Thousands of production facilities have been established in Azerbaijan's regions in the past 12 years. At the same time, 1.4 million jobs have been created, including 1 million permanent ones, with the vast majority being in the regions.

We have succeeded in ensuring our country's energy security, which is vitally important, and we are now contributing to other countries' energy security. Production at the Shah Deniz-2 gas project and the building of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline and Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline will help us play an even a greater role in guaranteeing Europe's energy security. We have prioritized food security in the past few years and have largely accomplished this goal by improving the agricultural sector.

Azerbaijan is also playing an active role in establishing transport corridors and modern transportation infrastructure in the region. In fact, we have already become a regional transportation and logistics hub. Both the East-West and North-South transport corridors pass through our country. The Baku Sea Port, our modern international aviation infrastructure and finally Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project is what conditioned Azerbaijan's emerging as a country that links Europe to Asia.

Azerbaijan has become the economic leader of the region, accounting for 75 percent of the South Caucasus economy. Having already completed its economic transition, Azerbaijan now is a country with a sustainable economy. International financial institutions also praise the economic reforms we have implemented. Our country ranks 38th among 144 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum, and for five years we have led all of the CIS countries in this category.

All of these factors are tangible results of the initiatives taken to diversify the economy.

**Q Baku's rapid development has been a symbol of Azerbaijan's modernization. How important is it to preserve culture and traditions at a time when there is so much modernization?**

**A** Modernization has been a fundamental component of our development efforts of the past ten years. This is a sophisticated process that includes renewing the social structure, creating a new economic system, and building modern socioeconomic and cultural infrastructure. This modernization is more evident if one travels across the country.

With a dazzling appearance and modern social and cultural infrastructure, Baku can be compared with the world's most

beautiful cities. The City Boulevard, parks, ancient architectural edifices, magnificent modern buildings and newly renovated cultural monuments add distinctive splendour to our capital. Internationally renowned hotel chains and other well-known companies operate in the city. I would like to emphasize that this is the case not only in Baku but in the regions as well. The important measures taken to ensure socioeconomic development of the regions in the past ten years have changed the landscape and helped revitalize them.

Nonetheless, modernization has not occurred at the expense of our national and moral values. The people of Azerbaijan succeeded in preserving their ancient culture and traditions even during the seventy years of Soviet rule. In the years of independence, hundreds of cultural and religious monuments have been renovated, national holidays have been given state status. Our people embrace universal values but, above all else, our own culture, national and moral values.

Throughout the centuries, diverse religious and ethnic groups have lived in peace as one family in Azerbaijan and contributed to our successful development. This diversity has been a great asset and source of strength. We are proud of our religious and ethnic diversity, and make serious efforts to promote values such as multiculturalism, peace, cooperation and mutual understanding globally. As a country located on the crossroads of the East and West, and as a member of both the Islamic Cooperation Organization and the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan plays a vital role in promoting dialogue among civilizations and cross-cultural understanding. In 2008, Azerbaijan invited representatives of Islamic countries to the Conference of Ministers of Culture of the Council of Europe in Baku, which served as a platform for a candid and open exchange of ideas. We were pioneers in organizing this event, which laid the foundation for what is now known as the Baku Process. The World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, Baku International Humanitarian Forum and other events have brought together incumbent and former heads of state and government, public and political figures, internationally acclaimed scientists and experts, and civil society representatives to discuss the challenges of our times. Azerbaijan makes serious efforts to promote multiculturalism, dialogue among religions and nations. It's no coincidence that Azerbaijan today enjoys an international reputation as a land of ethnic and religious tolerance.

**Q In view of successful organization of the first European Games and future events, how important is sport for Azerbaijan's internal development and its international standing?**

**A** The European Olympic Committees' decision to grant the first European Games to Azerbaijan can be characterized as a clear manifestation of the international community's confidence



◁ President Ilham Aliyev assists in the symbolic opening of the Azerbaijan section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which has supplied much of the world's oil needs since 2006

▷ National Flag Square in Baku is the focal point of the city, featuring one of the world's tallest unsupported flagpoles. Its 70-metre flag was unfurled for the first time by President Ilham Aliyev at the inauguration of the Square on 1 September 2010



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and interest in our country. I think that by ensuring the excellent organization of this Pan-European sporting event we, on the one hand, justified the international sporting community's confidence, demonstrated extremely responsible attitude to our commitments, and on the other, showed that we are capable of overcoming the most serious of the challenges.

In a short space of time – just 30 months – the sport infrastructure in Azerbaijan was brought to the highest international standards. I should note that we have embarked on building sport infrastructure in Azerbaijan since early 2000. Today there are 41 Olympic sport complexes in the country's regions alone, with the construction of nine more facilities continuing. Eighteen new world-class sports facilities were built for the Games in Baku. The city's transportation infrastructure was improved, and we took all the measures to ensure security and address the issues of accommodation of the guests and athletes, and the provision of the necessary conditions on training grounds. This is what allowed us to organize this sporting event, which is on a par with the Olympic Games, smoothly. Participants and fans alike praised the way the events were organized. For two weeks, 6,000 athletes representing National Olympic Committees of 50 countries contested a total of 253 sets of medals in 20 sports in Azerbaijan's magnificent sports grounds. Team Azerbaijan claimed a haul of 56 medals, including 21 golds, to finish second in the overall medal table of the Games. I think this is the great victory of the people of Azerbaijan, a triumph of our national independence.

The European Games is a new interesting chapter in the history of sports. The Games gave millions of people following this sporting celebration a glimpse at what we have achieved, our culture and rich traditions.

I believe another impact of the Games is that they have prompted popularization of sports in Azerbaijan, contributing immensely to shaping a new generation of athletes and sports experts. All this and state-of-the-art sport infrastructure will contribute to the establishment and development of a modern sports industry in our country.

The facilities we built for the European Games will make it easier for us to host other global sporting events. The World Chess

Olympiad and Formula-1 Race will be held in Azerbaijan in 2016. In 2017, Baku will host the Islamic Solidarity Games. I think the fact that Azerbaijan hosted the First European Games and just two years later would host the Islamic Solidarity Games is symbolic, and stands as a testimony to commitment to ideas of multiculturalism that are widely present in all spheres of life in Azerbaijan.

The development of sports in Azerbaijan is not episodic. It is consistent and purposeful state policy. I am confident that numerous sporting events held in our country, our athletes' global achievements would further contribute to the promotion of Azerbaijan and paint a comprehensive and objective picture of our country around the world. Ultimately, sport is a practical means for keeping our youth healthy, ensuring that our people live in peace, and developing our ties with other nations.

### Q What is your advice to those interested in visiting and doing business in Azerbaijan?

A Azerbaijan is a favourable place for both tourism and business. Guests leave Azerbaijan with profound impressions thanks to our rich nature, historical and cultural monuments, modern tourism infrastructure, and our people's hospitality and environment of exemplary tolerance.

It is no coincidence that people who visit Azerbaijan emphasize its beauty and say they will return. This includes the many tourists who visited Azerbaijan during the First European Games.

At the same time, Azerbaijan has a sound business climate. Foreign companies have invested some \$200 billion in our economy since 2003. Last year, investment totalled \$27 billion, of which \$11 billion was foreign investment. This demonstrated that Azerbaijan remains an attractive country for foreign investment. Given the world's tough economic conditions, \$11 billion foreign investment is quite an achievement for any country. Moreover, liberal laws and favourable environment are among the main factors facilitating business in Azerbaijan.

With that in mind, I think that Azerbaijan's relevance for both tourists and business community will only grow in the years to come. ●



# Where tradition meets modernity







Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan presents a compelling blend of long-held traditions and modern influences that is increasingly being experienced by visitors from around the world

The Republic of Azerbaijan is the largest state in the South Caucasus and the leading contributor to the region's economy. In recent years, the attention of the world has focused on rapid developments in the country due to its economic success, but ever increasing numbers of visitors to Azerbaijan are discovering the combination of tradition and modernity that provides the country's unique selling point.

The complex and fascinating history of Azerbaijan encapsulates several key eras. From ancient dynastic rule, to the country's years under Soviet control that covered much of the 20th century, Azerbaijan has emerged into a modern state with a prominent place on the global stage since attaining its independence in 1991.

As an important oil-producing country supplying the energy needs of large parts of the globe, Azerbaijan has enjoyed recent economic prosperity. The country and its capital, Baku, have experienced developments in construction, infrastructure and across society, made possible by the revenues produced by its abundant natural resources

Azerbaijan's geographical location makes it perfectly positioned to act as a gateway between East and West, just as it did hundreds of years ago as an important part of the trade network known as the Silk Road (see panel). Today, the country is a crucial element of the East-West energy corridor, supplying resources from the Caspian Basin to meet constant energy demand in Europe.

Amid Azerbaijan's recent economic success and increasing global presence in the past quarter of a century has also come conflict and suffering. During the final years of Soviet rule in the late 1980s, the country found itself in a violent and bloody dispute with Armenian secessionists in the formerly autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

War followed the region's declaration of independence in 1991, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, resulting in up to 30,000 deaths and one million people displaced. Territory outside Karabakh was also occupied. A ceasefire was signed in 1994 and the region remains occupied by ethnic Armenians, although the international community recognises Azerbaijan's claim on Nagorno-Karabakh. Subsequent negotiations have failed to find a resolution to the dispute.

< Daily life in Baku's city centre takes place against a backdrop that encompasses the old and the new, as modern architecture combines with more traditional buildings





## The Silk Road

Historically, Azerbaijan formed part of the ancient network of trade routes, known as the Silk Road, that linked the West to the East. Stretching for 6,000km, the overland routes connected China with the heart of Europe, as well as extending further south to Africa and India. Azerbaijan served as a bridge across the Caspian Sea region, linking the Caucasus with the Middle East and northern Europe, and was considered one of the safest stopping points on the entire route.

Although the route gained its name from the trade in Chinese silk that took place along its entirety, the Silk Road was also instrumental in the development of civilisations, cultural interaction and economic relations between regions from the second century BC to the 15th century AD. Ceramics, minerals and printed goods were also conveyed to the West, and musical instruments carried along the route influenced the sounds and culture of the territories through which it passed. Azerbaijan became renowned as a trading centre and for the handicrafts it produced, including carpets, jewellery and copper items.

The concept of the Silk Road is being resurrected today, with Azerbaijan at the centre of several plans to develop economic and energy connectivity. Projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor form part of a modern-day equivalent, conveying energy resources to Europe. Azerbaijan is also an integral part of the International Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), while new rail routes linking Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey will open new transit opportunities between East and West.

► At Gobustan Artistic and Historical Preserve, dancers give an open-air performance of Faraj Garaye's *The Shadows of Gobustan*, a ballet inspired by the area's ancient rock engravings that date back 40,000 years

## National culture and character

Azerbaijan's rapid development since independence hasn't prevented the country and its people from retaining the distinct culture that has been passed down through generations and which is based around the importance of family. Traditions that stretch back over more than two millennia continue to shape the national character and are incorporated into a modern lifestyle that is influenced by the speed with which ideas and trends are communicated in today's globalised world.

Azerbaijan has a proud history and cultural heritage, which remains evident in the music and art that can be heard and seen throughout the country. Its population is overwhelmingly of the Muslim faith, yet the country is a secular state, with its sense of identity being more dependant on culture and ethnicity than religion.





## Baku: Azerbaijan's capital

Located on the southern shore of the Absheron Peninsula, in the far east of Azerbaijan, Baku lies 28 metres below sea level, making it the lowest-lying national capital and the largest city in the world below sea level. The largest and most cosmopolitan metropolis in the South Caucasus, the city is home to almost 2.4 million people.

The first extraction of oil in Baku in the mid 19th century was the start of an oil boom that led to a huge growth in the city's population, outstripping that of major world cities such as London, Paris and New York during the late 1800s. The oil industry continues to be the major contributor to the economy of the city and the country as a whole.







DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA

◁ Cyclists race through the cobble streets of Baku's Old City on day 10 of the inaugural European Games

△ The sport-loving Azerbaijani public were enthusiastic supporters during the 17 days of competition at Baku 2015

### The first European Games

The tolerant Azerbaijan society welcomes visitors to its country and extends hospitality to newcomers and old friends alike – a national attribute that was brought to the attention of an international audience during the recent European Games, held in Baku on 12-28 June 2015. Although the country had just two-and-a-half years to prepare for this inaugural continental offshoot of the Olympics, 6,000 competitors and thousands more spectators, officials and media representatives enjoyed a 17-day festival of sport organised to the highest standards. The large range of modern venues and facilities provided for Baku 2015, including new stadiums, arenas and accommodation, ensured that athletes and audiences had the best possible experience and showed the progress that the country has made since its independence.

The staging of the first European Games and the broadcast of events to a worldwide audience also raised awareness of Azerbaijan's increasing popularity as a location for major events – ranging from sports and concerts to trade fairs and exhibitions. Building on the success of Baku 2015, the capital city is set to host further top-class sporting action. This includes the hosting of Formula One's European Grand Prix in July 2016, with the world's best drivers racing around a specially designed street circuit in the heart of the city.





## Land of Fire

Throughout its history, Azerbaijan has been known as the 'Land of Fire', due to the phenomenon of naturally occurring flames that can be found in some parts of the country, caused by the release of natural gas and oil from beneath the earth. References to this unusual characteristic date back many centuries.

Ancient manuscripts from the first century AD, written by Byzantine author Prisk of Pania, refer to "the eternal fires of Baku" witnessed erupting from the waters by Hun leaders travelling to Rome via the Caspian Sea. Arabic author al-Masudi, writing in the 10th century, described a fountain of burning oil and mud volcanoes, which can be seen today on the Absheron Peninsula. Around the time of the 14th century, Abdurrashid Bakuvi also gave an account of regular sightings "a flame coming from the sea" that could be "observed from a distance of two days' journey or more".

It was in the late 17th century that a monument to Azerbaijan's extraordinary natural flames, the Ateshgah ('Fire Temple'), was built on the outskirts of Baku, creating a focal point for the fire worship of local people. The historic site was the obvious source for lighting the flame for the inaugural European Games. President Ilham Aliyev lit the first torch of the Baku 2015 relay, before more than 1,000 torchbearers carried the flame on its 47-day, 5,500km journey to the Opening Ceremony at the award-winning Olympic Stadium.

Baku has also been selected to host another major multi-sport event, the 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games, and will be the venue for several matches of the UEFA Euro 2020 championship that will prove popular among a population with a passion for football.

## A magnet for visitors

The city has also become an increasingly popular destination for trade and business events and exhibitions, many of which take place at the modern Baku Expo Centre. Attendees from around the world find no shortage of well-appointed hotels, restaurants and bars from which to choose during their stay, and the city has a vibrant nightlife.

Events and festivals are another draw for visitors. Music festivals, such as the Baku International Jazz Festival and Gabala International Music Festival, and exhibitions at the country's many art galleries and museums highlight the wealth of cultural attractions for tourists.

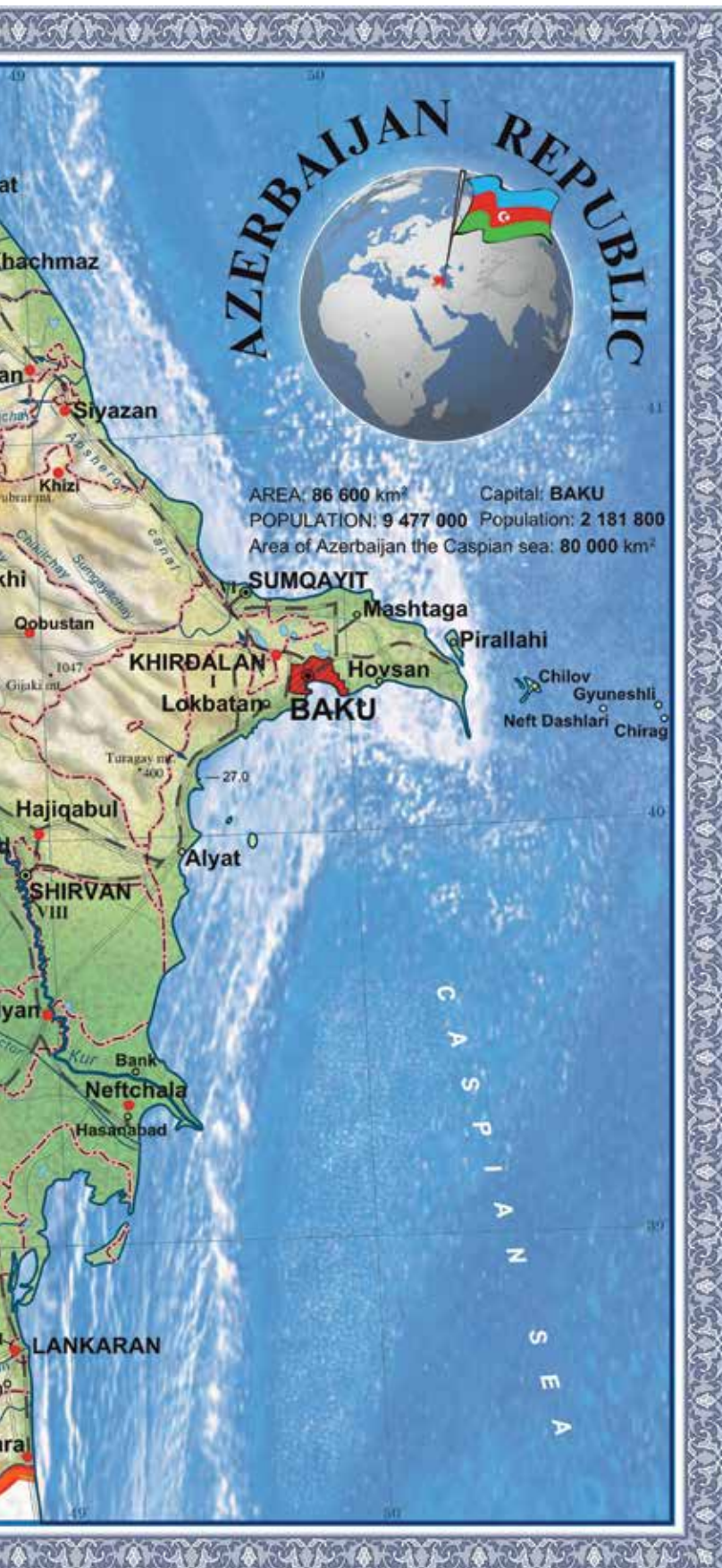
Azerbaijan's unique attributes, formulated by its long history and recent economic success, continue to provide a distinctive combination of old and new that are set to further enhance its global standing and attract even more visitors. ●



# Map of Azerbaijan







## Republic of Azerbaijan

### Flag



### Area

Total	86,600 sq km
Land	82,629 sq km
Water	3,971 sq km
(includes Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Nagorno-Karabakh region)	

### Lowest point

Caspian Sea -28m

### Highest point

Bazarduzu Dagi 4,485m

### Time difference

UTC+4

### Official language

Azerbaijani

### Currency

Manat (AZN)

### Gross Domestic Product

(purchasing power parity)

\$165.3 billion (2014 est)

### Per capita

\$17,600 (2014 est)

SOURCE: CIA WORLD FACTBOOK

STATE COMMITTEE OF AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC ON LAND AND CARTOGRAPHY BAKU 2015

Base map by Baku Cartographical Factory in 2010  
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# The origins of today's Azerbaijan

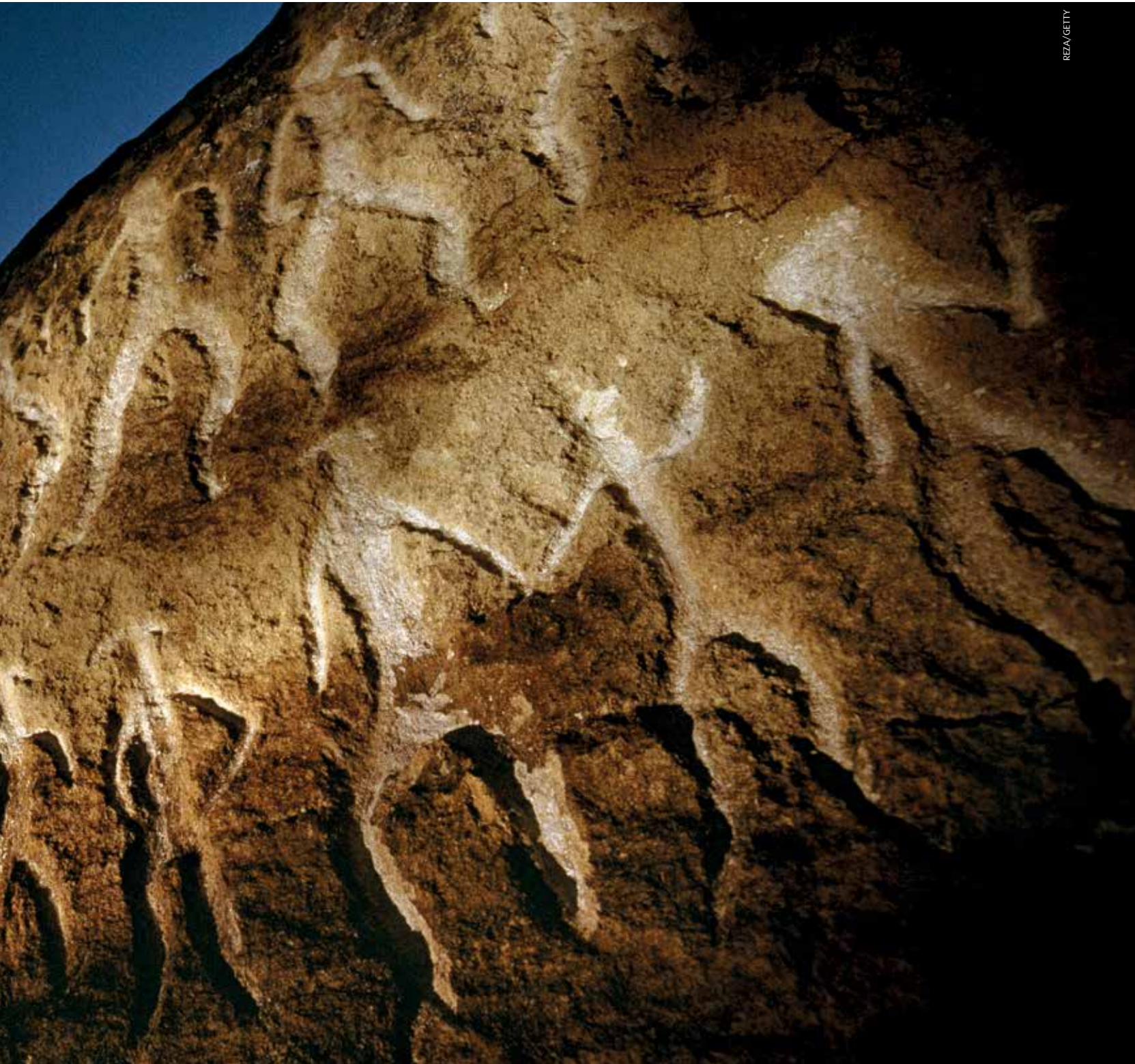
Azeri tradition and culture stretches over millennia to the dawn of civilisation. This rich heritage, its shifting borders and influential leaders, have shaped the unique features and qualities that characterise Azerbaijan today

△ Dating back to 6,000-5,000 BC, these giant carvings into rock at Gobustan National Historical-Artistic Preserve depict a scene reminiscent of traditional Azerbaijani dance

Situated at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, the Republic of Azerbaijan has a long and vibrant history, its culture shaped by a rich mix of Islamic and European influences and Iranian and Turkish heritage. The area is of unique historical and archaeological interest, with evidence of primitive human settlement and ancient civilisations.

Ancient Azerbaijan, commonly known as Caucasian Albania, was a vast area populated by various tribes that thrived for centuries, spreading outwards towards the bodies of water both within and around the territory. It neighboured the ancient kingdom of





Atropatene in the south, which played a prominent role in the formation of Azerbaijan's territory today.

The state's primitive community prospered until towards the end of the third millennium BC, at the dawn of the Bronze Age. It was at this time that ancient practices died out and more sophisticated methods of hunting and farming became common. Items found during excavations indicate developments in pottery and metalwork. As the primitive community teetered on the edge of collapse, the traditionally matriarchal communities gave way to societies in which males became more dominant.

Communities grew and travelled, and different religions dispersed throughout the region. Dating back to the earliest evidence of religious practice, Azerbaijan witnessed the spread of religions including ancient Heathenism and Zoroastrianism, as well as Judaism, Christianity (which came between the third and fifth centuries) and Islam, which arrived with Arabs in the seventh century and gradually supplanted earlier monotheistic beliefs.

Arts, music and literature prospered under the Shirvanshah dynasty, which governed from the seventh to the 14th century AD. Arabic script was introduced, and was used until the 1920s.





INTERIM ARCHIVES/GETTY

◀ Fire worshippers gather around one of Baku's naturally occurring flames, generated by pockets of gas beneath the earth, in the early 19th century

▶ The Palace of the Shirvanshahs in Baku's Old City, built by the dynasty that ruled the region from the mid ninth century to the early 16th century

Throughout its history, Azerbaijan has been ruled by leaders whose power and influence has steered the country's development. Many are today considered legends – powerful military leaders who led their armies to victory and helped to shape modern-day Azerbaijan. Amid shifting powers and threats of war and invasion, leaders such as Caucasian Albanian King Javanshir (who reigned from 638-80 AD) and Shamsaddin Eldaniz (1136-1175) are credited with winning and uniting territories.

Sheikh Ibrahim Darbandi, who reigned from 1382-1417, was the first leader of the Darbandi Shirvanshahs, and is remembered for his political cunning that protected the historical region of Shirvan from destruction during a time of aggressive political wars that raged in the Middle East.

### The legacy of the Shirvanshah dynasty

During their dynasty, the Shirvanshahs built numerous defensive castles, and though much of their work was destroyed during the 1235 Mongol invasion, some important sites still stand today. The Walled City of Baku – also known as the Old City, the historical core of modern-day Azerbaijan's capital – is home to the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and Maiden Tower, and was the first location in Azerbaijan to be classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Cultural and social development continued as the rule of Shah Ismail superseded the Shirvan line, with the arts remaining a prominent characteristic of Azeri society and the wider Safavid Empire, which was based in today's Iran. The leadership of Uzun Hasan – a sultan of the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty – for a brief period

**638-81**

Caucasian Albanian King Javanshir reigns

**1136-1175**

Shamsaddin Eldaniz reigns

**1235**

Much Shirvanshah architecture is destroyed during the Mongol invasion

3rd century

7th century

12th century

**3rd-5th centuries**

Christianity is introduced to the region

**7th century**

Arabic script is introduced to the region, and the Shirvanshah dynasty begins its reign

**1382-1417**

Sheikh Ibrahim Darbandi, the first leader of the Darbandi Shirvanshahs, protects Shirvan from destruction during a number of political wars





in the 15th century marked a time of improving relations in the region, although undercurrents of tension still existed. Uzun Hasan established diplomatic relations with countries and empires including the Ottoman Empire, the Golden Horde, the Moscow Kingdom, the Venetian Republic, the Neopolitan Kingdom, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Egypt, Rhodes and India.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, during the reign of Shah Ismail Khatai (1501-24), Azeri Turk was established as the state language to unite the different territories of the region. Founder of the Safavid dynasty, which survived until 1736, he established a powerful and vast Islamic Empire, conquering Iran, Iraq, eastern Anatolia and Georgia.

In addition to uniting many countries in the region, including modern-day Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, one significant legacy of the Safavid dynasty was the revival of Persia as an economic stronghold between East and West. Bureaucracy was established, and with it more efficient systems that marked social progress within the empire. The Safavids are also credited with architectural innovations and praised for their patronage of fine arts, which contributed immeasurably to the rich creative culture that can be seen in Azerbaijan today.

After the decline of the Safavids in the 19th century, the region was held first by the Iranian dynasties of Afshar and Zand, and then briefly by the Qajars before they ceded power to Russia.

**1804-13**

The first full-scale Russo-Persian war

**1826-28**

The final Russo-Persian War takes place, ended by the Treaty of Turkmenchay

**April-May 1920**

The Red Army invades, and Azerbaijan is declared a Soviet Socialist Republic

19th century

20th century

**October 1813**

The Treaty of Gulistan, a peace treaty between Imperial Russia and Persia, concludes. Most of modern-day Azerbaijan is ceded to the Russian Empire

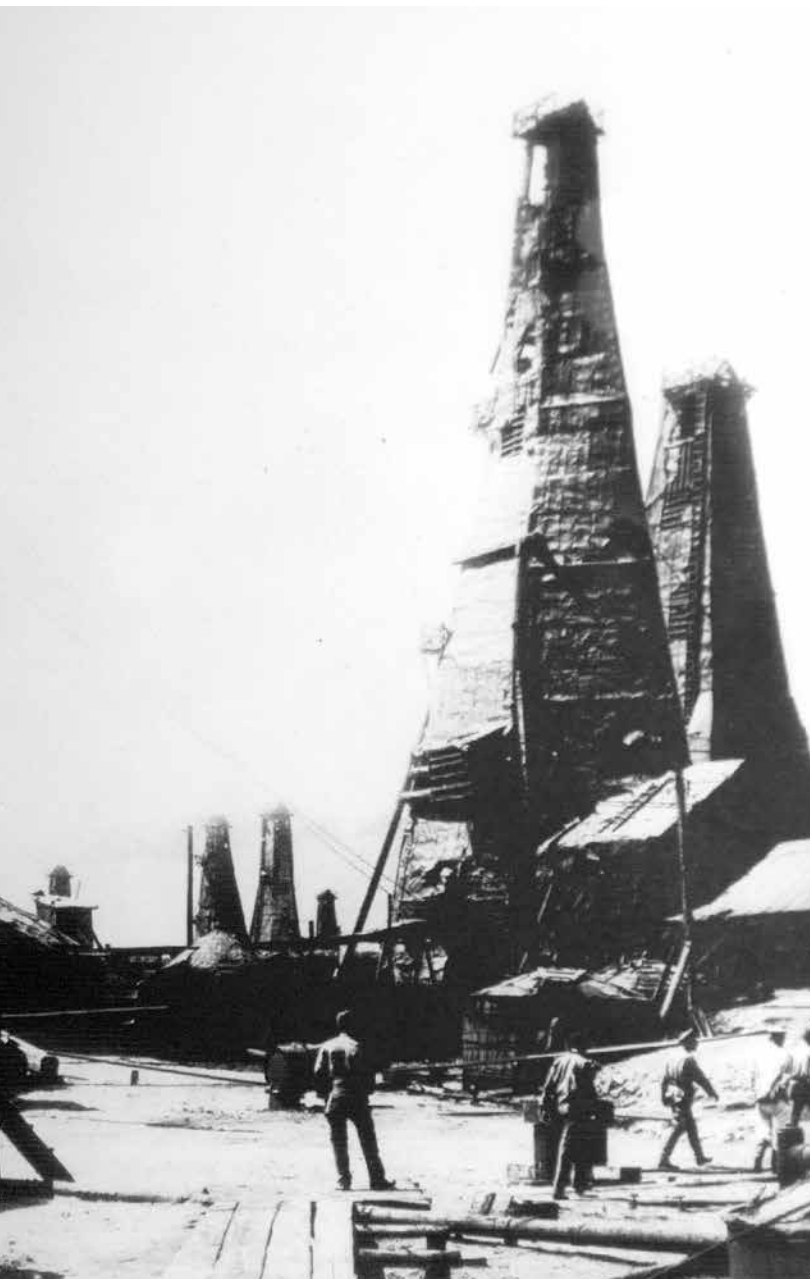
**1848-49**

The world's first oil well is drilled, south of Baku

**May 1918**

Azerbaijan declares independence as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic





HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY

◁ Oil extraction during the early 20th century. At this time, the area around Baku was producing almost half the world's oil

▷ President Heydar Aliyev addresses the United Nations in New York

▷▷ In November 2002, President Heydar Aliyev visited Prague at the invitation of NATO to take part in the leaders' summit

The partition of Azerbaijan took place when Russia and Persia took respective control north and south of the Aras river. Events that followed saw Russia assert a stronger geopolitical stance, particularly towards its southerly neighbours of Iran and Turkey. Successful Russian campaigns towards the end of the first Russo-Persian War led to the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan, which confirmed the ceding and inclusion of most of modern-day Azerbaijan, northern Armenia, Daghestan and eastern Georgia from Iran into the Russian Empire. The 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay marked the end of the final Russo-Persian War and officially established a new border between the empires. Russia acquired Baku, as well as Ganja, Nakhichevan, Shirvan and Yerevan.

### The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic

Azerbaijan was the first democratic parliamentary republic in the Middle East – a state that existed between May 1918 and April 1920 following the collapse of the Russian Empire. It bordered Russia to the north, the Democratic Republic of Georgia to the north-west, the First Republic of Armenia to the west, and Persia to the south. With Baku still under Bolshevik control, Ganja was named the temporary capital. The republic's parliament was elected on the basis of free, universal, proportional representation, and among its accomplishments was the greater empowerment of women, as Azerbaijan became the first Muslim nation to grant women the same political rights as men.

Although the parliamentary republic existed only for a short time, it was able to create an army, establish independent financial and economic systems, and foster diplomatic relations with

1980s

**1988**

The Nagorno-Karabakh region seeks to become part of Armenia

1990s

**1990**

Ethnic tension between Azeris and Armenians escalates

**1991**

Azerbaijani parliament votes to restore independence, and **Ayaz Mutallibov**, the last President of Soviet Azerbaijan, becomes President of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan. Future President Heydar Aliyev becomes leader of the Nakhichevan enclave

**1992**

Hostilities over Karabakh develop into full-scale war

**March 1992**

Azerbaijan joins the United Nations Organization



numerous states. This laid important groundwork for the country's re-establishment of independence, which was to come in 1991.

However, before that time, Azerbaijan endured many years under Russian rule. Following years of tension and fighting in the region, Russian leader Vladimir Lenin justified his country's invasion of Azerbaijan by saying that Soviet Russia could not survive without Baku oil. On 1 April 1920, the Fifth Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic resigned, and the Russian Red Army prepared for its attack. To avoid bloodshed, Azerbaijan complied with the demands being made, and on 28 April 1920,

the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic officially ceased to exist. It gave way to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).

### Part of the Soviet Union

Under Russian rule, the Azerbaijan SSR, or Soviet Azerbaijan, was now part of the Soviet Union – a state within Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991. It was on 13 October 1921 that Azerbaijan, along with the Soviet republics of Russia, Armenia and Georgia, signed an agreement with Turkey: the Treaty of Kars. This was a successor to the March 1921 Treaty of Moscow, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which marked Russia's exit from the First World War, and it established new borders between Turkey and the states of the South Caucasus. The collapse of the Russian Empire during this time led to Azerbaijan becoming, for a short time, part of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, along with Armenia and Georgia.

The Soviet influence can still be felt in Azerbaijan, which has one of the largest Russian communities outside of the country, with around 150,000 people speaking Russian as their first language.

During Russia's rule, the characteristics that for centuries had defined Azerbaijan began to disappear. The country became more closely tied to Moscow as Russia sought to build a powerful Soviet state, and extreme measures including the destruction of nationalist literature and the deportation of pan-Turkic intellectuals were undertaken. Though the situation eased following the death of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in 1953, Azerbaijan struggled to reclaim its national identity.



#### September 1994

Azerbaijan signs the 'contract of the century'

#### November 1995

Independent Azerbaijan adopts, approves and implements its first Republic Constitution. Since 1995, Constitution Day is celebrated as a national holiday on 12 November

#### 1994

Azerbaijan signs a ceasefire accord with Armenia

#### June 1993

Heydar Aliyev becomes President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

### 2000s

#### December 2000

The Old City of Baku becomes the first location in Azerbaijan classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site





## The leadership of Heydar Aliyev

It was not until Heydar Aliyev became the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan in 1969 that gradual change began. The country's position as a precursor to independence grew stronger, and steps were taken to reintroduce and re-establish Azeri culture. Azeri citizens living abroad were invited to visit the country, and intellectuals and creatives were able to work more freely – a liberty that had been taken away under Soviet rule. Much weight was put on preserving the country's legacy of culture, history and literature, and work in these areas was recognised and rewarded.

Yet Heydar Aliyev's leadership could only take Azerbaijan so far, as he was under close Soviet scrutiny and based outside the country. Relations between Armenians and Turks continued to sour, and a reign of chaos descended on the country. On 20 January 1990,

the Soviet leadership carried out a massacre against the civilians of Baku and other cities, the aim of which was to stop Azerbaijan making further progress towards independence. It was Aliyev's condemnation of these events that marked a turning point in Azerbaijan's detachment from Moscow. There was nothing left to do but for the Azeri people to declare independence.

## Towards independence

Azerbaijan's regaining of independence on 18 October 1991 is one of the most important events in the country's history. It was in 1993 that Heydar Aliyev was invited to mediate the ongoing crises in Azerbaijan by President Abulfaz Elchibey – crises resulting from ethnic conflict beginning in the 1980s that culminated in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Having been elected Chairman of

**2001**

Azerbaijan becomes a full member of the Council of Europe

**September 2002**

Construction begins on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline

**October 2003**

Ilham Aliyev wins a landslide victory in the presidential poll

2000s

**2001**

The country officially shifts to the Latin alphabet – its fourth alphabet change in a century

**December 2003**

Former President Heydar Aliyev dies

**November 2005**

The ruling New Azerbaijan Party wins the parliamentary elections



the National Assembly of Azerbaijan in June, Aliyev was elected President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in October. In May 1994, Aliyev entered into a ceasefire agreement to halt the fighting.

Though the breakdown of trade relations with other countries in the Soviet Union, high inflation and the threat of further conflict affected the government's ability to foster growth and development, Azerbaijan already boasted a diversified economy to build upon. It had an established industrial sector, a sizeable agricultural sector and its economy was balanced. At this time, trade in oil-production equipment was more important than oil itself – in the early 1990s, just two per cent of the Russian Federation's oil came from Azerbaijan.

◀◀ In July 2006, Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Recep Erdogan and British Petroleum chief executive officer John Browne symbolically assembled the last pieces of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline during an opening ceremony

◀ President Ilham Aliyev delivers a speech to the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly in Strasbourg in June 2014

It wasn't until 1994, when President Heydar Aliyev signed the 'contract of the century' – a production-sharing agreement with foreign oil and gas companies – that the influx of foreign investment began. There followed an agreement between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to build an oil pipeline between the countries. Since independence, Azerbaijan has rapidly become an upper-middle-income country.

It was Heydar Aliyev who pioneered Azerbaijan's industrial development. The government's 'open door' policy dramatically increased the number of foreign and joint enterprises operating in the country, and job creation grew in tandem. Rich in natural resources and a champion of reform, Azerbaijan experienced dynamic growth that continues today.

In 2003, Heydar Aliyev stepped down as president due to failing health and his son, Ilham Aliyev, succeeded his father after winning the subsequent election. The new president had been instrumental in implementing the country's oil strategy and, as President of the National Olympic Committee of Azerbaijan, he was credited with making significant contributions to the development of sport in the country. Efforts in this area came to fruition when Baku was named as host of the 2015 European Games.

Azerbaijan's global influence has grown under the presidency of Ilham Aliyev, yet its national traditions remain strong and are integral to the country's efforts to develop its partnerships worldwide. Azerbaijan pursues plans to diversify its economy and play host to further international sporting and cultural events, its role on the world stage seems set to expand. ●

**October 2008**

Ilham Aliyev is re-elected as President

**October 2013**

President Aliyev wins a third five-year term in office

**September 2014**

The construction of Southern Gas Corridor is announced by British Petroleum.

2010s

**July 2006**

The BTC oil pipeline officially opens

**May 2012**

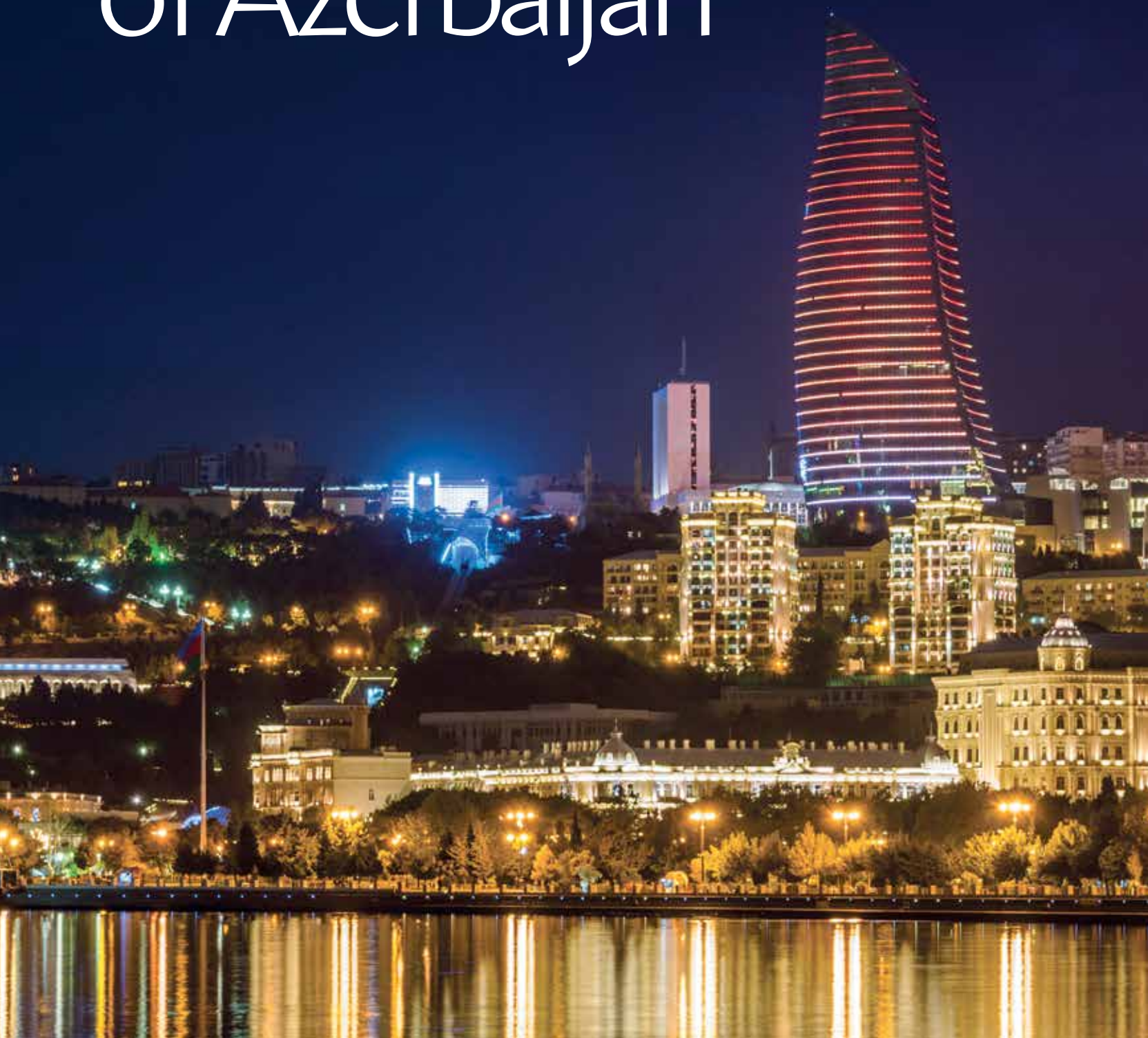
Azerbaijan hosts the Eurovision Song Contest

**June 2015**

Baku hosts the inaugural European Games



# The changing face of Azerbaijan





WILFRED Y WONG/GETTY

Azerbaijan's economic success over the past two decades has transformed the country, the evidence of which is most striking in innovative construction projects and infrastructure improvements, particularly in the capital city of Baku

Since regaining its independence in 1991 following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has enjoyed a sustained period of growth and development, having recovered successfully from the political chaos, economic paralysis and social collapse that affected many post-Soviet countries.

The foundation of Azerbaijan's recovery and subsequent economic growth, and the social benefits that were enabled, was the country's vast hydrocarbon reserves. The signing of the "Contract of the Century" in 1994, the first oil production-sharing agreement between Azerbaijan and foreign companies, by then President Heydar Aliyev, transformed the economy and living standards of the country and its population.

As Azerbaijan's current President, and then first vice-president of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR), Ilham Aliyev, explained: "Our purpose is not only to extract oil, to transport it and get the profit. Our purpose is to direct the benefits, either political, economic or others, received from oil, to the future of the Azerbaijani people, to its well-being."

Simultaneously, measures to create a market economy system were instrumental in creating opportunities for rapid development, with annual growth rates averaging almost 16 per cent during the first decade of the millennium. Revenues from oil and gas have facilitated rapid new and improved infrastructure and the construction of new education, health and sports facilities.

With Azerbaijan having successfully completed its period of transition from the difficulties it inherited to become a modern and dynamic economy, in December 2012 President Ilham Aliyev instigated Azerbaijan 2020 – a development concept for a new era, both domestically and globally. Azerbaijan 2020 set out a strategy to ensure that the country continues its economic and social progress – including measures to diversify the economy to reduce its reliance on oil revenues – and maintains and enhances its standing in the South Caucasus region and growing presence on the world stage.

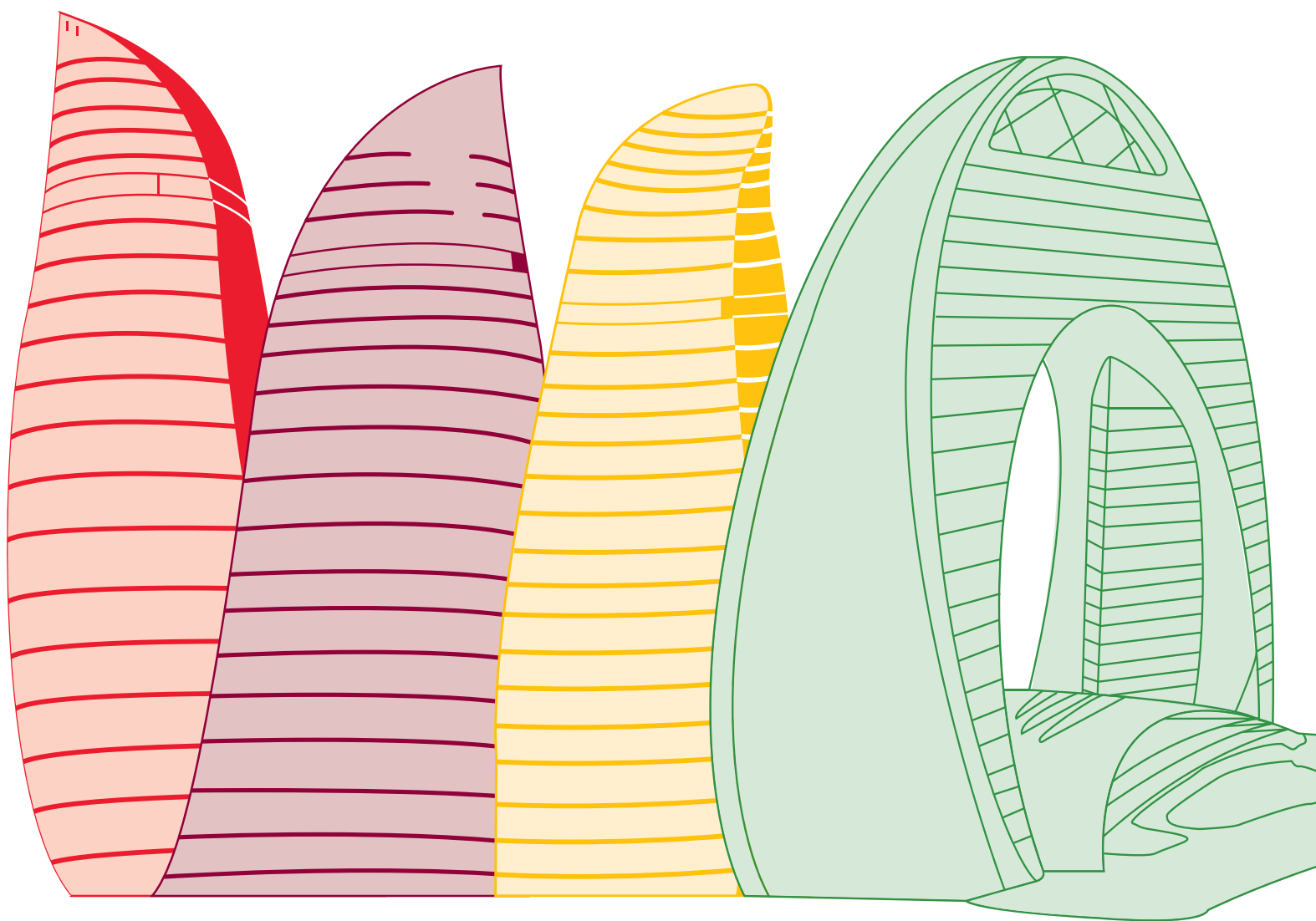
### Reaching new heights

Azerbaijan's economic success is most obviously reflected in the dramatic changes in the country's urban landscape over recent years, particularly in its capital, Baku. An array of innovative and ultra-modern structures, both complementing and contrasting the city's centuries-old architecture and historic buildings, is extending the height and breadth of the Baku skyline.

The most dominant and iconic of these new structures are the Flame Towers – a trio of skyscrapers that have become synonymous with Baku and which reflect the city's history of fire worship and

◀ Baku's changing skyline provides a perfect illustration of Azerbaijan's prolonged period of economic growth





**Flame Tower 1**  
Height 181.7m  
Storeys 39

**Flame Tower 2**  
Height 164.6m  
Storeys 36

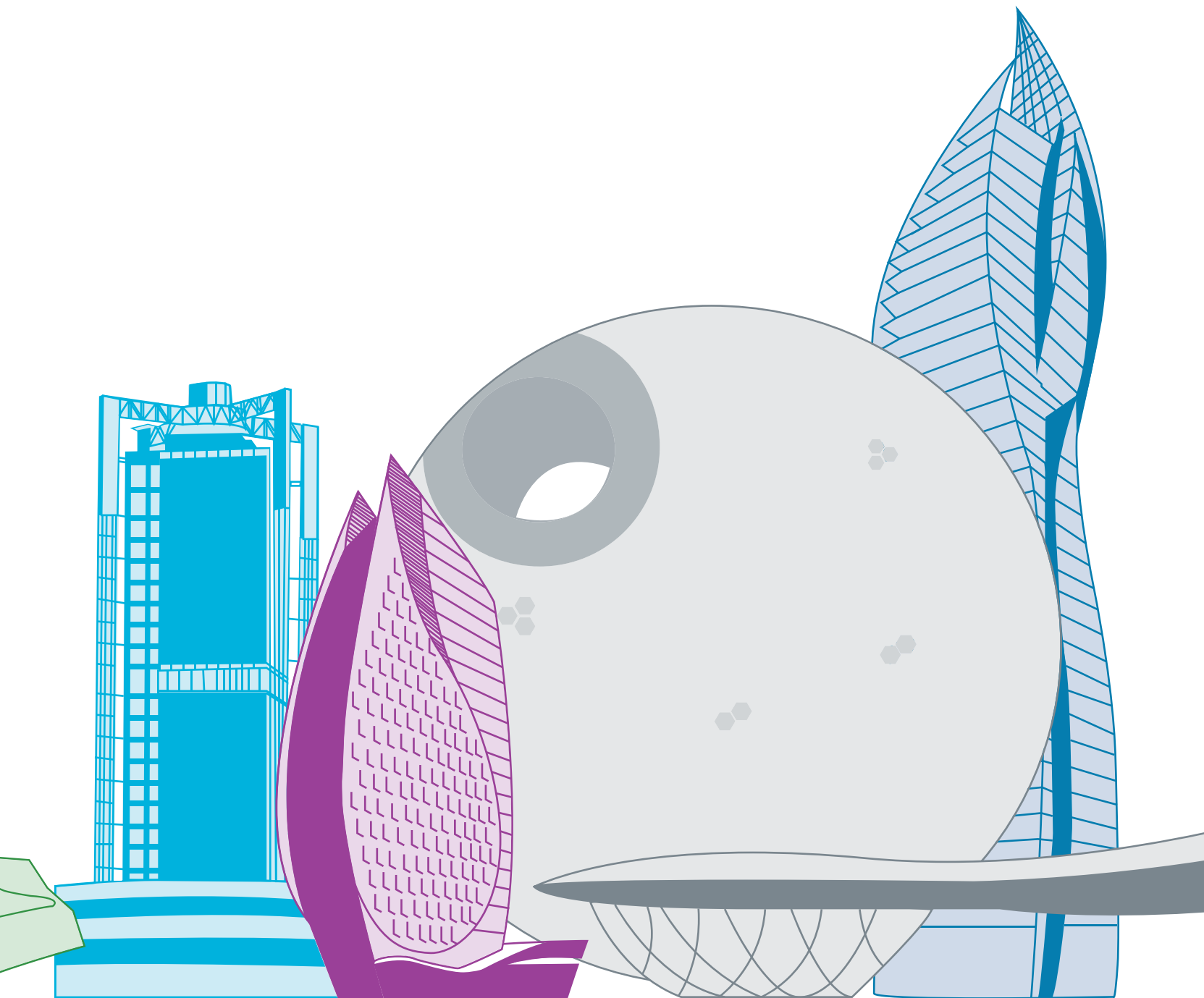
**Flame Tower 3**  
Height 160.8m  
Storeys 28

**Crescent Hotel**  
Height 166m  
Storeys 33

the three flames that appear on its coat of arms. Construction of the complex, which lasted five years, was completed in 2012 and featured prominently during television coverage of the Eurovision Song Contest, hosted in Baku that year.

The Towers incorporate luxury apartments, a 318-room hotel and commercial office space, and are joined at their base by an atrium housing leisure and retail facilities. At night, the buildings come alive in a display of light and colour, when the LED lighting that illuminates each tower creates three huge video screens that display animated designs, typically reproducing the effect of dancing flames, that are visible across the entire city.

Soon to eclipse the southernmost Flame Tower as Baku's tallest building is the SOCAR Tower, which will also become the highest skyscraper in the Caucasus. At the time of writing, construction work was being completed on this 40-storey building, which will serve as the headquarters of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and accommodate more than 2,000 employees. As well as providing office space, the building will also include a conference hall and sports facilities, plus retail and food outlets. Like the facade of the Flame Towers, the exterior of the SOCAR Tower will also add to the city's spectacular light show after dark.



**SOFAZ Tower**  
Height 140m  
Storeys 24

**Azersu Tower**  
(under construction)  
Height 124m  
Storeys 22

**Full Moon Hotel**  
(under construction)  
Height 158m  
Storeys 35

**SOCAR Tower**  
Height 225m  
Storeys 40

Nearing completion at the time of writing, the SOFAZ Tower, headquarters of the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan, will also join the ranks of Baku's tallest constructions. At 140m and 24 storeys high, it will become the city's fifth-tallest building.

### Under construction

Among the plethora of construction projects currently under way in Baku, three innovative examples stand out. The 22-storey Azersu Tower, the new headquarters of the Azerbaijan Water Resources Corporation, is strikingly and appropriately styled in the shape of a water drop that will light up at night. Elsewhere, on opposite

shores of Baku Bay, two lunar-themed luxury hotel developments – the disc-shaped Full Moon Hotel and the arched Crescent Hotel – will provide visitors with superb views across the Caspian Sea.

Perhaps nowhere else in Baku is more symbolic of its futuristic transition than White City – a current development in the east of the city that aims to reclaim an area previously occupied by oil refineries and storage facilities, known locally as Black City. One of the largest projects of its kind in the world, Baku White City covers 221 hectares, an area larger than Monaco, and when completed will accommodate approximately 50,000 people. The development is divided into 10 districts, each of which will have its own landmark





△ The new airport terminal at Heydar Aliyev International Airport is designed to cope with three million passengers annually

building. Further development has also taken place on the seafront at Port Baku, which includes luxurious apartments and penthouses, office space, shops and restaurants.

Most recently, Baku experienced further transformation after Azerbaijan was awarded the right to host the inaugural European Games. A state-of-the-art award-winning Olympic Stadium was the centrepiece of a wealth of new and modernised arenas developed in readiness for the arrival of thousands of visitors from across the continent. The chapter of this publication focusing Baku 2015 includes a section on the Games venues, which formed part of a rich legacy of world-class sporting facilities, infrastructure, knowledge and expertise.

### Improving infrastructure

The innovations that make Baku's modern architecture so distinctive continue into its transport infrastructure, most notably with the expansion of Heydar Aliyev International Airport – the largest of Azerbaijan's six international airports. A new, second terminal was opened in 2013, designed to meet anticipated demand of three million passengers per year. The terminal's tapered facade and semi-transparent roof places among the world's most recognisable airport buildings.

Adding to and upgrading the country's transport infrastructure is an important part of the Azerbaijan 2020 concept. In order to realise Azerbaijan's ambition to become a regional trade hub, the government plans to make effective use of the country's strategic geographical position. The development of transit systems and services that will link its regions, plus improved integration with international transport networks, are aimed at enhancing Azerbaijan's appeal as a centre for production and investment, further benefiting the country's economy.



Azerbaijan's strategic approach to its infrastructure development unites road, rail, maritime, air and metro (underground) transport. This includes the construction of the International Sea Trade Port in Alat, which will take over operations from the existing port in Baku.

In rail, the restoration and modernisation of the Baku-Boyuk-Kasik and Baku-Yalama railways has been taking place and a new Baku-Tbilisi-Kars route established, linking Azerbaijan to Georgia and Turkey. This is in addition to reconstruction work across the network and the updating of rolling stock and equipment.

The laying of new roads, the widening of existing highways and the construction of car parks in towns and cities is being accompanied by improved traffic management systems. The public transport system in the capital and other cities, districts and villages – including Baku's metro network – is also being significantly expanded and improved. ●



# Working for continued prosperity

Over the past two decades, oil revenues have been the bedrock of Azerbaijan's economic growth. **Rovnag Abdullayev**, President of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), explains his organisation's activities at home and worldwide, its environmental efforts and its contribution to the welfare of Azerbaijan's citizens through support for sporting and cultural projects

## Q As Azerbaijan's most prominent state company, what is SOCAR's mission and aim?

A Today energy strategy continues to be successfully implemented and makes significant contribution to further strengthening of the economic power of the country, further improvement of the material well-being, as well as to the macroeconomic growth of the whole region. The state of Azerbaijan and head of our country's stand is that oil industry will continue to serve growth of the economy in long term. In line with this position, SOCAR, one of the most powerful companies in the region, took the line of integration into global market trends and is constantly developing in this direction. The key items occupying our agenda today are:

- Sustaining and increasing the sustainable production in long term at onshore and offshore fields, especially at ACG super field

- The start of production at Shahdeniz-2 project and fast and efficient execution of tasks related to establishment of Southern Gas Corridor pipeline infrastructure
- Streamlining and increasing operation efficiency at existing fields and the acceleration of E&P activities at discovered and prospective structures
- Upgrade of existing refinery and petrochemical capacities to adjust changing market demand and targeting to meet internal demand
- Continue ongoing international investment projects and active utilization of international E&P opportunities

The creation of productive economic synergies through expansion in international markets, implementation of investment plans and acquisition of new assets is an essential part of the strategic development of SOCAR.



▷ (Left to right) Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Georgia's President Giorgi Margvelashvili raise their hands in unity during the groundbreaking ceremony of the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project in March 2015

**Q Oil and gas are at the forefront of Azerbaijan's trade and cooperation with partners worldwide. How has SOCAR developed as a global player in the energy sector since its creation in 1992?**

**A** SOCAR is transforming into a vertically-integrated international company. Today SOCAR takes more leadership role on global scale. Our company, which develops and grows year-over-year and expands its potential, signed out in recent years several large investment projects both in Azerbaijan, Turkey, Romania, Georgia, Ukraine and Switzerland.

At present, oil and oil products of Azerbaijan are exported via various routes to more than 30 countries of the world, including USA, China, England, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Brazil and Chile. SOCAR established "SOCAR Trading" company with head office located in Switzerland in order to organize direct sales of oil products to end buyers as well as to optimize the revenues. We are going to expand geography of our participation in international markets in the future as well.

In the light of growing interest towards natural gas, Azerbaijan's strategic importance as a reliable partner grows respectively. Today our country plays a significant role in gas supply of Georgia, Turkey, Russia, Iran and Greece.

Azerbaijan has ensured its energy security for long term period and plays an important role in ensuring regional and global energy security.

**Q Energy has been the major contributor to Azerbaijan's economic growth over the past couple of decades. What new projects and developments are in place to continue this success and to aid the country's economic diversification?**

**A** Currently, Azerbaijan experiences a profound social economic growth period in its history. We are developing very rapidly. The significant development can be observed especially at non-oil industries as agriculture, science and culture, education, healthcare and sport. We have completely changed the characteristics of our country through diversification of the economy and transformation of oil capital into human capital. The foundation of all these achievements is the energy strategy laid out by National Leader of Azerbaijan Haydar Aliyev 20 years ago. The execution of this strategy in course of last two decades has resulted in exploration and production of complex and technologically advanced projects such as Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field, Shahdeniz gas-condensate field in mutual cooperation with leading global oil and gas companies, ensuring full energy independence of our country as well as achieving significant progress in contributing to energy supply of neighboring countries.

This energy strategy continues to be successfully implemented under the leadership of His Excellency President Ilham Aliyev,



*Since 1993, Azerbaijan's Parliament, the Milli Majlis, has ratified more than 20 international environmental conventions"*

yielding political and economic dividends to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan takes important position as a reliable partner in global scale projects in terms of providing energy security of European Union countries. Recently, we have had groundbreaking of the Southern Gas Corridor project aimed to deliver Azerbaijan's natural gas volumes to European markets. This mega project as well as its integral links TANAP and TAP pipelines are in focus of global community similar to its predecessors Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum natural gas pipelines.

Our state has set a task for SOCAR to start modernisation projects in the oil & gas refining and petrochemical industries in light of above mentioned factors. We have prepared an action plan in very short period of time, forged relations with leading global industry players and carried out required research projects.

The creation of Sumgayit Chemical Technological Park, which is our another project, will contribute to the empowering the cooperation between petrochemical industry with private industry, especially non-oil industry companies.

We are also implementing important projects in Turkey. The most important investment projects for upcoming years include the complex development of Petkim petrochemical holding, the construction of STAR refinery, the expansion of port, the construction of new electricity generation capacity. The processing capacity of STAR refinery is planned to be around 10 million ton/year. The refinery will supply Petkim with raw material, as well as will export to the Mediterranean and South European markets.

Petkim will be transformed into the leading complex hub of not only Turkey, but of regional importance of petrochemical, logistics, shipping and port activities.

**Q With environmental issues high on the agenda at a global level, how is SOCAR contributing to international efforts in tackling climate change?**

**A** "It should be a major responsibility for each of us to take care of the rich resources that nature has endowed us with, and save these matchless treasures for the future of mankind". These words by Heydar Aliyev form the basis of SOCAR's policy towards the environment.

Since independence, Azerbaijan as a whole, and SOCAR in particular, has been working hard to correct the environmental mistakes of the past and to avoid them in the future.



ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY

Since 1993 Azerbaijan's Parliament, the Milli Majlis, has ratified over 20 international environmental conventions. Nearly as many new national laws have been enacted on environmental protection and the use of natural resources.

Since 2006 SOCAR has been using both physical and biological methods of clean-up. The cleaning of ponds, lakes and soil through most of the Absheron peninsula will continue for years to come. At the same time SOCAR seeks to provide further investment in order to replace out-of-date infrastructure and technical equipment, which carry a high risk of leakage and spillage both offshore and onshore. With a view of passing on a better inheritance to future generations, the company also strives to minimise new pollution. In doing so, SOCAR and its associates follow a published "Environmental Policy". The main goals of this document include the step-by-step identification and elimination of inherited problems, the provision of protection and safety in all spheres of activity, the application of rules and standards in all spheres of work, and the support of projects with high environmental and socio-economic outcomes.

SOCAR is involved with numerous regional and national environmental programmes, notably the Caspian Environment Programme (CEP). Jointly established in 1998 by the Caspian Basin countries, and supported by the European Commission's TACIS programme (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States), the UN Development Programme, the UN Environmental Programme and the Global Environmental Facility, the CEP coordinates and develops efforts to improve the Caspian environment and its coastal ecosystems. Within the programme frame, the impacts of the oil and gas industries on the Caspian environment have been studied, and numerous improvements and actions plans have been successfully implemented.

SOCAR is also in discussions with a view to joining IPIECA, the global oil and gas industry association for environmental

and social issues. Formed in 1974, IPIECA's membership now covers more than half of the world's petroleum production, and its working groups contain a wealth of experience and knowledge on several vital areas – biodiversity, climate change, health, oil spill preparedness, operations and fuels, reporting and social responsibilities.

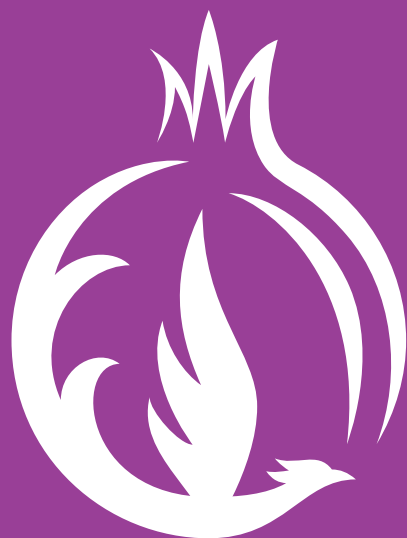
SOCAR is steadily overcoming its environmental inheritance, and through a proper approach to its daily work it is also ensuring that today's operations will not contaminate the future.

**Q SOCAR plays a key role in supporting cultural and sporting projects in Azerbaijan. In what ways do these benefit the people of Azerbaijan?**

**A** SOCAR pays a lot of attention to sports as a means to a healthy lifestyle. We want sports to be a part of the lifestyle of our citizens. With this in mind, SOCAR agreed with enthusiasm to be one of the main sponsors of the Baku 2015 European Games. Besides, we actively take part in the work of Azerbaijan Football Federations Association. As is known, Azerbaijan will be hosting some of the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship Games. We believe this is natural that we would like others to know more about our activity, become widely known to the public. Therefore, we appreciate the fact that those who will be watching the Games will discover our company.

It is always interesting to see how a community responds to and copes with the sudden wealth that oil can bring. In some nations, the windfall riches are hoarded by one section of society at the expense of all the rest. Other nations have made more benevolent use of their new assets, directing them towards improving the lives of their citizens and vital long-term elements of the national infrastructure. Azerbaijan comes into the second category, making good use of its oil wealth. ●





# Baku 2015

1<sup>ST</sup> EUROPEAN GAMES



# A historic moment for European sport

**H**istory was made in Azerbaijan's capital in June 2015 as Baku played host to the inaugural European Games, which were awarded to the city by the European Olympic Committees (EOC). Over 17 days of intense competition, Baku welcomed 6,000 athletes from 50 countries for a colourful festival of elite sport that saw some of the world's leading athletes rub shoulders with the stars of tomorrow.

The city and thousands of visitors from across Azerbaijan and beyond witnessed the excitement generated by high-level action in 20 sports, which took place in 18 new and refurbished venues – from the sands of the Beach Arena and the pools of Baku Aquatics Centre, to the wrestling mats of Heydar Aliyev Arena and the boxing ring of the Crystal Hall. Audiences were also thrilled by the spectacular Opening and Closing Ceremonies at the state-of-the-art award-winning Olympic Stadium, opened earlier in the year, which also hosted two days of international athletics.

The following pages look back over a memorable period in the history of Azerbaijan and its people, which established a new fixture in the Olympic calendar and brought Baku's many qualities as a venue for major sporting events to the attention of the world.





# A first for Europe

Baku made sporting history in staging the inaugural European Games – a major multi-sport event that had been almost five decades in the making



DAVID RAMOS/GETTY

Europe was the birthplace of the modern Olympic movement, so it is perhaps a little surprising that the continent would become the last of those represented by the Olympic rings to stage its own Games. In June 2015, the inaugural European Games in Baku saw many of Europe's finest athletes come together for what can undoubtedly be described as a historic festival of sport and unity.

The road to the first European Games was a long one. An initiative to bring together the continent's National Olympic Committees began in 1967, developing into today's organisation – the European Olympic Committees (EOC) – in 1995, as membership grew following the political changes in the east of the continent. Throughout the years

there had been many discussions about establishing a European Games, but previous attempts, including those by former International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge while President of the EOC, proved unsuccessful.

The opportunity to finally stage the inaugural Games was born out of the existing friendship between Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, also President of the country's Olympic Committee, and EOC President Patrick Hickey. It was during Hickey's visit to Azerbaijan as a guest at the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest, which was staged at Baku's specially constructed Crystal Hall, that he suggested the project to President Aliyev, who stepped forward to help make the Games a reality.

## Baku 2015 Ambassadors

Baku 2015 appointed numerous ambassadors to promote the European Games, including athletes from both home and abroad. Among the home country's sports stars selected were Rovshan Bayramov, European and world champion and two-time Olympic silver medallist in Greco-Roman wrestling, and Marina Durunda (pictured), twice Azerbaijani rhythmic gymnastics champion. International ambassadors included Great Britain's taekwondo gold medallist Jade Jones and Ireland's Olympic boxing champion Katie Taylor, both of whom repeated their winning performances at London 2012 to claim European Games gold.

Well-known personalities from the world of Azerbaijani entertainment – including Eldar Gasimov and Nigar Jamal, the country's Eurovision Song Contest winners in 2011 – also spread the word about Baku 2015.



DAN MULLAN/GETTY

## Medals

The design of the gold, silver and bronze medals awarded to athletes was unveiled as the city marked 100 days to the start of the European Games. The medals were presented at 253 ceremonies during Baku 2015.

The medal design was created by Russian jeweller Adamas, which also produced the Sochi 2014 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games medals, in collaboration with Azerbaijani artist Nargiz Huseynova. Each medal featured the Baku 2015 pomegranate logo at its centre, surrounded by imagery symbolising the culture and natural beauty of the host country, while the reverse face displayed the European Olympic Committees emblem.

The medals, which each weighed 380g and were adorned by a decorative purple ribbon, were manufactured locally by Azersouvenir.



RESUL REHIMOV/GETTY



## Baku 2015 Games Academy

Among the many initiatives of the first European Games was the Baku 2015 Games Academy, an innovative and impactful learning programme developed to assist in building the skills and knowledge required to deliver the Games and leave a lasting capability legacy in major event management.

Led by BEGOC and the Azerbaijan Youth Foundation and endorsed by the European Olympic Committees, the Academy enabled team members to access traditional classroom training, video tutorials and self-study materials. Around 200 young people also participated in the Graduate Excellence Programme, specifically designed to help realise the potential of university graduates with no previous events experience.



## Accepting the challenge

After a period of negotiation, Baku was confirmed as the host city of the inaugural European Games at the 41st General Assembly of the European Olympic Committees in December 2012. Cities that are awarded major events, such as the Olympic Games, typically have seven years in which to prepare; Baku had just two-and-a-half years to assemble all the facilities required for 6,000 athletes, as well as many more visiting spectators and media.

To address such a significant challenge ahead, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva was an obvious choice to lead the 30-strong Baku European Games Organising Committee (BEGOC), given her experience as a member of the National Olympic Committee, head of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, President of the Azerbaijan Gymnastics Federation, and chairperson of the organising committee for the Eurovision Song Contest.

With such a short timespan in which to make Baku ready to stage the Games, the hosts called upon the expertise of many of those involved in the highly successful London 2012 Olympics, among them Baku 2015's Chief Operating Officer Simon Clegg. Their deputies, however, were from Azerbaijan, ensuring that the country acquired skills that would be crucial in hosting future major events.

Although the staging of the European Games required the construction of some new stadiums and arenas, the most prominent of which was the award-winning Olympic Stadium, several of the projects were already in development as part of Azerbaijan's commitment to improve sporting facilities for its own athletes and for those from abroad.

A key part of the legacy of Baku 2015's new and refurbished arenas will be the capital's readiness to host sporting events, concerts and exhibitions in the future. To ensure that as many people as possible had a chance to experience the venues during the Games, tickets for under 16s were free of charge at most competition events, while adult admission was affordably priced.

## An innovative programme

Medals were contested in a total of 20 sports. While some familiar Olympic sports were not present, Baku hosted an innovative programme that included several non-Olympic events and new formats. In 11 sports, success also secured or contributed towards qualification for events at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Football and basketball, both long-standing fixtures of the summer Olympics, were contested at the European Games in lesser-known,



### Meet the mascots

With 200 days to go before the opening ceremony of the first European Games, the mascots for Baku 2015 were unveiled. Inspired by Azerbaijani nature and heritage, Jeyran the gazelle and Nar the pomegranate – designed in collaboration between the Baku 2015 brand team and London-based agency SomeOne – reflected both the country's proud history and its ambitions for the future.

As the mascots were launched, Azad Rahimov, Azerbaijan's Minister of Youth and Sport and Chief Executive Officer of Baku 2015, said: "We are extremely happy to introduce Jeyran and Nar to the world, and we hope that they will come to represent the excitement of the inaugural European Games. As symbols of Baku 2015, they will inspire, excite and entertain a new generation of sports fans in Azerbaijan."

Jeyran, the Azerbaijani word for gazelle, acted as a cultural ambassador for the Games and highlighted the country's rich heritage, while Nar the pomegranate – a symbol of unity in Azerbaijani folklore – represented the energy, fun and togetherness of the Games.

### Flamekeepers

In homage to Azerbaijan, 'Land of Fire', and the flame that burned throughout Baku 2015, the volunteers that played a crucial part in the success of the European Games were known as Flamekeepers. More than 18,000 people were selected for a wide range of roles, which included assisting athletes and dignitaries, working at the Games venues and guiding spectators and the media.

Almost all of the country's universities and colleges were involved in the volunteer programme, with the aim of providing students with the chance to gain valuable experience of being at the heart of Baku's sporting spectacle. Each of the Flamekeepers was supplied with a distinctive, specially designed uniform produced at Azerbaijan's Gilan Textile Park.



but no less exciting, forms: beach soccer saw 16 teams competing in this popular version of football, while the 3x3 basketball tournament brought this fast-emerging 'street' variant of the sport to a much wider audience. In martial arts, non-Olympic disciplines karate and sambo were also added to the schedule.

Meanwhile, the new National Gymnastics Arena saw acrobatic and aerobic disciplines added to the artistic, rhythmic and trampoline events that appear in the Olympic Games – the first time that all five have appeared together in major competition. A crowded international athletics programme in 2015 meant that the Olympic Stadium would host a team event comprising countries from the third tier of the European Athletics Team Championships, which included the home nation.

### International exposure

More than 800 hours of television coverage were broadcast from Baku to audiences across Europe and also around the world – including the African continent, the United States, China, India and Japan – providing international exposure that will help to establish the European Games as an important part of the Olympic movement's four-year cycle. There was also a high level of interest from blue-chip partners, ranging from global brands such as BP, Coca-Cola, and P&G, to national companies that included SOCAR, Azerbaijan Airlines and Kapital Bank.

The overwhelming success of the first European Games bodes well for the future of what is intended to become a four-yearly festival of sport, as the continent waits to see which country will take up the baton of hosting the event in 2019. Azerbaijan's legacy of experience and knowledge from Baku 2015 heightens anticipation for the city's staging of the Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017, and the prospect of hosting further major sporting events. ●





# Uniting Europe in a festival of sport

Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of Azerbaijan and Chair of the Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee, reflects on the achievement of hosting Europe's first continental Games and discusses the work of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, of which she is President

## **Q To host the first European Games – what does it mean for Azerbaijan and for its nation?**

**A** The European Games held in Azerbaijan this summer was a significant event itself. Approximately six thousand athletes and more than one thousand journalists, representatives of official delegations, fans and tourists came to Baku from all countries of the continent to participate in these Games. Competitions were broadcasted over TV channels not only of the entire Europe, but also of India, China, Arab countries, Canada, US and Australia.

European Games were not simply a large-scale multi-sport event. Our country hosted the first continental games in the history of European sports. Although Europe is the birthplace of modern international sports and Olympic movement, it never had its own continental games until the summer of 2015. Hosting such a high-profile sporting event is a responsible and honorable task. We are very thankful to the President of the European Olympic Committees Mr. Patrick Hickey for choosing our country as the venue for the first European Games in the history and for confidence placed in Azerbaijan. It is great honor for Azerbaijan



◀ As chair of the Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee, Mrs Aliyeva welcomed athletes at the opening ceremony with a speech on behalf of the host city

– a young state, to hold such an important competition on the highest level. In the opening ceremony of European games countdown started with number “24” and it was not occasional: independence of Azerbaijan was restored 24 years ago. European games allowed us to present our country in the world arena with dignity, and to make European and not only European audience acquainted with our rich cultural legacy. Our traditions of tolerance and openness are an important part of this heritage. Azerbaijan is located on the Great Silk Way and during its centuries-old history the country was a connecting link between

cultures and civilizations. All these factors have formed a genuine spirit of friendliness and tolerance in our nation throughout centuries. We treat our culture with utmost respect and care, but at the same time, we are open to accepting cultural diversity of the world. And that is why it is not a coincidence that Baku became a venue for the first European Games. This is a vivid recognition of our traditions of dialogue and multiculturalism. European games are a great festival for athletes, fans and the entire sports community. The games gave a strong impetus to the development of sports in Azerbaijan. Now



European competitions are over, the winners are known and athletes went back home. Summing up the sports results of the European Games is the easy part. Azerbaijan has got the second place in the medal ranking, which is a great success. We are justifiably proud of the achievements of our athletes, we rejoice at their victories. However, minutes, seconds, records, medals and Olympic licenses – these all are not the most important. During the European Games a new page opened in European and global sports movement and it was written in the independent Azerbaijan. This is the main “gold” won by our country.

## **Q How did you, as the Chair of Organizing Committee of “Baku 2015”, and your team managed to successfully organize the Games in just two and a half years?**

**A** By scale, European Games in Baku were comparable with the Summer Olympic Games. While preparation of World Olympic Games usually take 7 years, European Games had to be prepared in just two and a half years. Undoubtedly, it was not an easy task. Moreover, a huge responsibility was placed on the organizers of European Games. It was Baku where the standards for the future European Games were defined. Numerous problems had to be solved in order to hold such a great-scale and important sporting event on an appropriate level. And we did it. The European Games were indeed held on the highest level. This was noted by the athletes, fans and guests of European Games, as well as representatives of European Olympic Committee. Our success is multi-component. The Organizing Committee of European Games demonstrated a good example of high professionalism. In a short period of time we managed to co-ordinate activities of many organizations, and establish fruitful cooperation with both Azerbaijani and foreign partners. We did not start preparations for the European games from scratch. It was built on a solid foundation, which was primarily laid by the progress in social and economic development of Azerbaijan, political stability, growing authority of our country in the international arena. Modern Azerbaijan is a strong, dynamically developing state, which is capable of implementing such large-scale projects. The government of Azerbaijan headed by President Ilham Aliyev pays considerable attention to the development of sports and sports infrastructure. Preparations for the European games received a great support from the head of the state. Our country is for a long time known as an unofficial sports capital of the region. Our experience gained from holding “Eurovision” Song Contest in 2012 and European and World championships in various sports stood us in good stead. Most stages of preparations for European Games, including construction of the award-winning Olympic Stadium and Athletes’ Village – favorite of the guests, reconstruction of sports facilities, modernization of transport infrastructure, were integral part of the general development strategy of Azerbaijan. It is noteworthy that during the games, the whole of Azerbaijan, speaking in sports parlance, turned into a united team led by the President of the country. Preparations for the European games enjoyed popular support in its true sense, without which we could hardly hold the games at such a high level and in such a warm and friendly environment.

## **Q Volunteers played a key role at the sites of competitions, as it was the case during previous Olympics and other large-scale sporting events. How important was their contribution?**

**A** About 20 thousand of volunteers took part in preparation and holding of European Games. Among them were citizens of different countries, but the vast majority were boys and girls from Azerbaijan. Our youth already had experience in volunteering. But now our volunteers had to face much more complex and large-scale tasks. From the very early stages of preparations, Operating



△ Mrs Aliyeva attended numerous events during Baku 2015 and presented medals to many of the winning athletes

▷ One of many cultural projects realised by the Foundation, the Heydar Aliyev Centre has taken its place among Baku's iconic new buildings. The vast complex includes a museum, auditorium and multipurpose hall

Committee of the European Games announced that the volunteers will be called “Flamekeepers”. A huge responsibility rested with the “flamekeepers” in the days of European games and they got through it with flying colors. These young men and women, who grew up in independent Azerbaijan, have demonstrated genuine enthusiasm and a real, not ostentatious patriotism. No doubt, the main actors of large-scale sporting events were and still are their immediate participants – namely the athletes. However, it is the volunteers who create an atmosphere of such competitions, their emotional coloring. Thanks to our volunteers, their desire to represent their country adequately, European games have become so vivid and memorable. Azerbaijani Flamekeepers managed to transfer the special atmosphere of our city and its unique spirit to the guests. We were very pleased, when the guests and participants of the Games noted wonderful hospitality and warm welcome of our people. Here is also a great merit of our volunteers.

## **Q There were a plenty of memorable moments within 17 days of the Games. Which ones would you emphasize from your viewpoint?**

**A** There were many exciting moments in course of the European Games. Of course, the colorful opening ceremony was imprinted in memories. The organizers decided not to reveal its details till the last minute. The spectators were in anticipation of something extraordinary and the ceremony topped all expectations. The portrayal of the great poet Nizami and heroes of his masterpiece “Khamasa”, rock paintings of Gobustan, the fire which encompassed the Sun and the Moon in itself, miraculous Mugam, contemporary rhythms, classic melodies- it is impossible to list every single component. Intense moments of the competitions, brilliant victories of our athletes, cheer of fans, and storm



AZERBAIJANI STATE NEWS AGENCY

**“Sport has united us as one family. This is the most important outcome of the European Games”**

of applause in honor of the winners of European Games will be always engraved in our memories. The competitions in packed halls. Our family was also among the active fans. However, European Games are not only sport competitions. These Games had other essential components such as “sport diplomacy”. All 49 sport teams who were entitled to participate in European Games based on regulations of International Olympic Committee and European Olympic Committee. Many heads of states, governments, ministers, representatives of international sport organizations were in Baku during the Games.

Numerous formal and informal diplomatic meetings were held in Baku throughout the European Games. This will stay in our memories too. But the most vivid memory is that of an atmosphere of common joy and unity, which prevailed in Baku. European Games brought together everyone- people of different age groups and professions, citizens of Azerbaijan and guests of our country, Olympic champions and those who are distant from sport competitions. The sport has united us as one family. This is the most important outcome of European Games. This very spirit of general solidarity dominated the majestic closing ceremony, which was warm and a little sad too. But we did not bid farewell to our guests, rather saying “So long”. The “O Sport, you are Peace!” motto by Baron Pierre de Coubertin is quoted frequently in the sports world. During the European Games these words have obtained their concrete and tangible interpretation.

**Q As the President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, you are continuing your efforts on social, economic and cultural development of Azerbaijan. Could you please elaborate on your future plans and current projects of the Foundation?**

**A** Our Foundation has launched its activities 11 years ago, in May of 2004. From day one, we have set a task to revive philanthropy and charity traditions in Azerbaijan. Priority directions of our work are already renowned throughout the world: supporting education and health care, cultural progress and preservation of rich historic heritage of our country, projects in environmental and social sphere, support of intercultural and inter-civilization dialogue. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation has realized number of exceptional and large-scale projects, which are intertwined to general development strategy of Azerbaijan and to integrally supplement the state programs. In Azerbaijan, the Foundation helps to build and modernize the museums, establish cultural centers and sport facilities. One of the largest initiatives of the Foundation is “New school for renewed Azerbaijan” project. Hundreds of schools were built and renovated within this project. Today, we have launched a new program designed for pre-school institutions and kindergartens. Modern hospitals, clinics and medical research centers were opened across our country. Valuable monuments of history and architecture are being restored. The project “Address of tolerance-Azerbaijan” has become a matter of our pride. Mosques, churches and synagogues are being restored within that project. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation also helps organize interesting music festivals including classic music festival in Gabala, Shostakovich and Rostropovich festivals respectively, annual festival of famous Azerbaijani Mugam. The International Mugam Center built under the auspices of our Fund has become one of the architectural landmarks of Baku. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation provides support to the pavilion of Azerbaijan in Venice biennale, “Fly to Baku. Contemporary art from Azerbaijan” exhibition. International cooperation activities by Heydar Aliyev Fund are also expanding. Our partners include the UNESCO, ISESCO, UNICEF and UN Development Program and other well-known international organizations and institutions. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation representative offices and branches operate successfully in Russia, Turkey, US, Romania and other countries. Overseas projects of Heydar Aliyev Fund include restoration of the Strasbourg Cathedral and a few other churches in France, City Palace Berlin, Catacombs of Rome and unique volumes in the Vatican library. And of course, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation has taken and continues to take part in aid programs to help victims of humanitarian catastrophes in various countries including Turkey, Pakistan, Romania and Haiti...Our projects deserve a much longer conversation. There is plenty of examples. They are diverse. But, they serve one goal- to do good. ●



## A sporting legacy

Events at Baku 2015 took place in 12 permanent and six temporary sports venues, located in four main clusters. The state-of-the-art facilities included the new Olympic Stadium, which hosted the Opening and Closing Ceremonies and two days of athletics. The stadium is now the new home of Azerbaijan's national football team and will stage four matches during the finals of UEFA's Euro 2020 championship.

Of the 12 venues to remain as part of the Games' legacy for the city, four others were also newly built: the National Gymnastics Arena, the BMX Velopark, Baku Aquatics Centre and Baku Shooting Centre. The six temporary venues for the duration of Baku 2015 were the Water Polo Arena, Beach Arena, Basketball Arena, Mountain Bike Velopark, and the triathlon and cycling venues. Other Games facilities included 10 training centres and 32 non-competition venues, including the brand-new Athletes Village.







# The Olympic Stadium

Village cluster



The centrepiece of Baku 2015, the award-winning Olympic Stadium played host to the Games' spectacular opening and closing ceremonies, as well as being the venue for two days of athletics. Designed to meet standards for international events set by sports bodies such as the IAAF (which governs international athletics), FIFA and UEFA (world and European football governing bodies, respectively), the stadium has been created as a multi-functional venue.

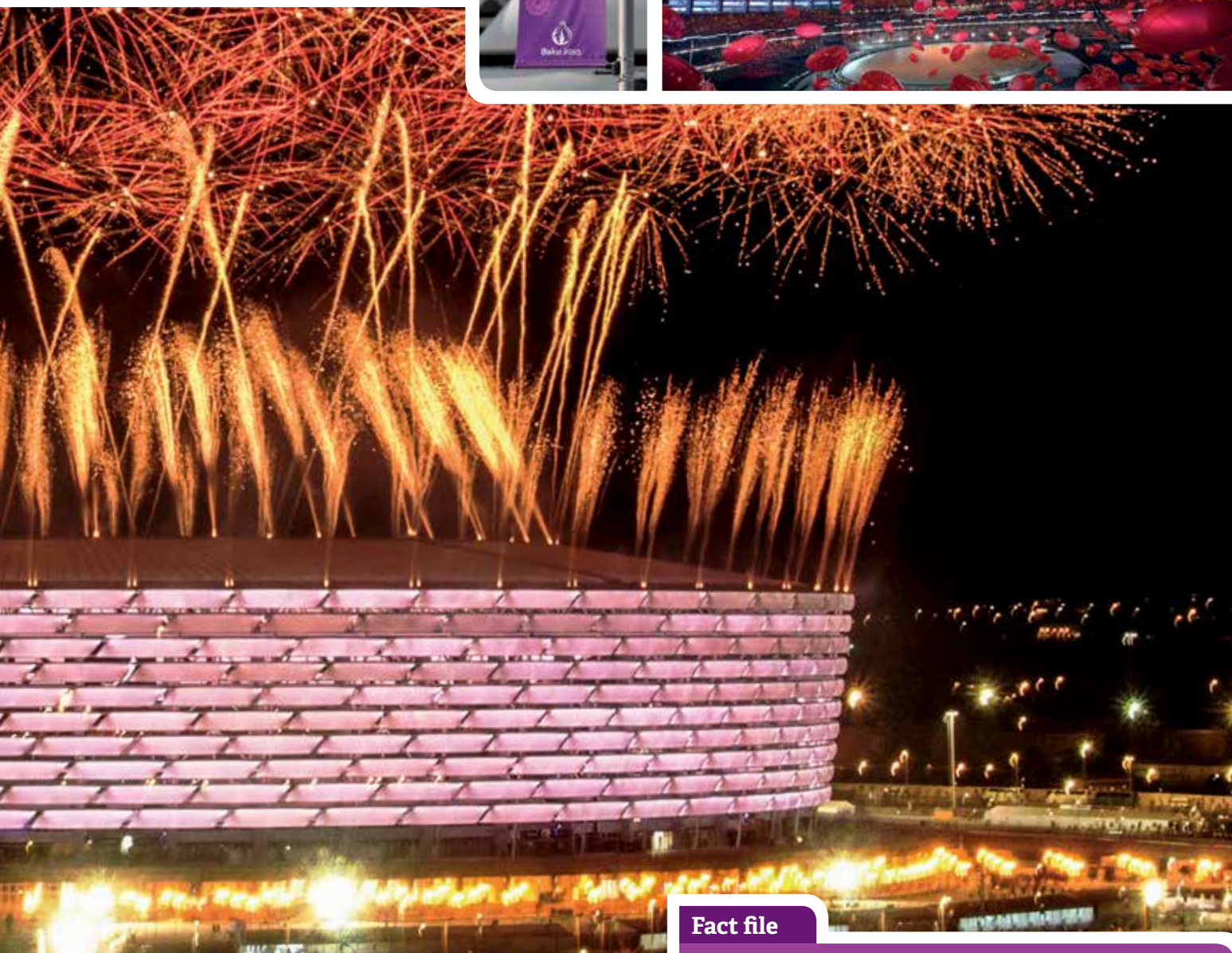
The Olympic Stadium has a capacity of more than 68,000 spectators, with the possibility of expansion should Baku become the host of a future Olympic Games or major sporting event requiring further seating. The structure, designed by leading architects Heerim and winner of Engineering News-Record's Global Best Projects Award in the Sports and Entertainment category, is distinctive in that its exterior forms a perfect circle, inspired by a cylindrical Azeri monument

dating from the 12th century. The stadium houses an oval auditorium surrounding the athletics track and providing superb views of the action from every vantage point.

The facade of the Olympic Stadium is arguably its most striking feature. Created to complement the historical and modern-day architecture of Baku, the stadium's shell symbolises 'fire' and 'wind', with which Azerbaijan and its capital are both equally associated. The outer skin comprises self-cleaning plastic panels that enable extraordinary light shows to be displayed around the stadium's entire circumference, and which were used to dramatic effect during the Baku 2015 opening and closing ceremonies.

Located on the shore of Lake Boyukshor and surrounded by almost 82 hectares of green space, the stadium complex also includes several hotels and a 1,800-seat warm-up area.





Construction of the stadium got under way with the groundbreaking ceremony on 6 June 2011, performed by President Ilham Aliyev, accompanied by senior representatives from FIFA and UEFA. Building of the stadium – which was financed by SOCAR, Azerbaijan's state oil company – began in December 2012 and was completed within the tight timetable needed to ensure readiness for the European Games. The stadium opened on 6 March 2015, just one month after construction had finished.

Following the European Games, the Olympic Stadium is to provide a lasting legacy for Baku, its residents and visitors. The opening and closing ceremonies and athletics events of the 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games will again bring colour and excitement to the stadium as Baku hosts its second major multi-sports event. The stadium also hosts the Azerbaijan national football team's home games and has been

#### Fact file

<b>Capacity</b>	68,195 (plus 1,800-capacity warm-up facility)
<b>Area</b>	225,000 square metres
<b>Height</b>	65.7 metres
<b>Storeys</b>	6
<b>Events held</b>	opening ceremony 12 June; athletics 21-22 June; closing ceremony 28 June

selected as the venue for three group-stage matches and a quarter-final of the cross-continent UEFA Euro 2020 tournament.

The park surrounding the Olympic Stadium is also being opened for the public to enjoy, while the ground floor of the building will become a multicultural complex that will house various cultural and sporting facilities, along with a shopping mall. Two further levels of the stadium will also be transformed into business centres. ●



# National Gymnastics Arena

Village cluster



Azerbaijan's National Gymnastics Arena was purpose-built for the European Games. Construction was completed in February 2014 and the facility was opened two months later by President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, President of the Azerbaijan Gymnastic Federation, which now has its home at the venue.

The arena hosted its first major event, the 30th European Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships, in June 2014. The arena's bowl design also has the potential for staging a variety of events – such as concerts, exhibitions and other indoor sporting competitions – with the ability to adjust space and capacity by moving the venue's seating. As well as the main auditorium, the building also includes on-site accommodation, a large training hall, gyms and medical facilities. The 'ribbons' on the

Fact file

Capacity	5,400
Events held	artistic gymnastics 14, 15, 18 and 20 June; acrobatic, aerobic and rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline 17, 19 and 21 June

facade of the arena reflect the flowing nature of gymnastics, in particular the ribbon element of rhythmic gymnastics.

During Baku 2015, the National Gymnastics Arena became the venue for seven days of competition, hosting the first major gymnastics championship to include five different disciplines – artistic, rhythmic, aerobic and acrobatic gymnastics, and trampoline – and welcoming more than 400 athletes. The venue will also host the 2019 World Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships. ●

# Athletes' Village

## Village cluster



ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY

Described as a “home away from home” for the participants in the inaugural European Games, the Athletes' Village is located just a short distance away from the Olympic Stadium and the National Gymnastics Arena. Athletes and team officials enjoyed a secure and comfortable environment in which to prepare for their competitions and to soak up the atmosphere of being part of Baku 2015.

The Village comprises 13 brand-new buildings, ranging in height from eight to 13 storeys and housing more than 1,000 residential units. The buildings contain 16 different types of apartments, ranging from one to four bedrooms, plus shared recreation spaces at each building that provided the opportunity to keep up with all the Games action on television and to keep in touch with home via the internet. Residents were also able to enjoy dining facilities, a swimming pool, gyms and shops. Direct transport services took athletes directly to their event venues, to help ensure stress-free transition on the day of competition.



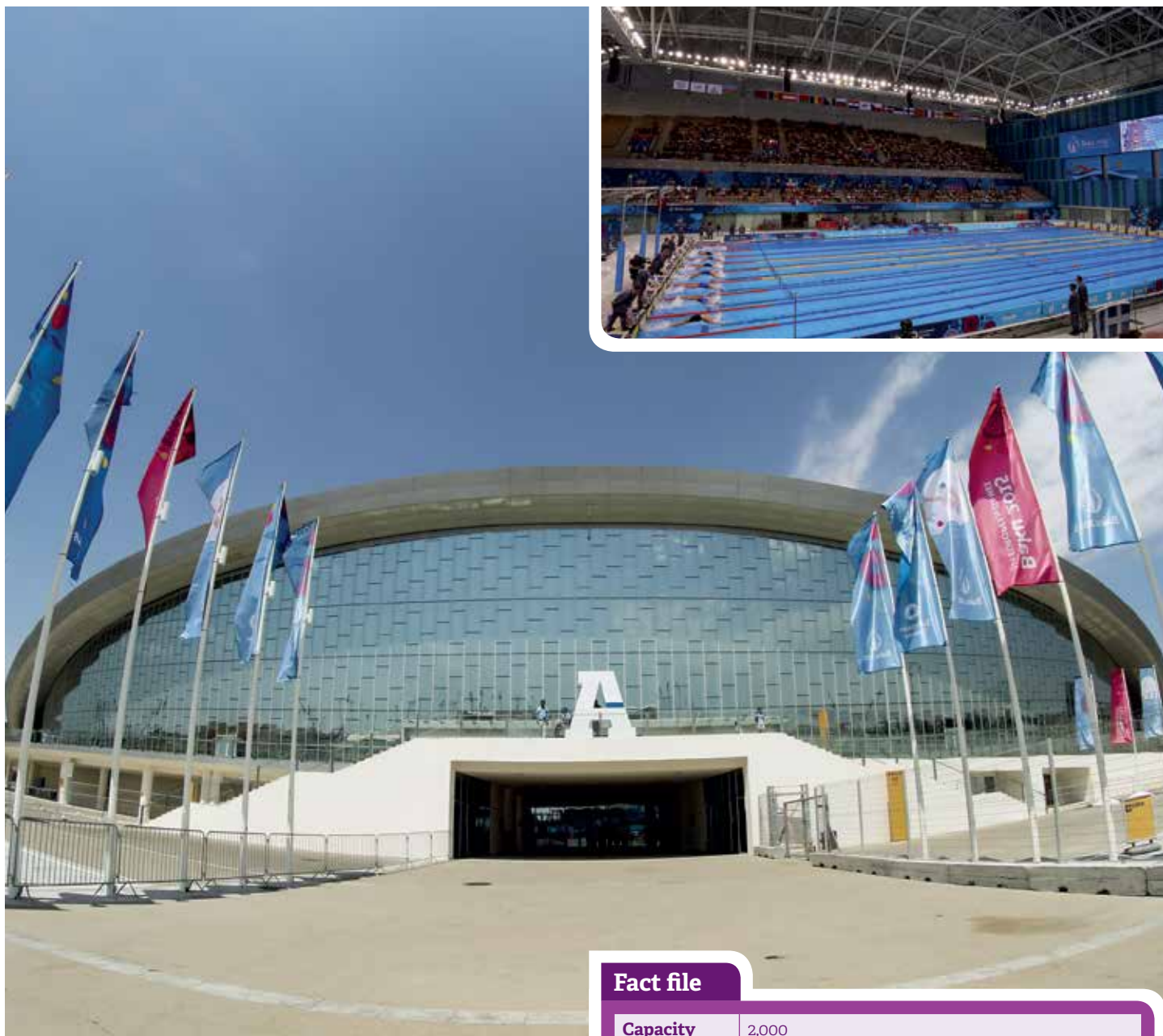
AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY

The Athletes' Village welcomed its first visitors a year before the European Games took place, during test events in preparation for opening the doors to many of Europe's finest athletes throughout 17 days of competition at Baku 2015. ●



# Baku Aquatics Centre

Flag Square cluster



Baku Aquatics Centre is, without doubt, one of the iconic venues of the 2015 European Games. Housing a 50m competition pool, a 50m warm-up pool and a diving tower and pool, the Centre welcomed more than 800 athletes during 14 days of intense competition in swimming, diving and synchronised swimming.

The Centre also includes a wealth of fitness and training facilities, including a spa and 'dry diving' area in which divers can practise, along with a restaurant, conference rooms and offices. Its elliptical exterior incorporates LED displays into its large glazed surfaces to transform the building into a visual landmark as night falls.

## Fact file

Capacity	2,000
Events held	synchronised swimming 12-16 June; diving 18-21 June; swimming 23-27 June

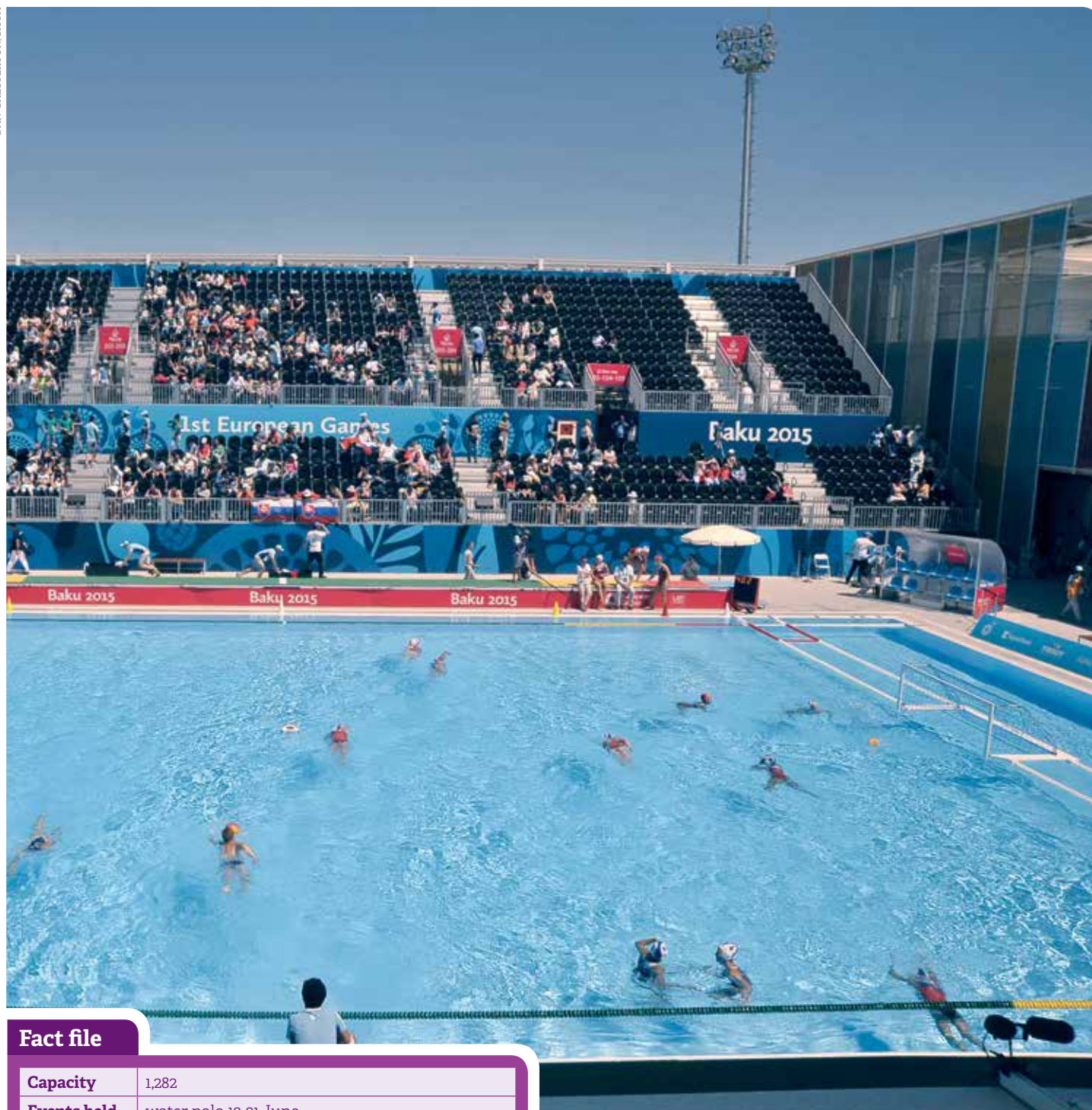
The building was designed by Spanish architect Joaquim Pujol, a specialist in sport and leisure projects who also has the distinction of being a former international and Olympic swimmer, giving him a rare insight into the needs of athletes during competition and training.

Baku Aquatics Centre is one of the key legacy projects of the European Games and the facilities will be open to the public and local schools to use and enjoy, helping to produce Azerbaijan's swimming and diving champions of the future. ●

# Water Polo Arena

Flag Square cluster

DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA



## Fact file

Capacity	1,282
Events held	water polo 12-21 June

Situated just a short distance from the Baku Aquatics Centre, the temporary Water Polo Arena was erected for the duration of the European Games. This outdoor venue played host to 364 athletes over 10 days of competition.

The men's tournament saw 16 teams divided into groups of four for the preliminary round, with the 12 teams in the women's event split into two equal groups, followed by the knockout rounds to decide the overall winners. The arena's two pools enabled matches to be held simultaneously. ●



# Crystal Hall

Flag Square cluster



DAVID RAMOS/GETTY



GARRY BOWDEN/SIPPA

Located in the centre of the iconic Flag Square, on a picturesque peninsula jutting out into the Bay of Baku and the Caspian Sea, the Crystal Hall is among the capital's most recognised landmarks. The building's innovative modular design, which resembles cut crystal, drew international attention with the staging of the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest, for which the venue had been purpose-built in fewer than nine months. Although the Crystal Hall was intended as a temporary structure, minor alterations during its construction extended the expected lifespan of the building to 30 or 40 years and it has since hosted various entertainment, corporate and sporting events.

## Fact file

Crystal Hall 1	
Capacity	3,796
Events held	volleyball 13-28 June
Crystal Hall 2	
Capacity	2,000
Events held	boxing 16-27 June
Crystal Hall 3	
Capacity	1,495 (1,012 for fencing)
Events held	karate 13-14 June; taekwondo 16-19 June; fencing 23-27 June

The exterior of the Crystal Hall comes to life after dark, when 9,500 LED lights that adorn the building provide a colourful spectacle and an array of searchlights beams high into the night sky.

For the duration of the European Games, this large and adaptable venue was divided into three separate arenas hosting five different sports: volleyball, boxing, karate, taekwondo and fencing. ●

# Beach Arena

## Flag Square cluster

Hosting competitions in two of the world's most popular beach sports – beach volleyball and beach soccer – the Beach Arena was constructed as a temporary venue for the duration of Baku 2015 and located in the European Games Park.

The beach volleyball event saw 128 athletes take part across the men's and women's events over six days, with preliminary rounds also taking place on adjacent courts. The inclusion of beach soccer was one of the many ways in which the inaugural European Games made history, as one of the non-Olympic events to feature on the schedule. The five-a-side tournament brought together eight teams over five days of competition. ●

### Fact file

<b>Capacity</b>	1,506
<b>Events held</b>	beach volleyball 16-21 June; beach soccer 24-28 June



RICHARD HEATHCOTE/GETTY

# Basketball Arena

## Flag Square cluster



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA

In common with the Beach Arena, the Basketball Arena was a temporary venue constructed specifically in the European Games Park and which hosted competition in another non-Olympic event – 3x3 basketball. While basketball has been a mainstay of the Olympic Games since 1936, this modern variant made its worldwide competitive debut at the 2010 Youth Olympics in Singapore and is closer in nature to the game played by young people on streets and recreation grounds.

Played on a half-court with a single basket, 3x3 basketball brings spectators close to the action. The inaugural European Games tournaments were contested by 16 teams in both the men's and women's events over four days. ●

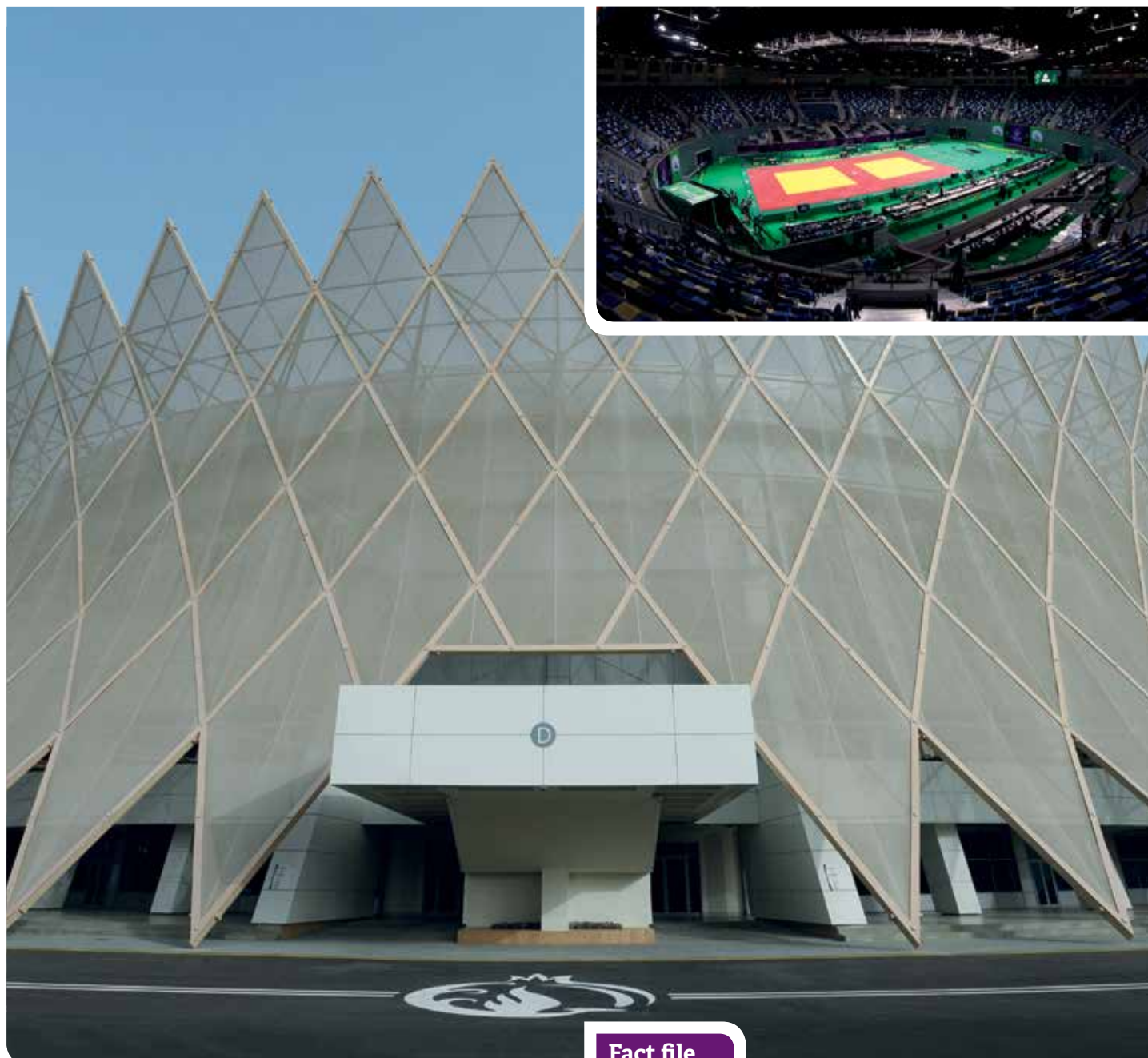
### Fact file

<b>Capacity</b>	1,843
<b>Events held</b>	3x3 basketball 23-26 June



# Heydar Aliyev Arena

City cluster



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPA

Initiated in the late 1970s by President Heydar Aliyev, who personally supervised its construction, this arena first opened its doors in 1990 and was named after the late ex-leader of Azerbaijan in 2004. During its 25-year history, the venue has hosted more than 30 international sporting events – including world and European championships in rhythmic gymnastics, wrestling, taekwondo and amateur boxing.

The Heydar Aliyev Arena was radically renovated prior to the European Games, with the installation of new lighting and seating, large video screens, improved acoustics, media and broadcast centres and an athletes' canteen.

## Fact file

Capacity	7,500
Events held	wrestling 13-18 June; sambo 22 June, judo 25-28 June

During the Games, the arena hosted competition in two Olympic combat sports – wrestling and judo – as well as sambo, one of Baku 2015's non-Olympic events. This modern martial art, which derives from Russia, is an explosive mix of fighting styles from Europe and Asia that incorporates elements of judo, jujitsu and wrestling. ●

# Tofiq Bahramov Stadium

City cluster

DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA



One of the existing venues in Baku that was utilised during the European Games, this stadium is the country's second largest. It is named after the Azerbaijani Soviet footballer who became best known outside his country as the linesman who helped in awarding a famously disputed goal to England in the 1966 FIFA World Cup final. The stadium is the home of Qarabağ Futbol Klubu, reigning champions of Azerbaijan's Premier League.

Tofiq Bahramov Stadium was built in 1951 and renovated in 2012, in time to stage the opening and closing ceremonies, two group matches, third-place playoff and final of the FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup,

## Fact file

Capacity	1,200 (normal capacity 31,200)
Events held	archery 16-22 June

which took place across Azerbaijan later that year. Several concerts have also been staged at the stadium in recent years, including one by Sir Elton John that was attended by Azerbaijan's President and First Lady.

During Baku 2015, the stadium hosted 128 athletes taking part in six days of archery competition, with a section reserved for spectator seating at an ideal vantage point. ●



# Baku Sports Hall

City cluster



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPA

Located on the city's Seaside Boulevard, Baku Sports Hall staged both the table tennis and badminton events during the European Games, welcoming 288 participants across the two competitions. Built during the 1980s, the Hall was refurbished especially for Baku 2015, having previously staged volleyball championships and serving as the home of Azerbaijan's Women's Volleyball Super League.

Although the meaning of Baku Sports Hall's original name was "hand games palace", the venue has also previously hosted futsal (five-a-side soccer) matches.

In May 2002, the Hall also was the setting for a mass conducted by Pope John Paul II for a congregation comprising Azerbaijan's small population of 120 Catholics and 1,300 Islamic guests. ●

### Fact file

Capacity	918
Events held	table tennis 13-19 June; badminton 22-28 June

# Freedom Square

City cluster

The cycling road races were held around a city-centre circuit in Baku, with the start and finish area in front of Government House at Freedom Square, the largest city square in Azerbaijan. The course featured a 13.9km long route and 12.8km short route, used in differing combinations in both the men's and women's events, that took riders past many of Baku's landmark buildings. It also included a challenging section over cobbled streets through the Old City (Icheri Sheher).

Freedom Square will also be at the heart of another major sporting event in 2016 when Azerbaijan stages the European Grand Prix – its first-ever Formula One race – on a street circuit in Baku. ●



TOBIAS SCHWARZ/GETTY

### Fact file

Capacity	500 at standing area in Freedom Square, plus vantage points throughout the course
Events held	cycling road races 20-21 June

# Baku Shooting Centre

Western venues



GARRY BOWDEN, DAN CHESTERTON/SIPA

This new, purpose-built facility for the European Games forms part of the legacy of Baku 2015. More than 300 participants were involved in seven days of competition, during which 19 gold medals were won.

The competition venue comprised qualifying ranges and a finals hall for the rifle

and pistol disciplines, plus shotgun ranges for the trap events. All competition areas and equipment complied with International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) regulations.

The centre also includes a hotel for team accommodation and will continue to operate as a venue for training and future competitions. ●

## Fact file

Capacity	500
Events held	shooting (pistol, rifle and trap) 16-22 June



# BMX Velopark

## Western venues



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA

The scene for some of the most exhilarating action of Baku 2015, the BMX Velopark staged three days of competition, with 48 athletes battling it out for gold medals in the men's and women's events.

The temporary arena was constructed specifically for the European Games and, as part of the legacy of the Games, the track will be incorporated into Baku's existing velopark, which is adjacent to this new facility. ●

### Fact file

Capacity	990
Events held	BMX cycling 26-28 June

# Mountain Bike Velopark

## Western venues

Built among the hills south of Baku Shooting Centre, the Mountain Bike Velopark was created for a single day of competition, when the men's and women's medals were decided on day two. The track, which is Azerbaijan's first-ever dedicated mountain bike course, was completed in October 2014 and staged two days of test events shortly afterwards.

The course was constructed and designed according to standards set by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI). Its 4.3km circuit includes a number of technical jumps, steep and medium-grade ascents and descents, as well as single-track and bridge sections, and artificial and natural rock gardens. Spectators were able to see as much of the action as possible from a central vantage point. ●



HARRY ENGELS/GETTY

### Fact file

Capacity	500
Events held	mountain bike 13 June

# Bilgah Beach

## Western venues



MATTHIAS HANGST/GETTY

One of Azerbaijan's most beautiful and exclusive seaside resorts, popular among the city's population and visitors from abroad, Bilgah Beach is located 30 minutes' drive north-east of Baku and was the coastal setting for two triathlon races and the cycling time-trial events.

The triathlon events, which took place on day two of the Games, comprised a challenging 1.5km Caspian Sea swim, followed by 40km of cycling and a 10km run around a compact and flat course. The cycling time trials took place four days later, with the men's race taking place over 51.6km and the women's event over 25.8km. ●

### Fact file

#### Events held

triathlon 13-14 June;  
cycling time trials 18 June

# Mingachevir

## Western venues

The city of Mingachivir, 250km west of Baku, played host to three days of canoe sprint events. The action took place at the Kür Sport and Rowing Centre, home of Azerbaijan's national canoe sprint and rowing teams, over a regatta course on the picturesque Kür river. The sports complex also includes a swimming pool, hotel, sports hall and tennis facilities.

A total of 350 athletes contested 15 medal events – three men's canoe events, in which competitors are positioned on one knee and use a single-bladed paddle, and 12 kayak competitions. Distances ranged from 200m to 5,000m and all events were compliant with International Canoe Federation (ICF) competition rules. ●



ROBERT PREZIOSO/GETTY

### Fact file

Capacity	274 seated, 1,000 standing
Events held	canoe sprint 14-16 June





The enthusiasm of the Azerbaijani public for the arrival of the European Games was at no time more evident than during the Torch Relay, which extended a long-held Olympic tradition to this inaugural continental event. Over the course of 47 days, the flame that would eventually grace the Olympic Stadium toured Azerbaijan in a celebration of the country's landscape, culture and heritage. The Journey of the Flame ensured that as many people as possible could get involved in building the momentum and excitement in the weeks leading to Baku 2015, as the flame visited 61 locations throughout the Republic.

On Sunday 26 April, the flame was captured at Ateshgah, an ancient and sacred temple on the outskirts of Baku. One of Azerbaijan's most remarkable landmarks, Ateshgah stands on a site renowned for its naturally occurring flames, sacred to Zoroastrian fire worshippers for centuries.

In an echo of the Olympic ceremony in which the flame is lit in Greece using the

rays of the sun, President Ilham Aliyev had the honour of lighting the Baku 2015 flame from the earth, epitomising Azerbaijan's characterisation as the 'land of fire'. President Aliyev then passed the flame to Rafiga Shabanova – Baku-born member of the 1976 Olympic handball gold medal-winning team – who became the first torchbearer of the European Games.

During its journey, the torch passed within an hour's travelling time of 99 per cent of the Azerbaijani population, and thousands of people joined in the daily celebrations along the route. Evening events at 15 locations included a specially created 'fire show', plus performances by local artists, a speech by the local Governor and the ceremonial lighting of the Journey cauldron.

More than 1,000 torchbearers, including Baku 2015 ambassadors and people nominated by local authorities, carried the flame on its way to the capital. As well as being transported on foot, the torch was

△ President Ilham Aliyev lights the flame of the first European Games, accompanied by First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, chair of BEGOC, and European Olympic Committees President Patrick Hickey

also carried over land by a variety of other means, including funicular railway, bicycle and Karabakh horse – and also travelled underground on the Baku metro, on water by boat and in the air by plane.

At each location, the flame was transferred to a lamp that remained alight until the Olympic Stadium cauldron was extinguished at the Closing Ceremony on 28 June. There was also a ceremonial lighting of the Journey cauldron – an elegant shallow bowl sitting on a lattice of brass rods.

After winding its way across the country on its 5,500km journey, the flame arrived in Baku on Sunday 7 June to be paraded for five days around the city, before being delivered to the Opening Ceremony on Friday 12 June for the dramatic lighting of the stadium cauldron. ●





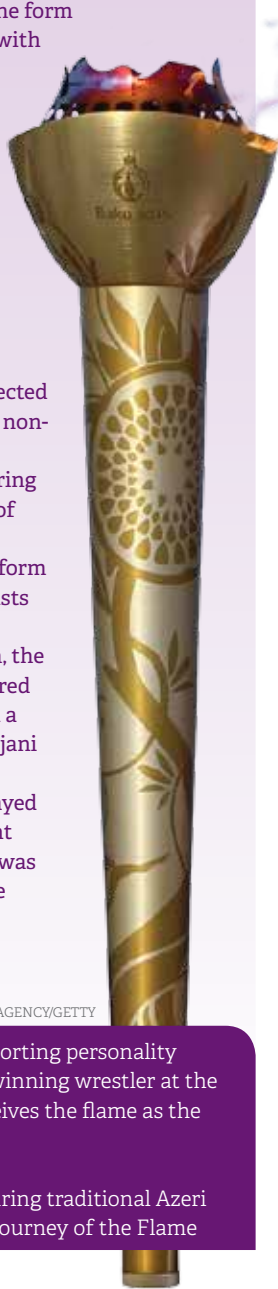
### The torch

Measuring 660mm high, the body of the torch was emblazoned with the graphic of a pomegranate tree that was to become so familiar before and during Baku 2015. The copper head that protected the flame was also in the form of a pomegranate, with its 50 'seeds' representing each of the participating countries.

The torch, lamp and cauldron were designed by award-winning British industrial designer Sebastian Bergne and art-directed by Yarat ('create'), a non-profit organisation dedicated to nurturing an understanding of contemporary art and creating a platform for Azerbaijani artists and their works.

At each location, the flame was transferred to a lamp, based on a traditional Azerbaijani design, that was prominently displayed and remained alight until the cauldron was extinguished at the Closing Ceremony on 28 June.

RESUL REHIMOV/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY



△ Well-known Azerbaijani sporting personality Farid Mansurov, gold medal-winning wrestler at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, receives the flame as the Torch Relay reaches Baku

◁ A colourful spectacle featuring traditional Azeri entertainment heralded the Journey of the Flame



# The Journey of the Flame





△ Azerbaijan's 2012 Olympic freestyle wrestling gold medallist Togrul Asgarov was among the torchbearers carrying the flame through the streets of Baku

#### Facts

1 flame  
48 days  
61 locations  
1,000+ torchbearers  
5,000 kilometres

“The torch relay will  
**inspire our people and  
share their warmth,**  
and our nation’s natural  
beauty, with the world”

– Mehriban Aliyeva  
First Lady of Azerbaijan  
Chair, Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee



# Day 1 – The Opening Ceremony

Ever since the right to host the inaugural European Games was awarded to Baku in December 2012, the people of Azerbaijan marked the days until they could welcome thousands of the continent's finest athletes to compete in their country. Among the most anticipated events for the host city of any Games is the Opening Ceremony – and Baku was no exception. Preliminary events had already begun in three sports, but this was the moment that everyone was waiting for.

Artistic director Dimitris Papaioannou, who came to prominence with the ceremonies at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, succeeded in his aim to “tell a human story using key Azerbaijani ingredients in a way that is contemporary, inventive and universal”. The inspiring ceremony involved more than 2,000 volunteers and performers, on a complex stage set that took three months to construct.

As the big moment neared, legendary Azerbaijani singer Alim Qasimov brought a hush over an expectant audience with a mugham (mixing poetry and traditional improvised music). Rhythmic drumming then accompanied a countdown from the number 24, reflecting not only the number of years since Azerbaijan regained its independence, but also the hours for one full rotation of the earth. The movement of our planet, its moon and the sun were all to play vital roles as the ceremony proceeded.

## The ceremony begins

As the clock reached zero, the stadium became ablaze with the first of the evening's many fireworks as more than 800 female dancers filled the circular main stage with a spectacular routine of ever-changing coloured skirts, re-creating vibrant geometric patterns and decorative motifs from Azerbaijan's world-renowned traditional carpets.

With a final swish of their skirts, the dancers formed the image of the flag of Azerbaijan as more fireworks filled the air, before a fanfare welcomed President Ilham Aliyev, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, Chair of the Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee (BEGOC), and Patrick Hickey, President of the European Olympic Committees (EOC). The Azerbaijan flag was then raised as the crowd rose for the playing of the national anthem.

Excitement had been building daily as the torch progressed to the Olympic Stadium for the culmination of its 5,500km, 47-day journey. Double Paralympic judo gold medallist Ilham Zakiyev had the honour of being the final torch-bearer, accompanied by 2014 Youth Olympic taekwondo champion Said Guliyev, who lifted a boulder to reveal a pit in which an underground fire was lit. The flame spread through a multitude of cracks in the earth-coloured stage, setting the scene for the rest of the ceremony.

## A love story of the ages

The fire initiated a segment of the ceremony dedicated to the works of influential 12th-century Azerbaijani poet, philosopher and scientist Nizami. A huge set of scales spun over the stage, carrying Leyli and Majnun, the figures at the centre of the love story in the third of Nizami's five long, narrative poems, *Khamsa* (Quintet). Described by Byron as the Romeo and Juliet of the East, the two star-crossed



TOM PENNINGTON/GETTY





RICHARD HEATHCOTE/GETTY



ROBERT PRIZIOSO/GETTY

- △ More than 800 dancers created elaborate patterns with their skirts in the centre of the arena
- △ The story of Europa and the Bull was retold with a spectacular aerial display
- ◁ Fireworks erupt over the Olympic Stadium at the climax of the Opening Ceremony







ROBERT PREZIOSO/GETTY

lovers danced on balanced discs representing the moon and the sun, symbolising harmony and balance. As the pair's puppet-like dance continued overhead, the audience in the stadium and watching on television worldwide entered the world of Nizami, via life-size enactments of miniature paintings that rotated the stage.

As the moving scenery and performers exited the stage, Nizami held in his hand a pomegranate – a symbol of Azerbaijan. A giant depiction of the fruit then floated over the stage and released its 'seeds' – hundreds of ruby-coloured balloons.

### The Parade of Nations

The audience in the Olympic Stadium then got their first sight of the athletes who would be competing at Baku 2015 over 17 days of competition, as the Parade of Nations got under way. Greece, birthplace of the Olympic Games, had the honour of leading the 50 participating countries as they received a rapturous welcome, with the biggest ovation reserved for the hosts when Azerbaijan emerged as the final team in the parade.

With darkness now descended upon the stadium, a succession of fireworks and a vibrant light show on the exterior of the stadium lit up the night sky, preceding the surprise arrival of a world-famous performer to the stage. American singer-songwriter Lady Gaga took to a flower-covered grand piano to perform an emotional rendition of John Lennon's peace anthem, *Imagine* – a perfect message to send to the athletes, the continent and the world.

The flag of the EOC received its ceremonial entry, carried into the stadium by eight Olympic champions, and was raised alongside the flag of Azerbaijan.

### From science to mythology

A video from the physicists of CERN, which for 60 years has brought together nations in peace through science, emphasised the international unity that the European Games and the Olympic movement generates. The sequence also remembered one of Baku's most famous sons, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Lev Landau (1908-68), whose work was an important step on the path to developing the Large Hadron Collider.





GARRY BOWDEN/SIPPA

◁ Surprise guest Lady Gaga performed John Lennon's peace anthem *Imagine*, keeping the audience of 68,000 people rapt with her powerful solo rendition at the piano

▽ A giant pomegranate, symbol of Azerbaijan and Baku 2015, releases its 'seeds' to float into the night sky

From technology, the ceremony moved into mythology, from understanding the origins of the universe to understanding the roots of the European continent's name. A large white bull being ridden by a girl flew slowly across the stadium, symbolising the story of Europa and the Bull – the tale of a princess who was stolen away by Greek god Zeus, who appeared to her in the form of a bull.

According to the famous myth, Europa bore Zeus three children – including Minos, the legendary founder of the literate European civilisation – and the continent was named after the princess. A galaxy of twinkling stars appeared across beneath the stage beneath the two characters, emerging into a map of Europe as it might appear at night from space, with a star shining bright over Baku as they departed.

### Declaring the Games open

The formalities of opening the inaugural European Games could now begin. First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Chair of BECOG, Mehriban Aliyeva, delivered a speech in both Azerbaijani and English to welcome the athletes, guest and visitors to Baku, declaring: "Dear athletes, these Games are for you. You are the first participants. You will be the first champions of the European Games. The whole country of Azerbaijan has come together to support you. For 17 days, Baku will be your home away from home."

EOC President Patrick Hickey then offered his thanks to Azerbaijan, its President and First Lady for their warm welcome and for delivering "the proudest moment in the history of the European Olympic Committees" and adding "the missing fifth ring to the Continental Games of the world". He then invited President Ilham Aliyev to declare the official opening of the 2015 European Games – an announcement followed by another spectacular array of fireworks to light up the night sky.

### The power of the elements

The spectacular final sequence of the opening ceremony began with the return of singer Alim Qasimov, sitting on a flying carpet that hovered a rippled across the stadium. As a woman walked across the cracked earth of the stage, grass and flowers sprang from under her feet, symbolising the arrival of spring. Reaching the centre, she placed a dish of grass on the spot where the underground fire was lit at the start of the ceremony, before a body of water rose from the ground – the Caspian Sea.

After walking across the sea, she surveyed the scene as 100 men rose up through the earth to perform a traditional Azerbaijani dance. At its climax, the ground broke and lifted to create an enormous mountain with figures inscribed on its sides. As the mountain receded into the ground, a man holding a burning rock moved towards the woman, lighting the earth and creating the image of a man in the ground. He then ignited the Caspian Eclipse Cauldron that rose high into the stadium in the image of a solar eclipse – a symbol that would burn throughout the Games.

The ceremony came to a spectacular end in another blaze of fireworks. As the light and noise grew in intensity, the entire cast of volunteers and performers took their bow before the audience, who were treated to a cascade of 20,000 inflatable pomegranate 'seeds' – a final token of love and good luck for the Games ahead. ●



# Day 2: Saturday, 13 June



AZERBAIJANI STATE NEWS AGENCY, HARRY ENGELS/GETTY, GARRY BOWDEN/SIPPA

Sporting history was made on the first full day of competition in Baku, with Switzerland making its mark on the record books following a succession of superb performances. At the Mountain Bike Velopark, **Jolanda Neff** became Baku 2015's first gold-medallist in the women's cross-country, with a comfortable two-minute victory over compatriot Kathrin Stirnemann in second.

In the men's mountain bike event, Swiss dominance continued as the country's riders landed a clean sweep of medals. A much closer battle saw **Nino Schurter** edge out Lukas Fluckiger, with Fabian Giger in third.

The day's flurry of medals for Swiss athletes was completed by **Nicola Spirig**, one of several Olympic champions competing in Baku, who won the women's triathlon at the picturesque Bilgah Beach resort. At London 2012, Spirig claimed the Olympic title in a photo finish, but left nothing to chance on this occasion, leaving the other competitors in her wake during the running discipline and securing qualification for the event at the Rio 2016 Olympics.

◁ President Ilham Aliyev prepares to present Firdovsi Farzaliyev with his gold medal following the Azerbaijan athlete's victory in the kumite -60kg final

◁ The flames go off and the crowd celebrates as Azerbaijan's Rafael Aghayev is announced as winner in the men's -75kg karate

△ Jolanda Neff of Switzerland celebrates winning the first-ever European Games gold medal following her victory in the women's mountain bike event

Elsewhere, the honour of becoming Azerbaijan's first European Games champion went to karate star **Firdovsi Farzaliyev**, who beat Italy's Luca Maresca 4-0 in the men's kumite -60kg final. "Now in my motherland, in my first European Games, I have victory," he said.

Home favourite **Rafael Aghayev** lived up to expectations in the men's kumite -75kg class – although the 'Maradona of Karate' left it late in the gold-medal bout, scoring a Yuko against Italian Luigi Busa with just seven seconds remaining.

The host nation also won gold in Greco-Roman wrestling as **Rasul Chunayev** claimed victory over Hungary's Balint Korpai in the 71kg category ●

# Day 3: Sunday, 14 June

GARRY BOWDEN/SIPPA, DAN MULLAN/STRINGER/GETTY



◁ Elvin Mursaliyev of Azerbaijan celebrates victory in the men's -75kg Greco-Roman wrestling final

▽ On his way to victory, Great Britain's Gordon Benson exits the water following the opening swim in the men's triathlon



Combat sports were an undoubted success story of the first European Games, attracting sell-out crowds and knowledgeable spectators.

At the Heydar Aliyev Arena, it was day two of six in Greco-Roman wrestling, a sport incredibly popular among the Azerbaijani public and also with nearby nations Russia and Turkey. Not surprisingly, all three of these countries enjoyed tremendous success in one of the world's oldest and most traditional of sports.

Russia claimed two of the four gold medals awarded on this day, with **Artem Surkov** and **Davit Chakvetadze** winning the men's 66kg and 85kg respectively. Azerbaijan's **Elvin Mursaliyev** was victorious in the men's 75kg, while Turkey's **Riza Kayaalp** stood on top of the podium in the heaviest wrestling class (men's 130kg).

In the conclusion of the karate at the Crystal Hall, there was more success for the host nation as **Ay Khan Mamayev** won the men's -84kg kumite and Irina Zaretska was victorious in the women's -68kg kumite. The day's remaining gold medals were shared between **Spain** (men's and women's kata), **Turkey** (men's +84kg kumite) and **Croatia** (women's +68kg kumite).

Elsewhere, on a blisteringly hot afternoon at Bilgah Beach, Great Britain's **Gordon Benson** won gold in the men's triathlon and secured his country a qualification place for the Rio 2016 Olympics. "It's great to come here and deliver," said Benson following his win. "That's why we're in Baku."

At the National Gymnastics Arena, the action got under way in artistic gymnastics with the first day of the team competitions and individual qualification. Meanwhile, competitors took to the water for the first time at Mingachevir in canoe sprint and kayak heats and semi-finals ●



# Day 4: Monday, 15 June



In artistic gymnastics, another sport that was well received and well supported by the Baku public, the men's and women's all-around team champions were crowned. **Russia** dominated both competitions, with the country's male gymnasts taking gold ahead of Ukraine and Azerbaijan, while the women's team finished comfortably ahead of Germany and Holland.

Russia's success continued at the Baku Aquatics Centre, where the first medals were awarded in synchronised swimming. The country claimed the team gold, while **Daria Kulagina** and **Valeriya Filenkova** were worthy winners in the duets.

In the table tennis team finals at the Baku Sports Hall, **Germany** beat Holland 3-2 in the women's gold medal match, while **Portugal** overcame France 3-1 in the men's competition.

In canoe sprint, Germany and Hungary, two traditional powerhouses of the sport, collected two gold medals apiece on the first day of finals

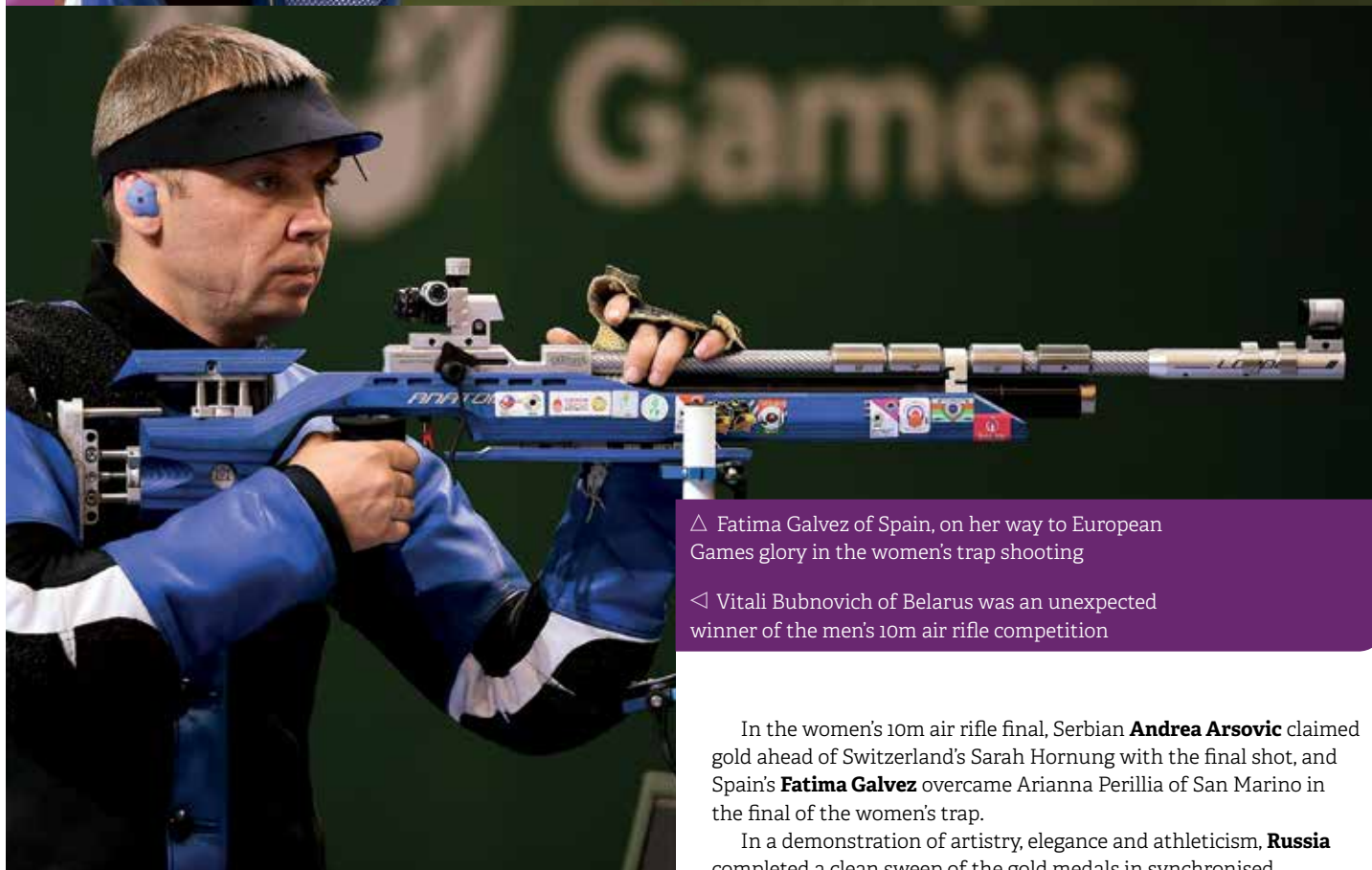
△ Germany's **Sebastian Brendel** celebrates after winning the men's canoe single (C1) 1,000m final at Mingachevir, adding to his Olympic, world and European championship titles

at the Kür Sport and Rowing Centre in Mingachevir. Most notably, Germany's **Sebastian Brendel** added a European Games gold to his Olympic, world and European titles when he maintained his dominance in the men's canoe single (C1) 1,000m. Brendel's compatriot, **Max Hoff**, an Olympic bronze medallist, came first in the men's kayak single (K1) 1,000m final, while Hungary's three-time Olympic champion **Zoltan Kammerer** and his partner, **Tamas Szalai**, were victorious in the men's kayak double (K2) 1,000m.

At the Heydar Aliyev Arena, Azerbaijan claimed further success in wrestling as **Mariya Stadnyk** won gold in the women's freestyle 48kg category, overcoming Bulgaria's Elitsa Yankova in the final. ●

# Day 5: Tuesday, 16 June

MATTHIAS HANGST/GETTY



△ Fatima Galvez of Spain, on her way to European Games glory in the women's trap shooting

◁ Vitali Bubnovich of Belarus was an unexpected winner of the men's 10m air rifle competition

Baku Shooting Centre, a brand-new, purpose-built facility on the outskirts of the city, opened its doors to Europe's leading marksmen and women. Belarus's **Vitali Bubnovich**, the men's 10m air rifle champion, was suitably impressed. "The venue is amazing," he said. "I feel like I am in the Olympic Games."

Bubnovich described himself as "the happiest man in the world" after he caused one of the upsets of the shooting competition. Italy's Niccolo Campriani, the Olympic 50m Rifle 3 positions champion, had the gold medal in his sights, but lost his opportunity with his very last shot.

In the women's 10m air rifle final, Serbian **Andrea Arsovic** claimed gold ahead of Switzerland's Sarah Hornung with the final shot, and Spain's **Fatima Galvez** overcame Arianna Perillia of San Marino in the final of the women's trap.

In a demonstration of artistry, elegance and athleticism, **Russia** completed a clean sweep of the gold medals in synchronised swimming with victory in the free combination and solo success for **Anisiya Neborako**.

At Mingachevir, 10 canoe sprint titles were decided on the final day of competition. Great Britain's Ed McKeever, the reigning Olympic champion, had to settle for bronze in the men's kayak single (K1) 200m, behind winner **Miklos Dudas** of Hungary and Sweden's Petter Menning. There was further success for **Hungary** when the country's quartet comfortably won the men's kayak four (K4) 1,000m, while **Danuta Kozak** won the women's kayak single (K1) 500m and took bronze in the 200m, adding to her gold medal in the K4 event the previous day. ●



# Day 6: Wednesday, 17 June



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPA

Great Britain's **Jade Jones** underlined her position as the golden girl of taekwondo with victory in the women's -57kg division. The reigning Olympic featherweight champion beat Croatia's Ana Zaninovic to win gold and also earn important qualification points for Rio 2016.

Shortly after Jones's success, Azerbaijan's **Aykhan Taghizade** defeated Poland's Karol Robak 10-9 on a golden point in the men's -68kg gold medal bout. Sitting among a jubilant home crowd was President Ilham Aliyev. "I never in my life wanted as much to become a champion as now, especially since the President was here watching," Taghizade exclaimed.

There was further cause for celebration among the home supporters at Heydar Aliyev Arena following two gold medals in the men's freestyle wrestling, with victories for **Togrul Asgarov** in the 65kg final and **Khetag Gazyumov** in the 97kg category.

Italy's fine tradition of success in competitive archery was continued at the Tofiq Bahramov Stadium in central Baku. **Mauro Nespoli**, a member of the winning men's team at the London 2012 Olympics, and **Natalia Valeeva** were victorious in the mixed team final, beating Georgian pair Lasha Pkhakadze and Khatuna Narimanidze.

◁ Azerbaijan's Aykhan Taghizade delighted the home supporters with his victory in the men's -68kg taekwondo final

△ Great Britain's Jade Jones added European Games gold to her winner's medal from the London 2012 Olympics

Baku lived up to its reputation as the 'City of Winds' as breezy conditions created an extra challenge for all the competitors, yet the Italians were undaunted, with Valeeva saying: "With the wind there's more adrenaline – for this reason it gives you a charge. Where else do you get this rush?"

In rhythmic gymnastics, **Russia** were crowned group all-around champions, ahead of Israel and Belarus, with a high-scoring ribbon routine playing a major part in the team's success. ●

# Day 7: Thursday, 18 June

The wrestling competition came to a conclusion, with Russia establishing its dominance at the top of the medals table. Four of the 24 gold medals were decided on the final day, with Russian men claiming three of them: **Magomedrasul Gazimagomedov** (70kg), **Aleksandr Bogomoev** (61kg) and **Abdulrashid Sadulaev** (freestyle 86kg).

Turkey's **Taha Akgul** won 3-0 against Aleksei Shemarov in the men's 125kg freestyle. The biggest surprise in this category was the elimination of five-time world champion Khadzhimurat Gatsalov, Russia's opening-ceremony flagbearer, in his opening fight.

Less than a month after winning the individual time trial at the Giro d'Italia, Belarusian cyclist **Vasil Kiryienka** beat the clock again. Despite gusty winds blowing off the Caspian Sea, the time-trial specialist was the only rider to complete the beautiful 51.6km Bilgah Beach course in under an hour, finishing more than one minute ahead of the Netherlands' Stef Clement.

In the women's time trial, 2013 individual world champion **Ellen van Dijk** of the Netherlands won gold, completing the 25.8km course nearly 44 seconds ahead of Ukraine's Ganna Solovei in silver-medal position and her teammate Annemiek van Vleuten in third place.

At the National Gymnastics Centre, the prestigious individual all-around competitions were decided in artistic gymnastics. In the men's event, Ukraine's **Oleg Verniaiev** edged out his namesake, Oleg Stepko of Azerbaijan, while Russia's **Aliya Mustafina** was dominant in taking the women's title.

Elsewhere, the first diving medals were awarded at the Baku Aquatics Centre, with 17-year-old Russian **Nikita Shleikhner** winning the men's 1m springboard event and Great Britain's **Lois Toulson** taking the women's platform title, aged just 15. In the archery team event, Italy's women beat Belarus 5-3, while Ukraine's men won 5-4 against Spain. ●



△ Russia's Aliya Mustafina competes on the uneven bars, on her way to victory in the women's artistic gymnastics individual all-around final

△ The Ukrainian team celebrates after securing gold in the men's archery final

◁ Aleksandr Bogomoev of Russia (red) and Beka Lomtadze of Georgia (blue) compete in the men's wrestling 61kg freestyle gold medal match

“I devote this victory to **all people that were rooting for me**, watching live stream by computer, on TV channels and sitting here in the stands...”

– **Aleksandr Bogomoev (Russia)**,  
gold medallist in the men's 61kg wrestling



# Day 8: Friday, 19 June

*“I’ve never competed in such a big competition as this. **I’m going to keep my feet on the ground.** Sometimes I’m a bit of a joker, but today I kept a cool head”*

– **Radik Isaev (Azerbaijan)**,  
gold medallist in the men’s +80kg taekwondo



△ The rhythmic gymnastics individual all-around final saw Russia take the top two positions, courtesy of gold medallist Yana Kudryavtseva and runner-up Margarita Mamun (pictured)

▷ Azerbaijan’s Radik Isaev (in blue), on his way to claiming the gold medal in the men’s +80kg taekwondo competition



DANIEL CHESTER/TON/SIPA, MATTHIAS HANGS/GETTY

Azerbaijan confirmed its emergence as Europe’s taekwondo powerhouse on the final day of competition, winning a third European Games title to finish top of the sport’s medal table. In front of a boisterous crowd at the Crystal Hall, victory in the final of the men’s +80kg category went to **Radik Isaev**, who beat Russia’s Vladislav Larin 4-3. Born in Makhachkala in the Russian republic of Dagestan, which borders Azerbaijan, Isaev competed for Russia before switching allegiances in 2011.

In the day’s other taekwondo final, France’s **Gwladys Epangue** beat the London 2012 Olympic champion, Serbian Milica Mandic, in the women’s +67kg category.

Germany’s **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** made amends for missing out on a podium place in the men’s table tennis team event by winning the individual competition. The Olympic bronze medallist became the sport’s first male qualifier for Rio 2016 following a 4-3 triumph over Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus. The women’s final was contested between two Chinese-born players now representing the Netherlands, with **Li Jiao** overpowering Li Jie 4-0.

In diving, Russia’s **Ilya Molchanov** and **Nikita Nikolaev** dominated the men’s synchronised 3m springboard, with the teenagers winning gold by a clear margin ahead of Britain’s James Heatly and Ross Halsam. In the women’s 1m springboard, Russia’s **Maria Polykova** was the clear winner.

In acrobatic gymnastics, Belgium claimed the women’s group all-around title, while Russia’s **Marina Chernova** and **Georgy Pataraya** were winners in the mixed pair all-around. Their compatriots, **Yana Kudryavtseva** and **Margarita Mamun**, completed a one-two in the rhythmic gymnastics individual all-around final.

The day’s remaining medals were awarded in shooting, with Italy’s **Petra Zublasing** taking the women’s 50m rifle three-positions, and victory for Russia’s **Vitaly Fokeev** in the men’s double trap final. ●

# Day 9: Saturday, 20 June



△ Amber Hill earned a gold medal and qualification for the Rio 2016 Olympics with victory in the women's skeet shooting competition

◁ At Freedom Square, Alena Amialiusik of Belarus grasped victory in a sprint finish over her rivals at the end of the women's cycling road race

Of the many teenagers that thrived on the European Games stage, few demonstrated such impressive composure under pressure than Great Britain's **Amber Hill**. The 17-year-old skeet shooter secured her selection for the Rio 2016 Olympics with a nerveless and outstanding display of precision shooting against much older and more experienced competitors.

There was further British success in diving, as **James Heatly** took gold in the 3m springboard, adding to his silver in the 3m synchronised event and bronze in 1m competition.

Earlier in the day, the streets of Baku staged the spectacle of the women's cycling road race. Riding past the city's historic and modern landmarks, including the Old City and the Flame Towers, **Alena Amialiusik** of Belarus beat some of Europe's finest cyclists over the 120.7km course. After more than three hours in the saddle, she overcame Poland's Katarzyna Niewiadoma and Holland's Anna van der Breggen in a sprint finish.

There was great drama in the women's water polo final, as Russia beat Spain in a penalty shootout. With just 38 seconds of normal time left, Russia equalised to tie the scores at 10-10. Both teams then succeeded with their first six penalties before Russia's Evgeniia Golovina saved Crespi Barriga's second effort for a 17-16 win.

In artistic gymnastics, 10 sets of medals were awarded in individual apparatus finals. The day's outstanding performer was Switzerland's **Giulia Steingruber**, who won the women's titles in both the floor and vault, plus bronze in the beam.

In beach volleyball, the Swiss pair of **Nicole Eiholzer** and **Nina Betschart** beat Austrians Katharina Schutzenhofer and Lena Maria Plesiutchnig 2-1 in a thrilling women's final, having been two points away from defeat in the third-set tiebreaker. ●



# Day 10: Sunday, 21 June



DANIEL CHESTERTON/SIPA, MICHAEL STEELE, PAUL GILHAM/GETTY

**The middle Sunday of the European Games saw the culmination of the gymnastics programme – with 16 of the 34 gold medals decided.**

In acrobatics, Russia (dynamic mixed pairs and balance mixed pairs) and Belgium (women's group balance and women's group dynamic) shared the spoils. In aerobics, Spain and Hungary won the mixed pair and groups respectively.

Russia claimed gold in five of the six rhythmic gymnastics disciplines (individual hoop, group ribbon, individual ball, individual clubs and individual ribbon) while Belarus claimed the group clubs and hoops. In trampoline, Russians were in top place on the podium on four occasions.

Following the colour and spectacle of the Opening Ceremony, the Olympic Stadium staged its first sport of Baku 2015 when athletics action got under way. Two days of competition would see 14 teams vying for national honours, in an event that incorporated the third league of the European Athletics Team Championships.

Azerbaijan's Ethiopian-born middle-distance athlete **Hayle Ibrahimov** was the day's leading performer, delighting the home crowd with victories in the 1,500m and the 5,000m, little more than an hour apart. After 21 events, Austria held the overnight lead in the team competition.

In cycling, Spain's **Luis León Sánchez Gil** lived up to his strong reputation, earned by his four Tour de France stage wins. After five punishing hours of riding in the men's road race, he triumphed in a four-man sprint finish at Freedom Square.

At the Water Polo Arena, Serbia beat Spain in the men's gold medal match, while in men's beach volleyball, Latvia's **Martins Plavins** and **Haralds Regza** shocked Russians Dmitry Barsouk and Yaroslav Koshkarev with a 2-1 victory. ●

◁ Luis Leon Sanchez Gil of Spain celebrates as he crosses the finishing line in Freedom Square, as he wins the men's cycling road race

△ The Serbian team celebrate their victory in the men's water polo competition, after defeating Spain 8-7 in a closely fought final

△ Azerbaijan's Hayle Ibrahimov won both the 1,500m and 5,000m on the opening day of the team athletics competition at the Olympic Stadium

*“I'm really happy to win gold in the European Games, not only for me but for the whole team. It's good for the whole of Spain”*

– **Luis León Sánchez Gil (Spain)**, gold medallist in the men's cycling road race

# Day 11: Monday, 22 June

DANIEL CHESTERTON/SIPPA



◁ Stsiapan Papou of Belarus carries his injured opponent, Azerbaijan's Amil Gasimov, off the mat after winning the men's -74kg wrestling gold

△ Spain's Miguel Alvarino Garcia was a comfortable winner of the men's individual archery event at the Tofiq Bahramov Stadium

**There was extraordinary late drama at the Olympic Stadium as the two-day athletics team competition reached a thrilling finale.**

Long-time leaders Austria were on course to win the gold medal – provided they protected a 5.5-point lead over second-place Slovakia in the final event, the men's 4x400m relay. However, disaster struck as Austria's second runner Gunther Matzinger dropped the baton while trying to overtake at the top of the home straight. By the time he had picked it up, his team were five places adrift of their Balkan rivals, who took the maximum 14 points.

Austria finished sixth, but their time was just under two seconds slower than that set by Georgia in the first heat, and scored only eight points. A protest lodged by Austrian team officials was rejected, leaving Slovakia in gold-medal position with 458.5 points, winning the competition by just half a point from Austria, with Israel claiming bronze.

Celebrating the surprise result, Slovakia's Martin Kucera said: "Anything can happen in athletics. You never know who is going to win. This is really awesome."

Earlier, Azerbaijan's Hayle Ibrahimov completed a treble in winning the men's 3,000m, adding to his victories in the 1,500m and 5,000m the previous day.

At the Heydar Aliyev Arena, the single day's competition in the martial art of sambo took place. Unsurprisingly for a sport which originated in the old Soviet Union, it was dominated by Russians, winners in five of the eight classes.

Most memorably, there was a wonderful act of sportsmanship in the men's -74kg class. After losing in the final, Azerbaijan's great medal hope, world champion Amil Gasimov, was in agony and unable to stand up. Yet, rather than celebrate victory, Belarusian **Stsiapan Papou** carried Gasimov off the mat over his shoulder in a gesture that earned warm applause from the 5,000-strong crowd.

Elsewhere, in archery, Spain's **Miguel Alvarino Garcia** won the men's individual event with a 7-1 win over Holland's Sjeff van den Berg. Also, Italy's shooters won the mixed team skeet and mixed team 10m air rifle, while Germany were winners in the mixed team 10m air pistol. ●

**“I wanted to show him my respect. He fought very well in all his matches, he was full of energy. You could see that he wanted to win so badly. He just didn't want to give up”**

– **Stsiapan Papou (Belarus)**, gold medallist in sambo's -74kg category, explains his gesture of sportsmanship towards his opponent, Azerbaijan's Amil Gasimov



# Day 12: Tuesday, 23 June



△ Great Britain's Abbie Wood was left her rivals in her wake in the women's 400m individual medley final

▷ Ana Maria Branza of Romania claimed her country's first gold medal of the European Games in the women's fencing individual epee competition

*“This is historic for me because **my name will be there as champion for years and years**”*

– **Ana Maria Branza (Romania)**,  
fencing gold medallist in the women's epee

Europe's next generation of swimmers – those attempting to make the transition between junior and senior competition over the next few years – arrived at the spectacular Baku Aquatics Centre hoping to make their mark. There were 526 swimmers involved in 42 events across the four main strokes (freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly), and day one of competition set the standard for some excellent performances from the continent's best juniors.

Great Britain, in particular, had a memorable opening night in the pool, claiming three of the seven gold medals. **Abbie Wood**, 16, won the women's 400m individual medley, more than two seconds faster than Italy's silver medallist, Ilaria Cusinato.

Wood's fellow countrywoman **Holly Hibbott** was successful in the women's 800m freestyle, while the British men's 4x100m freestyle



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA, PAUL GILHAM/GETTY

quartet saw off Italy in a closely contested race. Russia took the women's 4x100m freestyle relay, brushing aside the challenge from the Netherlands and Great Britain.

Ukraine's **Andrii Khloptsov** was a surprise winner in a thrilling 50m butterfly final, ousting Poland's Pawel Sendyk and one of Russia's biggest young prospects, Daniil Pakhomov. **Maria Astashkina** was the victor in the women's 50m breaststroke, and Germany's **Paul Hentschel** was first in the men's 400m freestyle.

At the Crystal Hall, Romanian fencer **Ana Maria Branza** won her country's first gold medal when she fought her way to victory over Russia's Yana Zvereva in the women's epee final. The Olympic silver medallist snatched the gold with a score of 15-11. The men's individual sabre contest was settled 15-10 in favour of Ukraine's **Andriy Yagodka** over Romania's Tiberiu Dolniceanu.

The Basketball Arena staged six hours of continuous action on the opening day of competition in the compact, three-a-side version of the game. Sixteen teams in each of the men's and women's tournaments played their first preliminary matches today. ●



# Day 13: Wednesday, 24 June

TOM PENNINGTON, DAVID RAMOS/GETTY



The attempt by Russian swimmer **Arina Openysheva** to achieve a historic clean sweep of eight titles was thwarted in one of the most exciting moments of the Baku European Games, when she was beaten by the brilliant 15-year-old Dutch freestyle **Marrit Steenbergen** in a thrilling 100m freestyle final. However, Openysheva did end the day with two gold medals from the 400m freestyle and the mixed 4x100m freestyle relay.

There was further Russian success when double Youth Olympic champion **Anton Chupkov** won the 200m breaststroke, while Great Britain added to its gold medals won in the pool when **Luke Greenbank**, the 2014 European junior champion, won the 100m backstroke.

In fencing, Italy's **Alice Volpi** was crowned the women's individual foil champion, and Frenchman **Ivan Trevejo** was the winner in the men's individual epee.

The men's beach soccer tournament – one of the hottest tickets around in a host country with a passion for football – started with four matches. Pre-tournament favourites Russia opened their campaign with a 5-3 group win over Hungary.

Away from the official Baku 2015 events, the city's residents and visitors were treated to the first of two evenings of street athletics, organised by the Azerbaijan Athletics Federation in conjunction with the European Athletics Association. The men's pole vault competition saw a close contest between Germany's Raphael Holzdeppe, 2013 world champion and 2012 Olympic bronze medallist, and rising star Thiago Braz Da Silva. The more experienced competitor took victory as both men beat their personal bests, with Da Silva twice improving his own South American record. ●

△ Spain's Llorenc Gomez scores past Italian goalkeeper Stefano Spada in a penalty shoot-out on the opening day of the men's beach soccer tournament

▽ Russia's Arina Openysheva claimed two gold medals in the women's 400m freestyle and the mixed 4x100m freestyle relay on Day 13





# Day 14: Thursday, 25 June



JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY

*“This feels fantastic, an amazing feeling. I can’t believe I’m bringing home another piece of history... I trained really hard for these European Games”*

– Nicola Adams (Great Britain), gold medallist in women’s flyweight boxing

△ Great Britain’s Nicola Adams (in red) lands a blow on her opponent in the women’s flyweight boxing final

Olympic champion Nicola Adams, one of the most recognisable sporting stars in Baku, claimed the first boxing gold medal awarded at Baku 2015 with a majority-decision victory over Poland’s Sandra Drabik in the final of the women’s flyweight competition.

The win was particularly rewarding for Adams, who in the past year had endured shoulder surgery and the theft of property, including Olympic mementos, from a family home.

Four other boxing champions were also decided at the Crystal Hall: Holland’s Nouchka Fontijn (women’s middleweight), Russia’s Bator Sagaliev (men’s light flyweight), Russia’s Bakhtovar Nazirov (men’s bantamweight) and Azerbaijan’s Teymur Mammadov (light-heavyweight).

At the Heydar Aliyev Arena, a knowledgeable Baku audience enjoyed the first day of judo competition, during which five champions were decided. This event doubled as the sport’s European Championships and Russia showed off its strength in depth, winning two golds and three bronzes on day one.

The most impressive winner came in the -60kg category when Russian Beslan Mudranov recorded an ippon (a bout-winning manoeuvre) against Azerbaijan’s Orkhan Safarov. The other Russian gold was delivered by Kamal Khan-Magomedov in the men’s -66kg, courtesy of a win over France’s Loic Korval.

In fencing, Italian Alessio Foconi and Poland’s Angelika Wator were champions in the men’s foil and women’s sabre respectively. Elsewhere in the Crystal Hall, Poland and Turkey secured their places for the women’s volleyball final. ●

# Day 15: Friday, 26 June

DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA, DAVID FINCH/GETTY



One of Azerbaijan's national heroes became the star of the show in front of a noisy and partisan crowd at the Heydar Aliyev Arena. In 1999, **Ilham Zakiyev**, a keen judoka, was wounded while on military patrol, after being shot in the head by a sniper's bullet that left him in a coma for five days and robbed him of his eyesight.

Zakiyev's judo victories at the 2004 and 2008 Paralympic Games had already brought him to national prominence. However, his European Games win on home soil in the men's blind +90kg final, after serving as the final torchbearer at the Opening Ceremony, solidified his position as a household name. His victory was made even more special as it occurred on the country's Day of Armed Forces – and on the second birthday of Zakiyev's son, Hamza.

At the Crystal Hall, five more boxing titles were decided, with gold medals for Russians **Elena Saveleva** (women's bantamweight) and **Anastasiia Beliakova** (women's light welterweight), Azerbaijan's **Elvin Mamishzada** (men's flyweight) and **Collazo Sotomayor** (men's light welterweight) and Great Britain's **Joe Joyce** (men's super heavyweight).

In another part of the same arena, three team fencing finals took place, with Romania (women's epee), Italy (men's sabre) and Russia (women's foil) all celebrating on the top step of the podium.



◁ The victorious Russian women's team celebrate their gold medal in 3x3 basketball...

◁ ...while their compatriots in the men's team overcame Spain to win the men's final

△ President Ilham Aliyev congratulates Ilham Zakiyev after presenting the gold medal he won in the men's blind judo +90kg competition

*“All of Azerbaijan was waiting for this result from me”*

– **Ilham Zakiyev (Azerbaijan)**, gold medallist in the men's blind judo +90kg category

Four days of 3x3 basketball action concluded with the semi-finals and medal matches. Russia took both titles, beating Spain 18-14 in the men's final and defeating Ukraine 22-17 in the women's decider.

In volleyball, the teams for Sunday's men's final were confirmed after Bulgaria overcame Poland 3-2 and Germany won 3-1 against Russia. ●



# Day 16: Saturday, 27 June



AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY, HARRY ENGELS, RICHARD HEATHCOTE/GETTY

△ The medallists in the men's heavyweight boxing, including champion Abdulkadir Abdullayev of Azerbaijan, await the presentation ceremony

△ Baku 2015 ambassador and Olympic champion Katie Taylor of Ireland celebrates victory in the women's boxing lightweight division

▷ Turkey's Polen Uslupehlivan smashes past her Polish opponent as her team powered their way to victory in the women's volleyball final

Ireland's Katie Taylor consolidated her position as Europe's finest female boxer at lightweight class following a unanimous final victory over Estelle Mossely of France. The 2012 Olympic champion, who was also a Baku 2015 ambassador, claimed an extraordinary 18th major championship medal of an extraordinary career.

The host nation enjoyed incredible success in boxing, doubling its medal count in the ring on this final day of competition at the Crystal Hall. **Albert Selimov** was crowned the men's lightweight champion, **Parviz Baghirov** was the men's welterweight winner and **Abdulkadir Abdullayev** had a walkover in the men's heavyweight final. Azerbaijan's **Xaybulv Musalov** also earned a silver medal in the middleweight division, losing to Irishman Michael O'Reilly in the final.

In swimming, **Arina Openysheva**, arguably the most successful sportsperson of the entire Games, claimed her final victory in the 4x200m freestyle relay final, returning to Russia with seven gold medals and one silver. With the addition of two further gold medals for **Anton Chupkov** in the final session, which brought his total

*“It's a bit of a relief to sit here now with the gold medal... Now **I've got every single major title out there** and it's great to add this one to the list”*

– **Katie Taylor (Ireland)**,  
gold medallist in women's lightweight boxing

of titles to four, Russia topped the swimming standings with 23 gold, seven silver and 12 bronze medals.

The women's volleyball competition reached its climax at the Crystal Hall, as Turkey comfortably overcame Poland 3-0 in the women's gold medal match. In the first of two evenings of badminton finals at the Baku Sports Hall, Bulgarian sisters **Stefani and Gabriela Stoeva** won the women's doubles, while Denmark's **Mathias Boe and Carsten Mogensen** were winners in the men's event. In fencing, three team titles were decided, with France winning the men's epee, Ukraine taking the women's sabre title and Great Britain victorious in the men's foil. ●

# Day 17: Sunday, 28 June

JAMIE SQUIRE, RICHARD HEATHCOTE, MICHAEL STEELE/GETTY



△ Michael Andrei in action for Germany as his team won gold in the men's volleyball competition

▷ The Russian team celebrate their victory over Italy in a closely fought beach soccer final, claiming the final gold of Baku 2015

▷ Joris Daudet of France crosses the finish line to win the gold medal in the men's cycling BMX final



**Joris Daudet** cemented his status as one of the world's leading BMX riders when he won gold in the men's final at the BMX Velopark on the last day of competition at Baku 2015. The Frenchman led from the first bend and crossed the finishing line several bike lengths clear of the Netherlands' Twan van Gendt and Swiss rider David Graf. In the women's race, Denmark's **Simone Christensen** triumphed over Magalie Pottier of France.

At the end of 16 days of volleyball action at the Crystal Hall, Germany were winners of the men's tournament, beating Bulgaria 3-1 in the final. Russia beat Poland by the same scoreline in the bronze medal match.

At the Heydar Aliyev Arena, France dominated the team judo competition, winning gold in both the men's and women's events over Georgia and Germany respectively.

Danish badminton star **Line Kjaersfeldt** won the women's singles gold while the men's singles champion was Spain's **Pablo Abian**. Denmark was also successful in the mixed doubles as **Niclas Nohr** and **Sara Thygesen** claimed the title.

The 253rd and final gold medal of the first European Games in Baku was decided at the Beach Arena; a few hours before the closing ceremony brought an official end to the Games, Russia and Italy played in the beach soccer final. Russia's captain, **Ilia Leonov**, wrote his name into the record books when he scored the decisive goal in a 3-2 win. This represented Russia's 79th gold as the country topped the medals table, ahead of Azerbaijan and Great Britain. ●

## Medal table

Rank	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Russia	79	40	45	164
2	Azerbaijan	21	15	20	56
3	Great Britain	18	10	19	47
4	Germany	16	17	33	66
5	France	12	13	18	43
6	Italy	10	26	11	47
7	Belarus	10	11	22	43
8	Ukraine	8	14	24	46
9	Netherlands	8	12	9	29
10	Spain	8	11	11	30



# The Closing Ceremony



AZERBAIJANI STATE NEWS AGENCY

**Following 17 days of sporting action and excitement, the inaugural European Games came to an end. Just as it had begun, Baku 2015 reached its climax in a dazzling display of colour and light at the award-winning Olympic Stadium.**

The closing ceremony – under the artistic direction of James Hadley, best known for his work with internationally renowned circus troupe Cirque du Soleil – explored the union of traditional and modern Azerbaijani culture. Both the ancient and the new were brought together to illustrate how the past is shaping the present and influencing Azerbaijan's future, and celebrated the joy of paradox – the old teaching the young and the traditional inspiring the modern.

More than 1,600 volunteers and performers took part, with over 1,300 production staff and crew from 34 countries also involved in bringing the event to life. Performances took place on a central main stage, surrounded by three smaller stages in the shape of the buta, an ancient almond-shaped motif found on many Azerbaijani decorative art works and architecture.

A fanfare welcomed Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, accompanied by First Lady and Chair of the Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee (BEGOC) Mehriban Aliyeva and European Olympic Committees (EOC) President Patrick Hickey, before a video showed a carpet weaver's threads coming to life and winding their way through





MATTHIAS HANGST/GETTY



AZERBAIJAN STATE NEWS AGENCY

- ◁ A burning 'simurg' emerges from the fiery scene below and rises high into the air
- △ The giant skirts surrounding three effigies of female dancers provided a colourful display
- ▽ Hundreds of volunteer performers helped to celebrate the end of a successful European Games





DAN CHESTERTON/SIPPA

the countryside, across the ancient landscape to the city of Baku. Distinctive carpets by renowned local artist Faig Ahmed transformed into numbers for a countdown from 10 to zero, reflecting the vitality of modern Azerbaijan.

A hush then fell over the stadium as 12 singers were joined by young children in a symphonic rendition of Azerbaijan's national anthem – its first performance in this arrangement – as the country's flag was raised.

### Spanning the musical ages

The evening's theme of the old inspiring the new was evident immediately in a vibrant exchange between traditional and modern musicians and dancers. Contemporary musicians answered the call of the melody played by their traditional counterparts, before 16 dancers from each era responded to each others' rhythms and movements, in front of a replica of the Maiden Tower – a landmark of Baku's Old City.

As the music became a fusion of rock and folk, colourful skirts unfolded from three giant rotating sculptures depicting female dancers. The dresses were then pulled away to reveal the 128 performers that were manoeuvring the sculptures, who then joined the dancers and musicians in a vivid display of coordinated movement. As the music and dance reached a climax, the walls of the Maiden Tower structure peeled away to reveal a replica of Baku's Flame Towers in a true transformation from ancient to modern.

### Remembering the Flamekeepers

Another short video on the stadium screens paid tribute to the 12,500 Flamekeeper volunteers, whose energy, enthusiasm and dedication were a crucial contribution to the success of Baku 2015. This was



ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY





◁ Once the formalities of the Closing Ceremony were completed, the party began for athletes, volunteers and spectators alike

◁ The segment 'Energy of Youth' lit up the arena with a routine focusing on how technology enables the world to connect

△ Following the Olympic tradition, Greece led the flagbearers for the Closing Ceremony

followed by a celebratory song for the athletes – the traditional folk tune *Cal Oyna*, performed by a 50-strong children's choir – as the placard- and flag-bearers of the participating nations entered the arena. As the song concluded, the athletes arrived in the stadium en masse, many taking photographs as a final memento of their experience of a remarkable Games.

### Bringing the Games to a close

The formal part of the ceremony then took place, firstly with a speech by First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, in both Azerbaijani and English, in which she thanked the athletes for "making these first European Games such an unforgettable festival of sport."

"You treated us to amazing performances of passion, courage and grace," she continued. "These Games have been your Games, and your achievements have been truly inspirational". EOC President Patrick Hickey praised Baku 2015 for its "gold-medal standard of operational excellence", before formally declaring the inaugural European Games closed.

A short video followed the speeches, showing images from Baku 2015 and highlighting some of the major sporting events that will soon take place in Azerbaijan, including the F1 European Grand Prix in 2016 and the 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games.

A segment entitled 'Energy of Youth', focusing on technology and its ability to connect countries and individuals, presented a combination of modern dance and a fast-moving light show that delighted the audience as 500 performers created patterns with their illuminated,

hexagon-shaped headgear. Acrobats in cyr wheels flew over the dancers before descending to perform on the ground as the images created by the illuminated dancers became even more elaborate, concluding with the 'pomegranate tree' graphic of Baku 2015.

More video highlights from the Games followed, before the sound of traditional music again echoed around the stadium, as the *kamancha* – a string instrument played with a bow – produced a haunting and yearning sound embodying Azerbaijani *mugham* music. The player was then joined by a lone female singer in an enchanting melody.

As the music began to swell, a replica of Baku's *Ateshgah* ('fire temple') rose from the main stage. Standing on top, a sand painter created images of 'the tree of life' and a brewing storm, as 76 dancers appeared below her to create the scene of a turbulent sea. As the artist then depicted birds, the dancers also appeared as 50 birds to represent each of the nations that took part in the Games. The sand art evolved in an image of the mythical *simurg*, recreated by the dancers below, before a blazing effigy of the giant bird rose into the air as the fiery scene intensified, with the stadium below resembling a flaming cauldron.

Fireworks enhanced the scene, before the moving moment when the flame of the inaugural European Games was extinguished, as the 'eclipse' that graced the stadium disappeared. Its light was replaced by that of hundreds of paper lanterns carried by children, many of whom attached their lights to a giant chandelier elevated in the centre of the arena.

### The party begins!

With Baku 2015 now closed, the party that is traditionally held at the end of any Games got into full swing. DJ Gareth Emery started the dancing with energetic electronic sounds as the athletes joined the evening's performers in the centre of the arena to enjoy the celebrations.

The crowd was then entertained by live performances by Grammy Award-winning dance act Clean Bandit and singer-songwriter John Newman, concluding with a final, spectacular firework display, bringing a euphoric end to a historic moment for both European sport and the Republic of Azerbaijan. ●



# Baku 2015: delivering on its promises

**Patrick Hickey**, President of the European Olympic Committees (EOC), explains why Baku was an ideal host for the first-ever European Games and shares his thoughts on the future of this major multi-sport event



## **Q What factors set Azerbaijan apart as a candidate to stage the European Games?**

**A** Baku and Azerbaijan made a compelling pledge to the EOC to host the inaugural European Games. Their Games concept was innovative and offered an assurance that all Games infrastructure would be ready on time and to the highest international standard, with strong legacy plans to elevate sport throughout Azerbaijan, the region and the continent. The Baku 2015 European Games Operations Committee (BEGOC) delivered on all of these promises and, as a result, delivered a fantastic inaugural European Games.

## **Q In what ways has Baku 2015 set a template for future European Games?**

**A** Baku 2015 is a great template for any multi-sport event and I have no doubt that future European Games organising committees will want to refer back to the excellent hosting concept BEGOC put in place in just 30 months. BEGOC employed many best-in-class directors to run its core departments and this really showed come Games-time, with everything organised to an Olympic standard.

However, the Baku 2015 template is only one format for hosting a European Games, and the EOC is open to the next European Games host cities in 2019 and 2023 doing things differently. Our approach is to be flexible and innovative and to allow cities to tailor-make the Games to fit their city plan, not the other way around.

## **Q How important was it to add the “missing fifth ring” to the continental Games with the staging of the first European Games in Baku?**

**A** It was a very big moment for the future of sport in Europe and it was symbolically

pleasing to add the fifth ring to the continental Games of the world. But these European Games have not been introduced just to tick a box so we can say that now every continent has its own Games. The purpose behind them was to stimulate the sporting landscape in Europe. The Games offer European athletes, National Olympic Committees and International Sports Federations a major new platform for success. With success comes experience of what it's like to compete at a multi-sport Games and exposure to potential new sponsors, all of which directly or indirectly will raise European athletes' performances at Olympic Games. For elite sport in Europe, we will see the benefits of Baku 2015 in the medals tables at Rio 2016, Tokyo 2020 and beyond.

## **Q Several non-Olympic sports were added to the Games schedule in Baku. What was the thinking behind the inclusion of these new events?**

**A** Sports were selected for inclusion in Baku 2015 based on their continental appeal to fans across Europe, for their popularity in Azerbaijan, and for how each sport intended to use the Games to promote itself in the long term. These criteria made selecting non-Olympic sports like 3x3 basketball, karate, sambo and beach soccer low-risk choices, as we knew they would get fans excited in Azerbaijan and across Europe.

## **Q What were your personal highlights of Baku 2015?**

**A** The first gold medal for Azerbaijan was a wonderful moment for me. How the host nation fares at a sports event is crucial to its overall success, and after Firdovsi Farzaliyev won gold in karate on only the second day of competition I was confident that it would be the first of many. The manner of his win and the way the crowd roared him



PAUL GILHAM/GETTY

TOBIAS SCHWARZ/AFP/GETTY

to victory was amazing. Also, as an Irishman and President of the Olympic Council of Ireland, I was thrilled when Michael O'Reilly and Katie Taylor won gold medals within 90 minutes of each other in boxing. That was very exciting.

## Q What are your hopes for the legacy of these inaugural European Games, both in Azerbaijan and across Europe?

A The legacy of a sports event is measured in the hearts and minds and positive lifestyle changes made by the fans who watched them. This cannot be measured in numbers or graphs, but it exists all the same. In this regard I am sure the Games had a huge effect on the people of Azerbaijan. I felt it at every venue and around the city. The rest of Europe will feel this effect more and more as

△ Azerbaijan's Firdovsi Farzaliyev (red), on the way to winning his country's first gold medal of the European Games in the men's kumite -60kg final

▷ Ireland's Michael O'Reilly proudly displays his gold medal after winning the men's middleweight boxing competition

the Games reach their second, third and fourth editions, when awareness of the Games will be much higher.

The European Games has also increased the reputation of Baku and Azerbaijan as trusted hosts of major international sports events. The benefit of this was already seen before Baku 2015, with Azerbaijan securing the rights to hold a Formula 1 Grand Prix in 2016, the Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017 and football matches at Euro 2020. ●





# Moments to remember

Three of Azerbaijan's Baku 2015 martial arts champions share their reflections on a highly successful European Games for themselves, their teammates and their country

**Aykhan Taghizade**, gold medallist, men's taekwondo -68kg

The competition in taekwondo was of the highest level. Since the European Games were being hosted in Baku, the responsibility on me was much greater.

We prepared for this competition over eight months at the Azerbaijan Taekwondo Federation. Before the European Games, I had participated in several competitions held in many different countries, but thanks to superb organization and the inspiration of the competition, this was definitely superior to my previous championships. As for the event, both the opening and closing ceremonies were organized very well.

There were many strong athletes in my weight category. One of my competitors, Joel Gonzalez Bonilla, is twice world and European champion. After beating him, I met Alexey Denisenko of Russia in the semi-final. Our country's First Lady, Mehriban Aliyeva, also visited to watch that fight.

The final was a very difficult match. I was behind in the scoring, but improved with my trainer's motivation in the third round, and won by gaining a golden score in the fourth. ●

▷ Nineteen-year-old Aykhan Taghizade successfully bore the responsibility of representing his country on home soil



DAN CHESTERTON/SIPA



PAUL GILHAM/GETTY

**Firdovsi Farzaliyev**, gold medallist, men's kumite -60kg

The Athletes' Village was a beautiful and unique place that was as an ideal home for all athletes during the event. I am sure that not only our athletes, but also all those from abroad, would feel the same way. Conditions in the venues where competition took place were perfect and the athletes felt very comfortable. Plus the opening ceremony of the Games was magnificent. The elements representing Azerbaijan, especially the opening of a pomegranate, were awesome.

Competition in my event was very strong. My most difficult fight was in the semi-final. Although I was behind in the scoring, the support and motivation from the fans helped me to move forward to win in the final seconds. In the final, I met Luca Maresca of Italy and achieved a clear victory.

I thank everyone, especially Mr President, his spouse Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, the fans, my trainers, the Azerbaijan National Karate Federation and its head coach, Rahman Hatamov, who supported me in becoming a champion. I am proud to be Azerbaijan's first winner of a gold medal at the inaugural European Games. The most exciting moment was when Mr President presented me with my gold medal. It was a strange and unbelievable feeling that not everyone can experience, and I dedicate my victory to my fans, and particularly to my parents, who have always supported me. ●

◁ Firdovsi Farzaliyev entered the history books as Azerbaijan's first gold medallist at the European Games



△ President Ilham Aliyev congratulates Azerbaijani medal winners at Baku 2015, including men's blind judo champion Ilham Zakiyev (front row, third left)

### **Ilham Zakiyev**, gold medallist, men's blind judo +90kg

Before the competition, Minister of Youth and Sports of Azerbaijan Republic Azad Rahimov informed me that President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva wanted me to carry the flame into the Olympic Stadium during the Opening Ceremony. I had to keep this a secret.

When I spoke with Mr President at Atashgah during the lighting of the flame, I told him that I would fight on the mat on 26 June, on the Day of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan, and I would do my best to gift a medal to Mr Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Both Mr President and Mrs Aliyeva told me that they expected only the gold medal from me.

Europe's eight strongest judokas, all of whom I knew well, had been invited to the competition. I qualified for the final after winning all stages, and then I was informed that Mr President would come to watch the final. At that point, I had to be much more responsible.

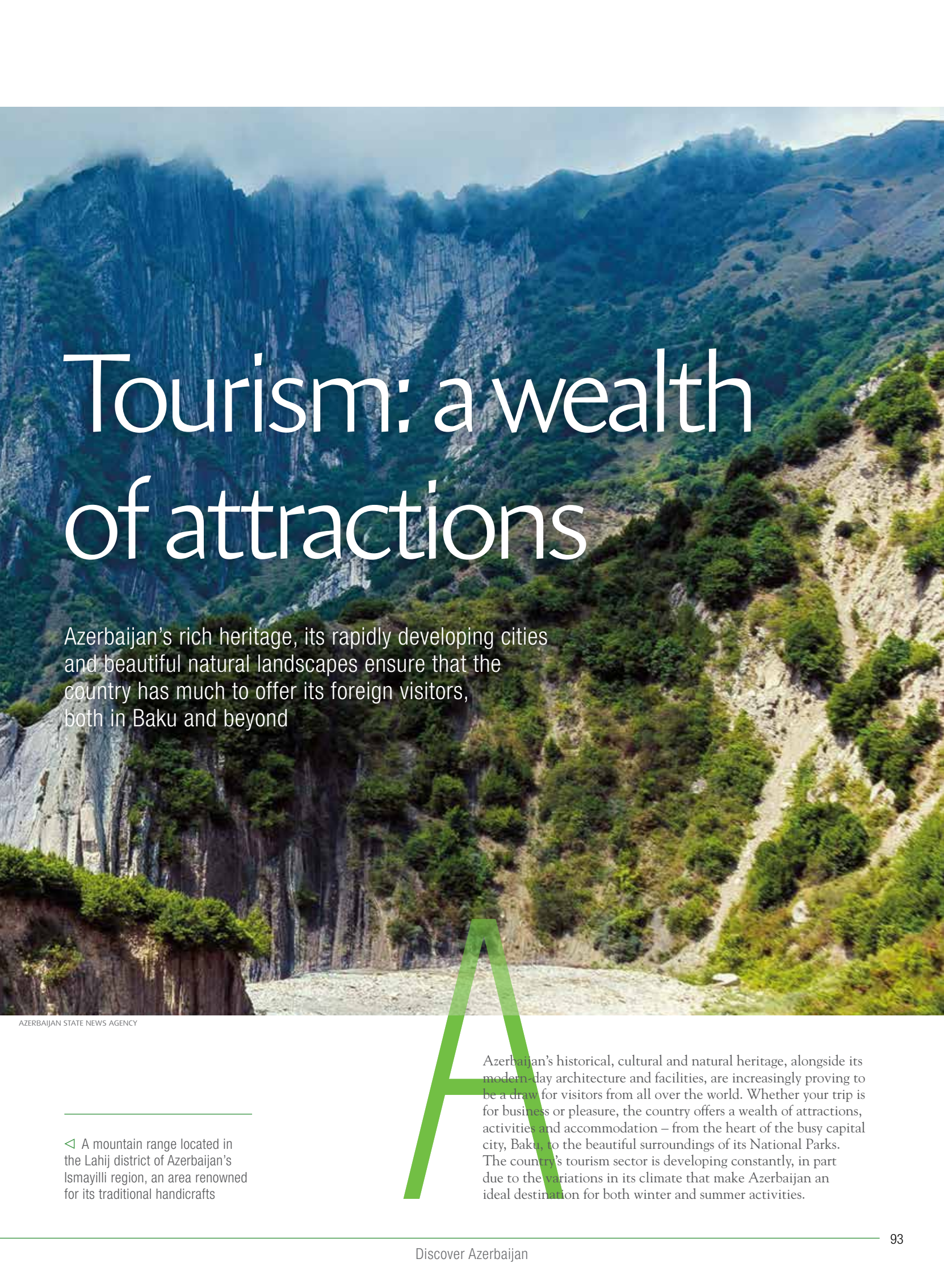
After winning the final fight, I congratulated Mr President on the occasion of the Day of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan during the medal ceremony and invited him to the winners' podium. He came up onto the podium and I told him that "Mr Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Soldier Zakiyev has accomplished the mission", that I had won the gold medal.

At the end of ceremony, he congratulated me and told me that all Azerbaijanis would be proud of me. Then the anthem of the Republic of Azerbaijan was played, which was an unbelievable and unforgettable feeling that I wish everybody could experience. I would like to express my deep gratitude to President Ilham Aliyev and his spouse, Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, Neftchi Sports Club, especially Rovnag Abdullayev and Sadig Sadigov, the Azerbaijan National Paralympics Committee and the Azerbaijani people. ●









# Tourism: a wealth of attractions

Azerbaijan's rich heritage, its rapidly developing cities and beautiful natural landscapes ensure that the country has much to offer its foreign visitors, both in Baku and beyond

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◀ A mountain range located in the Lahij district of Azerbaijan's Ismayilli region, an area renowned for its traditional handicrafts

Azerbaijan's historical, cultural and natural heritage, alongside its modern-day architecture and facilities, are increasingly proving to be a draw for visitors from all over the world. Whether your trip is for business or pleasure, the country offers a wealth of attractions, activities and accommodation – from the heart of the busy capital city, Baku, to the beautiful surroundings of its National Parks. The country's tourism sector is developing constantly, in part due to the variations in its climate that make Azerbaijan an ideal destination for both winter and summer activities.





### Exploring the capital's history

First-time visitors to Baku for the recent European Games would not have been able to miss the modern buildings that are redefining the Baku skyline. However, closer to ground level are the buildings that form Baku's Old City (Ichari Shahar). This historical centre of Baku, much of which dates back to at least the 12th century, became the first site in Azerbaijan to be classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in December 2000.

The Old City's most iconic landmark is the Maiden Tower, which viewers of the Baku 2015 will have seen recreated in the Olympic Stadium during the Closing Ceremony. The 12th-century stone monument, which stands at 29 metres tall, is set in the south-east of the Old City and houses a museum that tells the story of Baku's evolution. Mystery surrounds the origins of the cylindrical, eight-storey structure; its long, east-facing projection, pointed towards the sun, suggests that its purpose was astronomical.

◀ Daily life amid Baku's ancient and modern architecture presents visitors with a vibrant blend of old and new

▶ The Palace of the Shirvanshahs is one of the most popular attractions for tourists visiting Baku's Old City



### Hotels

As tourism has increased in Azerbaijan, so has the number of well-known hotel brands with a presence in the country, particularly in Baku. Each provides a high-calibre, five-star experience for business and leisure travellers alike.

Most notable among these is the Fairmont Baku Hotel, which occupies one of the famous Flame Towers that dominate the evolving skyline and provides its guests with a superb view over the city and across the Caspian Sea. Its central location makes the hotel ideal for tourists planning to take in Baku's myriad sights.

For those keen to experience the history of Baku's Old City, the Four Seasons Hotel Baku is an ideal choice. Located on the coast in the most prestigious area of the city, the hotel is only a short walk from the centuries-old architecture that attracts thousands of visitors each year.

Also situated on the coast is the Hilton Baku, another five-star establishment from an internally recognised name. This modern hotel is perfectly placed for visitors wishing to explore Baku's many opportunities for shopping and entertainment.

The capital's largest hotel is the four-star Qafqaz Baku City Hotel and Residences, which features 319 rooms and suites on its 19 floors. Ideal for business and leisure travellers, the hotel includes a conference rooms, a fitness studio and a restaurant serving European and Azerbaijani cuisine.





## Taxis

Travellers from the UK, and from London in particular, will encounter a familiar mode of transport on the roads of Baku – the London taxi. When Baku's taxi service required an upgrade as part of preparations for hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012, the government ordered 1,000 of the iconic vehicles, branded to promote the event.

Since then, the taxis have been painted purple and are often referred to by Bakuvis as "aubergines"! Before and during the European Games, the taxis were also decorated with the official branding of Baku 2015. The taxis are run by the Baku Taxi Company, which has ensured a high standard of service by adopting the same course used to train London's drivers.

Also of great historical interest is the 15th-century Palace of the Shirvanshahs, regarded as one of the pearls of Azerbaijan's architecture. The largest monument of the Shirvan-Absheron style of architecture, it was built by the ruler Shirvanshah Khalilulla I and his son, Faruk, on the highest point of one of the Old City's hills. As well as the main palace, the site contains burial vaults, the Shah's mosque and the mausoleum of Seyid Yahya Bakuvi – an Azerbaijani scientist and philosopher credited for a number of works that have survived to date, and which have influenced the spheres of astronomy, philosophy and mathematics.

In the east of Baku stands a reminder of Azerbaijan's fame as the 'Land of Fire', the Ateshgah ('Fire Temple') that dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries. The temple, which historians debate was constructed as either a Zoroastrian or Hindu place of worship, was built over a natural gas vent that fuelled flames in its centre and on four towers (although today the fires are fed through the city's gas supply). The complex, which was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998, is now a museum that welcomes 15,000 visitors each year.

More information on Baku's cultural attractions, including museums and galleries, can be found in the next chapter of this publication, A cultural crossroads.





◀ A river flowing through Hirkan National Park in Lankaran

▷ Summer on a beach in Baku



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### Shopping

Souvenir and gift hunters have no shortage of opportunities for shopping in Azerbaijan, from the high-end items on offer at Baku's modern retail stores to markets selling a wide variety of locally produced goods.

In Baku, Nizami Street is one of the city's best-known shopping areas, where the shops range from large stores to small outlets selling local goods. Those seeking goods from the higher end of the price spectrum will be drawn to Fountain Square, where luxury stores and boutiques sit alongside some of Baku's best restaurants and hotels, and Neftchilar Avenue, home to many of the world's leading fashion brands.

Away from the capital, tourists visiting cities elsewhere in Azerbaijan can experience local bazaars and their vast selection of handicrafts, food and spices.



### Food and drink

Many restaurants in Azerbaijan's most popular tourist areas offer traditional Azeri cuisine alongside the fare that is more familiar to the foreign visitor.

The food of Azerbaijan mixes Russian and eastern influences. Popular dishes include pilaf (a local variation on the Asian dish made with saffron-infused rice), kebabs, and stuffed vine and cabbage leaves. Courses are often substantial and involve meat – including mutton, beef and poultry – fish and vegetables, flavoured with aromatic herbs and spices. Sweets and desserts, such as pakhlava and halva, reveal Middle Eastern influences.

When dining in Azerbaijan, expect to be offered either tea or sorbet, a flavoured syrup that is among the country's most popular beverages.

### Exploring natural landscapes

Tourists seeking escape from city life can find respite in Azerbaijan's natural wonders. The country's diverse landscapes and wildlife offers a unique experience for nature lovers.

From the coast of the Caspian Sea to the mountains of the north, Azerbaijan has a wide range of climatic zones, each with its own natural beauty harbouring distinctive flora and fauna. The country's six national parks, along with its state natural parks and reserves, provide ideal surroundings and facilities to explore and observe the animals, birds and plants that occupy the various landscapes.

Located east of Baku, Absheron National Park occupies the tip of a peninsula reaching out into the Caspian Sea. Peace and tranquillity can be found in a landscape made up of coastal sands, reeds and grass, where the sound of the waves is punctuated only by the calls from sea birds such as herring gulls, red and grey geese and mute swans. The waters also play host to the world's smallest species of seal, the Caspian seal, which can be spotted on the sands.

In contrast to the almost barren landscape of the Absheron Peninsula, the Hirkan National Park in the very south of Azerbaijan, is largely made up of subtropical forests. This humid environment features forests that contain almost 200 trees dating back more than 1,000 years. The park also plays host to many rare and protected species of birds – including the black stork, imperial eagle and bearded vulture – as well as leopards, deer and wild boar.





### Travelling to and from Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) operates flights through Baku's Heydar Aliyev International Airport and the country's other airports in Ganja, Lankaran, Zagatala and Gabala. AZAL's destinations include London, Paris, Rome, Milan, Dubai, Ankara, Istanbul and Tel Aviv. Many of the major European airlines also fly into Baku, including British Airways, Lufthansa, Air France, Aeroflot and Turkish Airlines.

Over land, the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway will link Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkish and European rail networks, while the upgrading of the country's road network has improved connections with neighbouring countries.

Before entering Azerbaijan, visitors from most countries require a visa that must be obtained from one of the country's diplomatic missions.

### Scaling the heights

The largest of Azerbaijan's national parks also contains its highest peaks. Located in the north of the country and covering 115,900 hectares, Shahdag National Park was created with funds from the World Bank to address ecological issues and build a tourist infrastructure in the region. Its wildlife includes the rare East Caucasian tur, a goat antelope that can only be found in the eastern Caucasus Mountains.

Azerbaijan's mountains hold appeal not only for lovers of nature – they also prove popular with fans of winter sports. First opened to the public in 2012 and currently completing further development, the Shahdag Mountain Resort has numerous ski slopes, alongside hotels, conference halls, restaurants and leisure facilities. The resort also offers plenty of activities during the summer months, from paintballing and mountain biking to trekking and horse riding.

The hot summer climate across much of Azerbaijan is ideal to those looking to enjoy sun and sand. A number of popular beaches are within easy reach of Baku, from tranquil coastlines to lively resorts. On the southern coast of the Absheron Peninsula lies Aysberg Beach, where tourists can relax at a selection of bars and restaurants. Nearby, Shikhov Aqua Park offers an altogether more energetic experience, with a complex including swimming pools, water slides, trampolines, bars and restaurants. The busy Mirvari and Xezer beaches also attract many tourists with a wide range of activities and facilities, including sports and entertainment. ●



# A cultural crossroads

Azerbaijan's cultural heritage combines with current influences from around the world in a unique mix of traditional and modern art forms, aided by the creation of innovative venues and facilities to reflect this marriage of old and new

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Shaped by its role as an important trading post along the Silk Road, Azerbaijan's artistic and cultural identity has been influenced by the civilisations that have passed through the country, absorbing Zoroastrian, Christian, Islamic and Russian traditions in particular. These influences, combined with customs and traditions practiced by a variety of regional ethnic groups, have created a rich and distinctive Azeri cultural blend.

Perhaps the most widely known Azeri art form is mugham, Azerbaijan's most famous and ancient genre of traditional music, which is characterised by a high degree of musical improvisation. Generally, a mugham ensemble is made up of one or more singers, sometimes accompanied by a daf (tambourine), a tar (lute)

player and a kamancha (a long, four-stringed violin) player. The ululating cry of the singer and the warbling rhythms crafted by the instruments create a complex and fascinating sound.

Mugham remains widely appreciated in the 21st century and is still being cultivated. Concerts are held frequently in venues such as the International Mugham Centre of Azerbaijan, located on the Caspian waterfront in Baku, and the capital also hosts an International World of Mugham Festival every two years. Mugham was named a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2003, and received recent exposure to a global audience when the music featured prominently in the opening and closing ceremonies of the European Games.





### Heydar Aliyev Centre

Marking a radical departure from the rigid architectural style of the former Soviet Union, the Heydar Aliyev Centre was designed by Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid – winner of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize 2004 – to become Azerbaijan's primary cultural exhibition space.

The multifunctional cultural complex, comprising a 1,000-seat auditorium, library, a multi-purpose hall and a museum, opened its doors in 2012. Its inaugural exhibition, *Life, Death and Beauty*, showcased more than 100 masterpieces from pop art legend Andy Warhol. Since then, the Centre has displayed work from some of the world's most celebrated contemporary photographers, sculptors and painters.

In April 2015, the Centre held an opening ceremony for the solo exhibition of Wim Delvoye, a Belgian artist whose work has been displayed in several world-class museums and galleries, including the Louvre and the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The Centre also houses a permanent exhibition on modern Azerbaijan and Heydar Aliyev, the country's former President, after whom the building is named.

Taken on its own merit, the Heydar Aliyev Centre is a stunning example of modern Azeri art in itself, winning the architecture Design of the Year Award in 2014. Not a single straight line was used in the panels that form the external structure and, according to the Centre's publicity, the building resembles "a wave-like ascension from the ground towards the sky, followed by the gradual descent down to the earth". The architectural team's ambition was to create a fluid relationship between the building's interior and the surrounding plaza, removing any boundaries and opening the space to all, irrespective of gender, race or origin. Its undulating structure is also said to express the sensibilities and diversity of Azeri culture.

### Cross-cultural pollination

In the early 20th century, Azeri music underwent a period of Western acculturation. The Baku Academy of Music was founded to support advocates of classical music, which was followed by the establishment of several collectives, symphonic orchestras and dance ensembles. Azeri opera also took shape during this time; Uzeyir Hajibeyov made history in 1908 when he composed and performed *Leyli and Majnun*, Azerbaijan's first opera and also the first to come out of the Muslim world. Based on a poem written in the 16th century by Azeri classical poet Muhammad Fizuli, *Leyli and Majnun* synthesised oriental and European traditions.

Today, many musical genres co-exist and Azerbaijan is gaining global recognition for its diverse musical talent. The country hosts a number of music festivals, including the International Baku Jazz Festival and the Mstislav Rostropovich Baku International Festival.

Azeri pop music has also emerged and gained in popularity. Azerbaijan won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2011 with a Western-style pop song and, consequently, Baku hosted the contest the following year in the purpose-built Crystal Hall.

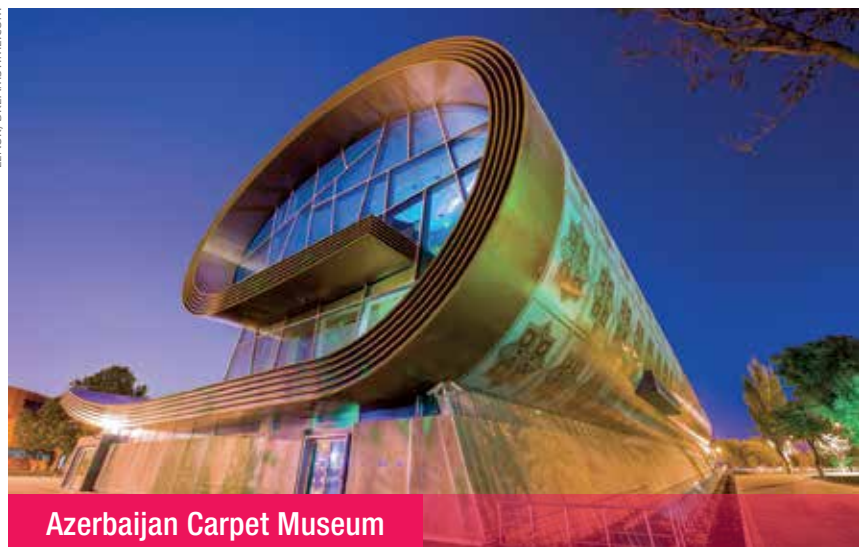
Visual art is also an ancient tradition in Azerbaijan. Archaeological digs across the country have revealed rock engravings depicting scenes of hunting, fishing, dance and natural beauty dating back to the second millennium BC.

Moving several centuries forward, miniature art thrived in the 13th-16th centuries under the main influence of the school of Tabriz. In the early 13th century, Abdulmomin Muhammad al-Khoyi produced more than 70 miniature paintings to illustrate the famous Persian poem, *Varqa and Gulshah*. Azeri miniature art continued to develop right through to the 19th century and its figurative

▽ Opened in 1912, the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall was extensively renovated and reopened in 2004. Its two halls play host to many classical concerts each year

▽ The International Mugham Centre hosts festivals and concerts of Azerbaijan's traditional music. The shape of the building is based on the tar, an Azeri musical instrument used in performing mugham

ELNUR/DREAMSTIME.COM



### Azerbaijan Carpet Museum

Carpet weaving is one of Azerbaijan's most treasured forms of artistic expression. The history of the country's ancient carpet culture is on display in the Azerbaijan Carpet Museum, located in the seaside park of Baku. The museum has changed location several times over the years and is now situated in a brand-new building, specially designed by Austrian architect Franz Janz to resemble a gigantic folded carpet unfurling onto the Caspian Sea. The five-storey structure, inaugurated in 2014, holds the largest carpet collection in the world – close to 10,000 examples – as well as a variety of traditional clothes, copper objects and jewellery. Visitors can take part in guided audio tours, attend lectures and speak to experts about purchasing an authentic Azeri carpet.

Although Azeri carpets are most commonly used as soft furnishing or decor, they have also been used in traditional wedding ceremonies and mourning rituals, during prayer, to mark the birth of a child, and for medical treatment. The skill of carpet weaving is passed down orally and through practice, with different composition structures, patterns and colours reflecting the beliefs, faiths and customs of Azerbaijan's seven different carpet-producing regions. Men shear sheep in spring and autumn, while women colour the wool using natural dyes. Traditionally, women and girls, who learn the various special weaving techniques from their mothers and grandmothers, make the carpets in winter. In 2010, Azeri carpet-weaving joined UNESCO's list of Masterpieces of Intangible Heritage.

style has been replicated and adapted to ceramics and carpets.

The development of easel art in Azerbaijan is largely attributed to Bahruz Kangarli, who laid the foundations of realist portrait and landscape art. During his short life (1892-1922), he produced more than 2,000 paintings that are appreciated for their plasticity of form, linear and aerial perspectives, contrast in light and shade and subtle tonal proportions.

Then came Sattar Bahlulzade (1909-74). Inspired by the beauty of his homeland, Bahlulzade developed an impressionist style that blended pastel colours and broad strokes to create stunning landscapes. He once said, "I don't need to go to Tahiti like Gauguin. The source of my real inspiration is my own country and people." His best-known works include Gudialchay Valley, Evening above Caspian Sea and Spring of my Native Land. Exhibitions of his paintings have been held in galleries in Paris, Naples, Vienna, Berlin and Beirut, among others.

Other famous Azeri artists include Tahir Salahov (born 1928), the main exponent of the "Severe" style, and Togrul Narimanbekov (1930-2013), who painted aspects of Azeri folk life using rich and vibrant colours.



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### Baku Museum of Modern Art

Opened to the public in 2009, the Museum of Modern Art exhibits the works of Azeri avant-garde artists from the second half of the 20th century onwards, including Rasim Babayev, Aga Ousseinov and Nadir Kasimov. The building also houses an outstanding collection of contemporary European modern art, including pieces by Dali, Chagall and Picasso.

The two-storey building, conceived by Jean Nouvel, has been designed to avoid confined spaces. The interlinking passages meet at various angles, drawing visitors through the many exhibition areas. The museum also includes a children's fine art department, a video hall, a café, a restaurant, a hall for private exhibitions, a library and a bookshop.

### Baku's burgeoning art scene

Today, Azerbaijan's culture and art scene is undergoing a period of vibrant revival, and nowhere is this more evident than in the country's capital. Baku is teeming with creative minds, keen to showcase the nation's great artistic endeavours to the world.

Yarat is a not-for-profit organisation, founded in 2011 by Azeri artist Aida Mahmudova, that is dedicated to the promotion of local and regional contemporary art on a national and global scale. Yarat, which means "create" in Azeri, runs a series of exhibitions, educational events and festivals, giving new and established contemporary artists a professional platform from which to exhibit their work. "Apart from creating an environment for contemporary art, it's to raise awareness among local people of the idea that art can exist not just in painting and sculpture but all sorts of different forms," explained Mahmudova in an interview with UK newspaper *The Guardian*.

Rasha Alakbarov, one of Yarat's founding artists, cleverly creates metal and light sculptures that project phrases onto blank walls. Faig Ahmed, another founding artist, turns Azerbaijan's ancient art of carpet weaving on its head, disrupting traditional motifs and deconstructing carpets to create strikingly modern installations.

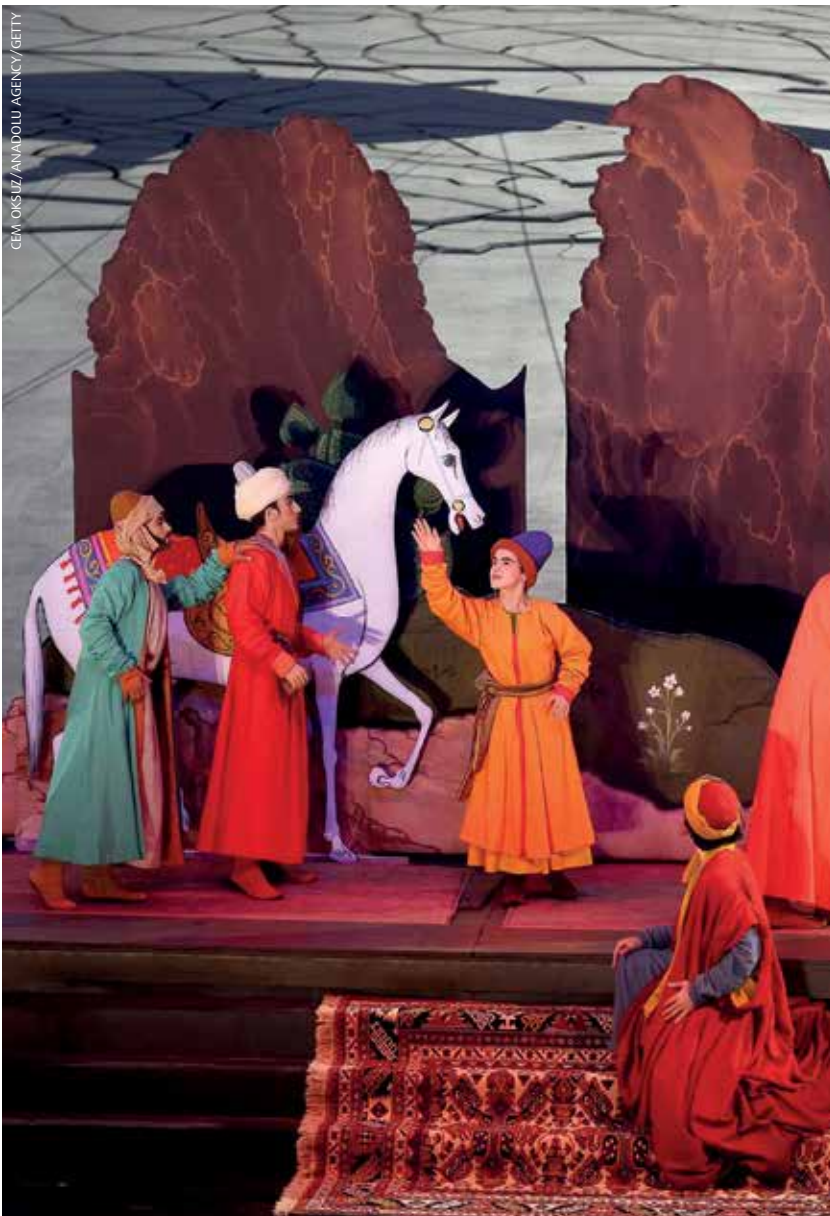
▽ Azerbaijani traditional mugham singer Alim Gasimov has been described as "Central Asia's greatest voice"

▷ Azeri miniature art was animated on a life-sized scale during the Opening Ceremony of the 2015 European Games in Baku



This year, Yarat opened a permanent space in an ex-Soviet naval building in Baku to serve as a dedicated creative hub for contemporary art. The permanent collection of the Yarat Contemporary Art Space highlights artists from the region, while its temporary exhibitions will occasionally feature artwork from further afield. Its inaugural show, *Making Histories*, includes works by more than 20 artists. The centre also hosts a monthly series of talks, screenings and discussions to support Yarat's education programme.

Built on the seams of ancient traditions, Azerbaijan has so much to offer in the fields of art, literature and music. More than 250 museums, galleries and concert halls are located across the country and, today, driven by the efforts of Yarat and its impressive roster of contemporary artists, Baku is rapidly establishing itself as the culture capital of the Caucasus. ●



▽ Initiated by Leyla Aliyeva, Vice President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Baku's Love Tree gives the city's residents and visitors an opportunity to leave a symbol of their love in the form of a padlock on one of the branches



## Festivals

### Maiden Tower International Art Festival

Launched in 2010 by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, this annual festival attracts artists from all over the world to decorate the Maiden Tower – a UNESCO World Heritage site – with ornaments representing their country's cultural heritage.

### Baku Public Art Festival

Every Friday for five months, new home-grown Azeri artwork is unveiled in a different corner of the city, prompting viewers to consider the relationship between art, people and culture.

### The Gabala International Music Festival

A festival held every summer, combining classical and traditional music.

### Baku International Jazz Festival

Organised by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Azerbaijan Culture foundation, this annual festival was created to support the country's jazz culture.

### International World of Mugham Festival

Taking place in Baku every two years, the next edition of this festival will take place in 2017. This week-long event draws musicians from some 40 countries to pay homage to mugham, one of Azerbaijan's most ancient styles of music.

### Mstislav Rostropovich Baku International Festival

Named after one of Baku's most famous cellists, this classical music festival takes place every year, featuring performances from internationally renowned soloists and orchestras, including the Azerbaijan State Symphony Orchestra.

### Baku International Tourism Film Festival

This annual, non-profit cultural event promotes films that highlight Azerbaijan's cultural offerings. It also facilitates seminars and discussion to encourage conversation between filmmakers, tourism experts and the media.



# Playing host to international events





From sport to music, international trade to politics, Azerbaijan and its capital city have become an increasingly attractive location for staging major events, concerts, conferences and exhibitions

The development of modern buildings and facilities in Azerbaijan, particularly in Baku, has raised the republic's profile on the world stage and generated growing international interest in staging events in the country. Global awareness of Azerbaijan's ability to put on high-profile events has grown since the staging of the 2012 Eurovision Contest Song Contest, at the specially constructed Crystal Hall in Baku, and was further raised by the city's recent hosting of the inaugural European Games.

### Passion for sport

The European Games undoubtedly established the city among the world's leading destinations for major sporting occasions. Fortunately, residents will not have to wait long for the excitement of elite international sport to be generated again, as the next few years will see a succession of top-class events taking place.

In July 2016, Baku will resemble Monaco as the city's streets experience Formula One racing. The Baku European Grand Prix will take place on a six-kilometre circuit that has been specially designed to provide a unique set of challenges for drivers as they compete for vital championship points, as well as highlighting the attractions of Baku to a worldwide audience.

At the launch of the race, Formula One Group chief executive Bernie Ecclestone welcomed the latest addition to the F1 calendar and looked forward to "an innovative new street circuit that will definitely help to create a world-class event when we race there in 2016". Also speaking at the launch, circuit designer Herman Tilke promised "something that will create an incredible spectacle for the race fans on track and the viewers at home".

Although the European Grand Prix marks Baku's first F1 event, the city has previous experience of hosting motor racing on its streets, with the Baku City Challenge in 2012 and the finales of the FIA GT series and Blancpain Sprint Series in subsequent years.

### International football

As in many European countries, football is the most popular sport in Azerbaijan. Over the past decade, the government has backed development of the sport, with the aim of securing the national team's qualification for a major tournament and also to promote women's football.

Having previously staged the 2012 FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup at five stadiums in Baku and at a sixth in Lankaran, Azerbaijan is preparing to host another prestigious youth tournament – the UEFA European U-17 Championship –

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< The roar of Formula One engines will soon be heard around the streets of Baku as the city looks forward to hosting the 2016 European Grand Prix





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◁ Baku will welcome teams from all over the world for the 42nd World Chess Olympiad in September 2016

▽ Seen here in their first colours of red, the national football team of Azerbaijan will be aiming to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia

▷ Heydar Aliyev Palace is the venue for concerts and festivals highlighting traditional, classical and popular forms of music

▷▽ The 'City of Winds' should provide ideal conditions for the 2016 Junior World Championship in 470-class Olympic sailing, which will take place off the coast of Baku



TORIK BAGAYEV/GETTY

which takes place on 12-27 May 2016. The national team will also begin its qualification campaign for the 2018 FIFA World Cup finals in the following September.

Looking further ahead, Baku's Olympic Stadium will have the honour of staging three group matches and a quarter-final of UEFA Euro 2020. The recently constructed stadium will join iconic venues such as London's Wembley Stadium and Rome's Stadio Olimpico in being part of a tournament staged across 13 cities, marking the 60th anniversary of football's European Championship.

### Taking to the sea

The coastal waters of Baku will also be the location of further sporting action in 2016, as competitors take to the Caspian Sea for the Junior World Championship in 470-class Olympic sailing. One of 10 varieties of sailing at the Olympic Games, the name '470-class' refers to the length in centimetres of the boats, each crewed by two people. Baku's famous winds should ensure high-speed racing.

A busy sporting 2016 in Baku also sees matters of the mind coming to the fore during the 42nd World Chess Olympiad,



which takes place on 17-30 September. Around 1,500 participants are expected for the tournament, contested every two years by teams representing more than 170 countries.

Baku will soon have the opportunity to build on the success of the European Games when it hosts another major multi-sport event – the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games, to be held in 2017. The Games will involve the 57 members countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference – 26 from Africa, 14 from the Middle East and North Africa, 12 from Asia, three from Eastern Europe and Caucasus, and two from South America – making this a truly international gathering. The 2013 event in Indonesia featured 18 sports, the majority of which also appear in the Olympic Games.

### A wealth of music

Away from the sporting arena, Baku's residents and visitors can enjoy frequent concerts and music festivals featuring well-known artists from around the world. Heydar Aliyev Palace is Baku's main music venue, with an audience capacity of more than 2,000 people and boasting the country's biggest stage. The Palace, which was built in 1972 and redeveloped in 2008, holds numerous concerts and performances each year – from classical and traditional music, to dance and pop.

Recent events have included concerts by Baku-born mezzo-soprano Fidan Hacıyeva, Turkish pop singer Demet Akalın, Grammy Award-winning US vocalist Bobby McFerrin and a special symphonic performance to celebrate the arrival of the European Games.



MATTHEW STOCKMAN/GETTY





### Trade shows and exhibitions in 2016

**Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Azerbaijan Tour**  
13-14 February  
Ramada Hotel and Suites

**AfuExpo – International Flower, Landscape and Urban Exhibition**  
26-28 February  
Baku Expo Centre

**Baku Glass**  
1-2 March  
Holiday Inn Hotel

**Azerbaijan International Travel and Tourism Fair (AITF)**  
7-9 April  
Baku Expo Centre

**International Hospitality Fair**  
7-9 April  
Baku Expo Centre

**Caspian International Boat and Yacht Show**  
7-9 April  
Baku Expo Centre

**International Education Fair Azerbaijan – Spring**  
9-10 April  
Baku Expo Centre

**Caspian International Aqua Technologies Exhibition and Forum (CATEC)**  
14-16 April  
Baku Expo Centre

**Azerbaijan DecorExpo**  
28-30 April  
Baku Expo Centre

**TransCaspian**  
11-13 May  
Baku Expo Centre

**Road and Traffic Exhibition**  
11-13 May  
Baku Expo Centre

**WorldFood Azerbaijan/ Azerbaijan International Food Industry Exhibition/ Azerbaijan International Agriculture Exhibition**  
25-27 May  
Baku Expo Centre

**Caspian International Exhibition: Packaging, Tare, Label And Printing (Ipack Caspian)**  
25-27 May  
Baku Expo Centre

**International Caspian Oil and Gas Exhibition and Conference/Caspian International Power and Alternative Energy Exhibition**  
7-10 June  
Baku Expo Centre

**Azerbaijan International Defence Exhibition (ADEX)**  
27-30 September  
Baku Expo Centre

The Palace is also one of the venues for the annual Baku International Jazz Festival, organised by saxophonist and resident of the city, Rain Sultanov. Jazz has been a popular art form in Azerbaijan since the 1950s and 60s – a period during which such music was banned by Soviet authorities.

The festival, typically held in autumn, features performers from Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Georgia, and has previously featured top US jazz stars, including pianists Herbie Hancock and Bob James, saxophonist David Sanborn and vocalist Al Jarreau.

Gabala International Music Festival – a project of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, held each summer in Baku – brings together performers, orchestras and collectives from around the world for a series of concerts at the city's Chamber Music Hall and in the open air. A celebration of music and friendship, the festival combines classical and traditional music, including Azerbaijani mugham. This year's concerts included performances by the Orchestra Filarmonica Italiana, the Moscow Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra

and the State Chamber Orchestra of Azerbaijan, plus traditional Spanish music and dance from Barcelona y Flamenco.

For further information on Azerbaijan's music and art festivals, see page 103.

### Trade fairs and exhibitions

Since the mid 1990s, Azerbaijan has served as a hub for regional conventions, trade fairs and exhibitions, producing a thriving sector. The country has increased its focus on meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) in an effort to be recognised as a key destination for major events, as part of the Azerbaijan 2020 national strategy. In recent years, a selection of venues in Baku have provided international organisers with top-class facilities in which to host their events – ranging from industry conferences to health and beauty exhibitions.

The most prominent of these is the Baku Expo Centre, which opened in 2010. Located close to the airport and within 20 minutes



ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY



### Promoting partnership, peace and security

May 2015 saw Baku's Heydar Aliyev Centre play host to two conferences bringing together nations in valuable dialogue to promote peace, security and economic cooperation.

The 48th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) took place on 2-5 May, attended by 3,000 participants including senior officials, business leaders, financiers, civil society representatives and the world's business media. The theme of the meeting was "Fostering Partnership for Development", with delegates discussing the challenges that face the region and ongoing reforms of the ADB.

Since 2011, Baku has also hosted the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, a two-day conference of religious leaders and opinion-formers designed to generate new thinking to resolve some of the world's conflicts and promote greater discussion between different cultures and religions. The Forum, also known as the "Baku Process", has been held every two years in partnership with UNESCO, having been initiated by President Ilham Aliyev in 2008.

The theme of the third Forum, held on 18-19 May, was "Culture and Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda". Speaking during the Forum, President Aliyev remarked: "Today we have representatives here from over 100 countries. It is really very important that these people have come to Azerbaijan to share their opinion because there are a lot of conflicts in the world."

△ Baku Expo Centre hosts numerous international events and conferences each year

of the city centre, this multipurpose venue houses three halls of varying sizes, enabling more than one event to be held at the same time or the halls to be joined for a larger event. Facilities also include a conference hall, seminar room and two meeting rooms.

Annual trade fairs and conferences that take place at Baku Expo Centre include the Caspian Power and Oil and Gas Conferences, the Azerbaijan International Agriculture and Food Industry Exhibitions, the Caspian International Boat and Yacht Show, and the Azerbaijan International Travel and Tourism Fair – to name only a few (see panel for a list of events in 2016).

To increase awareness of Azerbaijan's MICE industry, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has formed the Azerbaijan Convention Bureau (AzBC), in conjunction with its partners in the private sector. The AzBC is a non-profit umbrella organisation that brings together a network of public- and private-sector partners – including hotels, venues and the state-run Azerbaijan Airlines – to create new opportunities for partnership with the global MICE industry. The organisation also offers free services to help with event planning, such as identifying suitable facilities and assistance with promotion and publicity. ●



# Directory

Contacts for government offices, Azerbaijan's foreign embassies, cultural venues, tourist attractions and city hotels

## OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE**  
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W: www.justice.gov.az

**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL  
PROTECTION OF POPULATION**  
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T: Public Relations Department  
(+994 12) 596 50 36  
Administrative Department  
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**MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORT**  
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**MINISTRY OF ECONOMY  
AND INDUSTRY**  
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**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE**  
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**MINISTRY OF FINANCE**  
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**MINISTRY OF CULTURE  
AND TOURISM**  
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**MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY**  
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**MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT**  
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W: www.mot.gov.az

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**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE INDUSTRY**  
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## SLOVAKIA

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## SYRIA

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E: info@azcb.com  
W: azcb.com

### CRYSTAL HALL

State Flag Square, Baku  
T: (+994 50) 678 77 97

### HEYDAR ALIYEV PALACE

35 Bul-Bul avenue, Baku  
T: (+994 12) 498 84 84/96/72  
W: www.ha-saray.az

## ARTS AND CULTURE

### HEYDAR ALIYEV FOUNDATION

5, Niyazi street, Baku, AZ1000,  
Republic of Azerbaijan



T: (+994 12) 4351293, 4351296  
W: [www.heydar-aliyev-foundation.org](http://www.heydar-aliyev-foundation.org)

**HEYDAR ALIYEV CENTRE**  
1 Heydar Aliyev avenue,  
AZ1033, Baku  
T: (+994 12) 505 60 01  
E: [info@heydaraliyevcenter.az](mailto:info@heydaraliyevcenter.az)  
W: [www.heydaraliyevcenter.az](http://www.heydaraliyevcenter.az)

**INTERNATIONAL MUGHAM  
CENTRE OF AZERBAIJAN**  
9 Neftçilər Prospekti,  
Baku AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 497 89 70  
W: [www.mugam.az](http://www.mugam.az)

**YARAT CONTEMPORARY  
ART ORGANISATION**  
153 Neftçilər avenue, Port Baku  
South Towers, Baku AZ1010  
T: (+994 12) 437 3970  
E: [info@yarat.az](mailto:info@yarat.az)  
W: [www.yarat.az](http://www.yarat.az)

## MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

**AZERBAIJAN CARPET MUSEUM**  
Bakı ş., Mikayıl Useyinov pr-ti, 28  
Dənizkənarı Milli Park  
T: (+994 12) 497 20 57  
W: [azcarpetmuseum.az](http://azcarpetmuseum.az)

**SHIRVANSHAHS' PALACE**  
76, Gasr dongesi, Icheri Sheher,  
Baku AZ1004  
T: (+994 12) 492 10 73, 492 83 04

**ATESHGAH TEMPLE**  
Surakhani, Bakixanov, Azerbaijan  
W: [ateshgahtemple.az](http://ateshgahtemple.az)

**AZERBAIJAN STATE  
AGRICULTURE MUSEUM**  
30/97, Darnagyl highway, Baku  
AZ1029  
T: (+994 12) 461 49 17, 461 22 15, 462 06 61

**GEOLOGY MUSEUM OF AZERBAIJAN**  
95, I. Kutkashenli street, Baku AZ1073  
T: (+994 12) 441 92 88

**NATIONAL EDUCATION MUSEUM  
OF THE AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC**  
11, Niyazi street, Baku AZ1001  
T: (+994 12) 497 15 46, 492 04 53

**MUSEUM OF AZERBAIJAN  
MEDICINE**  
18, N.Rafiyev street, Baku AZ1025  
T: (+994 12) 490 13 73

**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM**  
3, Lermontov street, Baku AZ1006  
T: (+994 12) 492 06 67

**MUSEUM OF MINIATURE BOOKS**  
67, Gala dongesi I, Icheri Sheher, Baku  
AZ1004  
T: (+994 12) 492 94 64  
E: [zarifa\\_salahova@yandex.ru](mailto:zarifa_salahova@yandex.ru)  
W: [www.hostel.aznet.org/mini\\_books](http://www.hostel.aznet.org/mini_books)  
[www.mini\\_books.aznet.org](http://www.mini_books.aznet.org)

**NATIONAL OIL MUSEUM**  
68, Tabriz street, Baku AZ1008  
T: (+994 12) 496 28 52

**OLYMPIC MUSEUM**  
5, Olympic street, Baku AZ1005  
T: (+994 12) 465 13 23, 465 84 38  
F: (+994 12) 465 42 25  
E: [noc-aze@noc-aze.org](mailto:noc-aze@noc-aze.org)

**AZERBAIJAN STATE MUSEUM  
OF HISTORY**  
4, Z. Taghiyev street, Baku AZ1005  
T: (+994 12) 493 36 48

**INDEPENDENCE MUSEUM  
OF AZERBAIJAN**  
Neftçilər, 123A, Sabail, Baku, AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 4988382

**MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
AND ETHNOGRAPHY**  
42, Beyuk Gala street, Baku AZ1004,  
Azerbaijan  
T: (+994 12) 4925236

**AZERBAIJAN STATE MUSEUM  
OF HISTORY OF RELIGION**  
123a, Neftçilər avenue, Baku AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 493 92 43

**GOBUSTAN STATE HISTORICAL  
AND ARTISTIC RESERVE**  
3, Lermontov street, Baku AZ1006  
T: (+994 12) 492 02 54, 492 61 45  
E: [gobustanaz@yahoo.com](mailto:gobustanaz@yahoo.com)  
[gobustan@iatp.az](mailto:gobustan@iatp.az)  
W: [www.gobustan.iatp.az](http://www.gobustan.iatp.az)

**AZERBAIJAN STATE  
MUSEUM OF ART**  
9-11, Niyazi street, Baku AZ1001  
T: (+994 12) 492 57 11, 492 57 89

**BAKU MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**  
5 Yusuph Safarov, Baku, AZ1025  
T: (+994 12) 490-84-04  
E: [office@mim.az](mailto:office@mim.az)  
W: [mim.az](http://mim.az)

**CENTER OF AZERBAIJAN  
MINIATURE ART**  
7, Gulla street, Icheri Sheher, Baku  
AZ1004  
T: (+994 12) 492 59 06

**BEYUK GALA, 19 ART GALLERY**  
19, Beyuk Gala street, Icheri Sheher,  
Baku AZ1004  
T: (+994 12) 492 05 78

**QIZ QALASI ART GALLERY**  
6, Gulle street, Baku AZ1004  
T: (+994 12) 492 74 81  
E: [qgallery@qgallery.net](mailto:qgallery@qgallery.net)  
W: [www.qgallery.net](http://www.qgallery.net)

**MUSEUM OF AZERBAIJAN  
LITERATURE**  
53, Istiglaliyyat street, Baku AZ1005  
T: (+994 12) 492 18 64, 492 74 03, 492 04 49

**AZERBAIJAN STATE THEATRE  
MUSEUM**  
123a, Neftçilər avenue, Baku AZ1000  
T: (+449 12) 493 40 98

**STATE MUSEUM OF AZERBAIJAN  
MUSICAL CULTURE**  
5, R. Behbudov street, Baku AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 498 44 79, 498 81 84,  
498 69 72  
E: [musculture@azdata.net](mailto:musculture@azdata.net)  
W: [www.musicmuseum.aznet.org](http://www.musicmuseum.aznet.org)

**INSTITUTE OF MANUSCRIPTS**  
8, Istiglaliyyat street, Baku AZ1001  
T: (+994 12) 492 83 33

**RINAY MALACOFUNA MUSEUM**  
2a, Apt. 85, Ibrahim Mamedov street  
Baku AZ1003

**NOBEL BROTHERS' MUSEUM**  
Nobelavenue (inside Nizami Park), Baku  
T: (+994 12) 424 40 20, 424 40 21  
E: [info@bakunobel.org](mailto:info@bakunobel.org)  
W: [www.bakunobel.org](http://www.bakunobel.org)

## HOTELS

### BAKU

**FAIRMONT BAKU HOTEL**  
Flame Towers, 1A, Mehdi Huseyn,  
Baku AZ1006  
T: (+994 12) 565 48 48  
E: [baku@fairmont.com](mailto:baku@fairmont.com)  
W: [www.fairmont.com/baku](http://www.fairmont.com/baku)

**FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BAKU**  
1 Neftçilər avenue, Baku AZ1095  
T: (+994 12) 404 24 24  
W: [www.fourseasons.com/baku](http://www.fourseasons.com/baku)

**HILTON BAKU**  
1b Azadlig avenue, Baku AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 464 50 00  
E: [baku.reservations@hilton.com](mailto:baku.reservations@hilton.com)  
W: [www.hilton.com/baku](http://www.hilton.com/baku)

**SHERATON BAKU AIRPORT HOTEL**  
Heydar Aliyev International Airport,  
Baku, 1044, Azerbaijan  
T: (+994 12) 437 49 49  
E: [reservations@sheratonbakuairport.com](mailto:reservations@sheratonbakuairport.com)  
W: [www.sheratonbakuairport.com](http://www.sheratonbakuairport.com)

**HYATT REGENCY BAKU**  
1033 Izmir street, Baku AZ 1065  
T: (+994 12) 490 12 34  
E: [baku.hotels@hyatt.com](mailto:baku.hotels@hyatt.com)  
W: [baku.regency.hyatt.com](http://baku.regency.hyatt.com)

**JW MARRIOTT ABSHERON BAKU**  
674 Azadliq Square, Baku, Azerbaijan  
T: (+994 12) 499 88 88

**KEMPINSKI HOTEL BADAMDAR BAKU**  
Mushfig street 1c, 1006 Baku  
T: (+994 12) 538 90 90  
W: [www.kempinski.com/en/baku](http://www.kempinski.com/en/baku)

**EXCELSIOR HOTEL BAKU**  
2 Heydar Aliyev avenue,  
Baku, AZ-1154, Azerbaijan  
T: (+994 12) 496 80 00  
E: [info@excelsiorhotelbaku.az](mailto:info@excelsiorhotelbaku.az)  
W: [www.excelsiorhotelbaku.az](http://www.excelsiorhotelbaku.az)

**GRAND HOTEL EUROPE BAKU**  
22 Tbilisi avenue, Baku  
T: (+994 12) 490 70 90  
E: [info@grand-europe.com](mailto:info@grand-europe.com)  
W: [www.grand-europe.com](http://www.grand-europe.com)

**ATROPAT HOTEL**  
11-13-79 Magomayev scr, Baku  
AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 497 89 50 (52-55 Pbx)  
E: [info@atropathotel.com](mailto:info@atropathotel.com)  
W: [www.atropathotel.com](http://www.atropathotel.com)

**QAFQAZ POINT HOTEL**  
118/56 Kazim Kazimzade, Baku  
AZ1006  
T: (+994 12) 510 78 78  
W: [qafqazhotels.com](http://qafqazhotels.com)

**SHAH PALACE BOUTIQUE HOTEL**  
Boyuk Qala street 47, Icheri Sheher,  
Baku AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 497 04 05  
E: [info@shahpalace.az](mailto:info@shahpalace.az)  
[reservation@shahpalace.az](mailto:reservation@shahpalace.az)  
W: [www.shahpalacehotel.com](http://www.shahpalacehotel.com)

**CENTRAL PARK HOTEL**  
Suleyman Rahimov 165, Baku AZ1014  
T: (+994 12) 594 42 36  
E: [reservations@centralparkhotelbaku.com](mailto:reservations@centralparkhotelbaku.com)  
W: [www.centralparkhotelbaku.com](http://www.centralparkhotelbaku.com)

**GANJALI PLAZA HOTEL**  
48, U. Hajibeyov street, Baku  
T: (+994 12) 498 92 90  
E: [info@ganjaliplaza.az](mailto:info@ganjaliplaza.az)  
W: [www.ganjaliplaza.az](http://www.ganjaliplaza.az)

**PARK INN BY RADISSON  
AZERBAIJAN BAKU HOTEL**  
1 Azadlig avenue, Baku AZ1000  
T: (+994 12) 490 60 00  
W: [www.parkinn.com/hotel-baku](http://www.parkinn.com/hotel-baku)

**AUSTIN HOTEL BAKU**  
58 Nizami st, Baku, Azerbaijan  
T: (+994 12) 598 08 12  
E: [office@austinhotel.az](mailto:office@austinhotel.az)  
W: [www.austinhotel.az](http://www.austinhotel.az)

### GANJA

**VEGO HOTEL**  
Cavad Han street 38, Ganja  
T: (+994 22) 264 01 82  
E: [info@vegohotel.com](mailto:info@vegohotel.com)  
W: [www.vegohotel.com](http://www.vegohotel.com)

**RAMADA PLAZA GENCE**  
237 Nizami St, Gence AZ2019  
T: (+994 22) 2670005  
W: [www.ramadaplazagence.com](http://www.ramadaplazagence.com)

**DELUXE HOTEL**  
Nizami Gajave avenue 42, Ganja  
AZ2000  
T: (+994 22) 257 46 52  
E: [contact@deluxe-hotel.az](mailto:contact@deluxe-hotel.az)  
W: [www.deluxe-hotel.az](http://www.deluxe-hotel.az)

### SUMQAYIT

**TERM HOTEL**  
Baku street, Sumqayit AZ5000  
T: (+994 18) 642 46 55

**AF-HOTEL AQUA PARK**  
Novkhani settlement (Seaside), AZ0119  
T: (+994 12) 448 13 13  
E: [office@afhotel.az](mailto:office@afhotel.az)  
W: [afhotel.az](http://afhotel.az)

### MINGACHEVIR

**KUR HOTEL**  
I.Islamzadehstr98A, Mingachevir, AZ4500  
T: (+994 24) 273 03 13/14  
W: [www.kurhotel.az](http://www.kurhotel.az)

**RIVER SIDE HOTEL**  
H.Huseynovstreet, Mingachevir, AZ4500  
T: (+994 02) 427 49 373  
E: [hotel@riverside.az](mailto:hotel@riverside.az)  
W: [riverside.az](http://riverside.az)

**AGSARAY DELUXE HOTEL AND SPA**  
Husu Huseynov 1, Mingachevir AZ4500  
T: (+994 50) 200 19 80  
W: [www.agsarayhotel.az](http://www.agsarayhotel.az)





# DISCOVER AZERBAIJAN

BAKU 2015 EDITION

## The Land of Fire

Azerbaijan is the success story of the Caucasus. Since regaining its independence in 1991, the country has experienced rapid economic and social development and expanded its role on the global stage. Such achievements have not been at the expense of Azerbaijan's traditions and values, however, as the country's historic and celebrated culture mixes with modern influences to create a unique blend of old and new.

Azerbaijan's growing status on the world stage was further enhanced with the hosting of the inaugural European Games in June 2015. This publication includes a special section focusing on 17 days of competition and celebration in the country's capital, Baku, including highlights from the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies and a day-by-day review featuring many of the medal winners across 20 sports.

